Chapter 3

An Interpretation and Application of the ‘Four Paths of Yoga’ for a Positive Well–Being

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this chapter is to introduce a conceptual framework and application of the four paths of yoga in modern times to strip the human mind of all its impurities and see the stream of consciousness is clear as crystal and capable of reflecting whole reality. The conceptual framework is formulated from the ancient Indian scriptures and literature. Karmayoga, jnanayoga, bhaktiyoga, and rajayoga are the four yoga or spiritual paths significant for improving individual and society wellbeing. The chapter includes trends of each yoga with respect to modern times.

INTRODUCTION

Every individual aspires for a positive wellbeing and its absence brings a sense of burden in living. Both Western and Indian perspective of psychology emphasises on positive wellbeing (PW) from different perspectives. Commonly, a good state of body and mind are considered for positive well-being. Various scholars of both
the perspectives have different ways to define positive wellbeing. To begin with, the Oxford English and Cambridge dictionaries define wellbeing as the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy. Seligman (2002) said it’s “life satisfaction”, whereas Pollard and Lee (2003) stated a sense-of well-being as “happiness”. Tehrani, Humpage, Willmott, and Haslam (2011) epitomises an encompassing bio-psycho-social construct (of well-being) that comprises of physical, psychological, and social well-being, subsequently being more inclusive that mere avoidance of physical illness or sickness. VandenBos (2015) characterised well-being as a state of contentment, satisfaction, happiness, low levels of distress and illness, good physical and mental health, a positive outlook, or good quality of life. Wellbeing comprises objective descriptors and subjective evaluations of physical, material, social and emotional wellbeing, together with the extent of personal development and purposeful activity, all weighted by a set of values (Felce & Perry, 1995). These definitions point to positive psychological, physical and social states as important ingredients of wellbeing. For a deeper understanding, one has to dig in philosophy and Indian philosophy provides a holistic structure of explanation.

The Indian Knowledge Tradition

In the Indian knowledge tradition, the concept of wellbeing collates with happiness. Happiness and wellbeing are paved as fundamental elements of human life goal specifically in Vedas, Upanishads, and other ancient scriptures. They have comminute ‘wellbeing’ and ‘happiness’ into qualities such as being non-materialistic, desire less, faith, religion, spiritual, consciousness, caring about social relations, being aware about self, human potentials and personality. Indian knowledge system propounds two perspectives of wellbeing, the materialistic and transcendental. When the sole criterion of wellbeing is pleasure fulfilment specifically sensory desires, like Lord Brahaspati and Charvaka’s views, it is the materialistic view. Charvaka’s philosophy denies the Vedic concepts such as metaphysical existence of a Consciousness (Atman), existence of God, values (dharma), theory of rebirth (law of karma) etc. Charvaka considered consciousness and mind (manas) as a characteristic that lasts with the bodily wellbeing and mind helps in knowing the world through the senses (Raju, 1992). Charvaka’s philosophy stated that our lives belong and ends in this material world, so one should try to make the best of it by doing anything possible to enhance pleasure and avoid pain. This system of philosophy is similar to the hedonic perspective and did not gain importance in ancient India. The transcendent perspective, similar to eudemonic, advocates happiness and wellbeing as subjective, something that do not depend on any objective conditions of reality, including one’s state of body-mind. It has a universal vision that aspires for the wellbeing of everyone in the universe. The basis or foundation of the transcendental view was born out of experience of
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