

Psychological Concepts and Psychotherapy in The Yogadarśana

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Contents

Intelligence and the Yogic Conception of Ṛtambharā Prajñā	7
1. Introduction.....	7
2. Western Psychological Theories of Intelligence	7
3. Yogic Conception of Intelligence	8
4. Ṛtambharā Prajñā: The Highest Form of Intelligence ...	8
5. Impressions (Saṃskāras) and the Dynamics of Intelligence	9
6. From Ṛtambharā Prajñā to Nirbīja Samādhi.....	10
7. Conclusion.....	10
References.....	10
The Concept of Memory in Yoga Philosophy and Cognitive Science	12
The Process of Memory in Yoga Philosophy	12
The Eternity of Memory and Rebirth	13
The Contents of Memory.....	13
Clearance and Purification of Memory	14
Scientific Implications.....	14
Conclusion.....	15
References.....	15
Cognition in Yoga Darśana	17
Citta-vṛttis: The Five Primary Mental Functions.....	17
1. Cognition (<i>Pramāṇa</i>)	18
(a) Perception (<i>pratyakṣa</i>)	18
(b) Inference (<i>anumāna</i>)	19

Psychological Concepts and Psychotherapy in Yogadarsāna 4

(c) Statement of Ṛṣi of Śāstra (<i>āgama</i>)	19
(d) Comparison (<i>upamāna</i>)	20
Beyond Ordinary Cognition: Yoga and Extrasensory Perception	20
Stimulus and Response in Yoga Psychology	20
Conclusion	21
Psychological Disorders and Their Cure: A Yogic Perspective	22
Abstract	22
Introduction	22
Mental Processes and Their Disturbances	23
The Five Root Causes of Mental Malfunctions (<i>Kleśas</i>) ..	23
Development of Psychological Disorders (<i>Cittavikṣepas</i>) ..	24
Psychophysiological Symptoms	25
Therapeutic Framework: <i>Kriyā-Yoga</i>	25
Integration with Ayurveda	26
Conclusion	26
Yoga Therapy for Psychological Disorders: A Pātañjala Perspective	26
Yoga Therapy According to Patañjali	27
1. Training of Mind (Meditation)	28
2. Relaxation of Mind (<i>Citta-śamana</i>)	29
3. Training of Breath (<i>Prāṇāyāma</i>)	30
Discussion	32
Conclusion	32
Reference	32

Introduction

The six systems of Indian philosophy, traditionally known as the **Ṣaḍ-Darśanas**, serve as guiding frameworks for understanding the diverse dimensions of the vast knowledge contained in the Vedas. Far from being separate or contradictory, these philosophical schools are integral to the **long and unbroken Vedic tradition** of India. Because of their reverence for the authority of the Vedas, they are collectively known as **Āstika Darśanas** (theistic schools of thought, or pro-Vedic philosophies). In contrast, philosophical ideas that reject or disregard the authority of the Vedas came to be categorized as **Nāstika Darśanas** (non-Vedic or anti-Vedic schools). Thus, the distinction between Āstika and Nāstika is not about belief in God per se, but rather about acceptance or rejection of the Vedic foundations.

Among the six Darśanas, the **Yoga Darśana** occupies a special place. It addresses the **spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of creation** while offering practical techniques for self-development. Its primary aim is to guide human beings toward the realization of the **Supreme Consciousness**. In essence, Yoga is the **science of psycho-engineering**. Just as physical sciences and technologies rely upon kinetic and potential energies, the psycho-spiritual sciences of ancient India were founded upon **bhāvanā-saṃskāra** (the subtle utilization of **psychic energy**).

The Yoga Darśana provides a systematic methodology for harnessing this inner energy, directing it toward the attainment of **siddhis** (higher faculties and spiritual perfections). Through its practices, individuals learn to gain mastery over their own mental processes, enabling them to cultivate specific dispositions that transform the quality of

life. For example, in order to live joyfully, peacefully, and free of stress, Yoga encourages the cultivation of the spirit of **niṣkāma-karma**—selfless action performed for the welfare of society, without attachment to personal gain. When such attitudes are developed, they naturally elevate an individual from a materialistic orientation to a **spiritual way of life**.

The present work is a humble but sincere attempt to explore the profound psychological insights of the Yoga Darśana and to highlight their continuing relevance. In particular, it seeks to examine how the therapeutic principles of Yoga can be effectively applied in addressing modern psychological challenges and disorders that afflict humanity on a large scale.

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Intelligence and the Yogic Conception of R̥tambharā Prajñā

1. Introduction

The question of intelligence has intrigued philosophers and psychologists alike, both in the East and the West. Ancient Indian philosophers, particularly within the framework of **Yoga Darśana**, made profound contributions to the understanding of intelligence, far earlier than modern psychology. Their central insight was that intelligence is not merely the possession of mental faculties, but rather the **capacity to arrive at confirmed knowledge** (*adhyavasāyātmikā buddhi*).

Where there is hesitation, wavering, or indecisiveness, there can be no true intelligence. Thus, perplexity or inability to decide (*what to do or what not to do*) was not seen as intelligence, but as its absence. In contrast, much of modern psychology has emphasized the **factors** or **manifestations** of intelligence rather than its essence.

2. Western Psychological Theories of Intelligence

- **Spearman's Two-Factor Theory:**
Spearman distinguished between **general intelligence** (*g*), referring to overall cognitive ability, and **specific intelligence** (*s*), referring to skills limited to particular domains (Spearman, 1927).
- **Wechsler's Definition:**
David Wechsler described intelligence as “the ability to think rationally, to act purposefully, and to deal effectively with the environment.” (Wechsler, 1944)

- **Thurstone & Guilford's Multifactorial Models:**
L.L. Thurstone and J.P. Guilford emphasized **multiple primary mental abilities** and complex structures of cognition.
- **Vernon's Hierarchical Model:**
Vernon (1950) proposed a **pyramidal structure** of intelligence, with general intelligence at the top, followed by broader abilities, and finally highly specific skills.
- Modern psychology has, therefore, largely treated intelligence as **factorial and outcome-based**, measured through observable performance, decision-making, and problem-solving.

3. Yogic Conception of Intelligence

In contrast, **Yoga Darśana** defines intelligence (*buddhi*) as *adhyavasāyātmikā buddhi*—the **faculty of confirmed decision-making**. This is an anticipatory and proactive conception, closer to what modern researchers describe as **quick and accurate decision-making ability**.

Furthermore, Yoga psychology extends beyond conventional theories by asserting that intelligence can be **sharpened, purified, and elevated** through spiritual discipline. At its highest refinement, intelligence transforms into **ṛtambharā prajñā**, a state of pure and direct cognition.

4. Ṛtambharā Prajñā: The Highest Form of Intelligence

According to Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* (1.48–1.49), the culmination of yogic practice leads to **ṛtambharā prajñā**, literally meaning “truth-bearing wisdom.”

- **Nature of Ṛtambharā Prajñā:**
It is a form of cognition entirely different from knowledge derived through language (*śruta*) or

9 Psychological Concepts and Psychotherapy in Yogadarśana

inference (*anumāna*). It is **immediate, direct, and self-luminous**—knowledge of reality as it is (Arya: 2021).

- **Psychological Significance:**

Modern psychology equates intelligence with reasoning and inference. Yoga Darśana, however, asserts that reasoning has limits. Absolute truth cannot be reached through discursive thought; it can only be realized. Ṛtambharā prajñā transcends logical processes and reveals truth directly, without mediation of prior education or experience.

- **Historical Context:**

The Vedas themselves are traditionally regarded as the revelations (*śruti*) of ancient ṛṣis who attained this state of perfected cognition through *nirvitarka samādhi*.

5. Impressions (Saṃskāras) and the Dynamics of Intelligence

Indian psychology emphasizes that all knowledge leaves **impressions (saṃskāras)** upon the mind. These impressions are the seeds (*bīja*) that condition future cognition and even rebirth (Arya 2021).

- *Saṃskāra bījāt sṛṣṭiḥ* – “From impressions arise creation.”
- Different impressions produce different forms of existence: impressions of birds give rise to a bird’s life, those of animals to animal life, and so forth.

Ṛtambharā prajñā, however, produces the **strongest impressions**, capable of overriding all others (*taj-ja saṃskāro ’nya-saṃskāra-pratibandhī* – YS 1.50). Yet, even these impressions are not ultimate; they too must eventually be transcended for final liberation (*mokṣa*).

6. From Ṛtambharā Prajñā to Nirbīja Samādhi

The attainment of ṛtambharā prajñā corresponds to the state of **samprajñāta samādhi**, wherein knowledge arises with seeds (impressions). Liberation, however, requires a further stage:

- **Nirbīja Samādhi (Seedless Absorption):**

As Patañjali states (*YS 1.51*):

tasyāpi nirodhe sarva-nirodhān nirbījaḥ samādhiḥ

“When even these impressions are suppressed, there arises seedless samādhi.”

At this stage, the individuated consciousness merges into the **universal consciousness**. Psychologically, this may be described as the **universalization of individual intelligence**—the dissolution of the personal self into pure awareness, also called **mokṣa** or **kaivalya** (Arya 2021).

7. Conclusion

While modern psychology describes intelligence primarily as rationality, problem-solving, and adaptability, Yoga Darśana offers a **broader and deeper paradigm**. Intelligence is not only the capacity for correct decision-making but also a faculty that can be refined into higher states of cognition, culminating in direct realization of truth.

This yogic conception places intelligence within a **spiritual and evolutionary framework**—where human cognition is not static or merely functional but has the potential to transcend itself, leading ultimately to liberation.

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The Concept of Memory in Yoga Philosophy and Cognitive Science

Patañjali classifies **memory** (*smṛti*) as one of the five fundamental mental modifications (*citta-vṛttis*) along with perception (*pramāṇa*), misconception (*viparyaya*), imagination (*vikalpa*), and sleep (*nidrā*) (Yoga Sūtra, 1.6). He defines memory as:

अनुभूत-विषयासम्प्रमोषः स्मृतिः

anubhūta-viṣayāsampraṁoṣaḥ smṛtiḥ

Memory is the non-forgetting of experienced objects” (*Yogasūtra*, 1.11).

The key term *asampraṁoṣaḥ* (“non-loss”) implies that memory is not merely storage but the **accurate retention of prior experience**. Contemporary psychology similarly views memory as both a retention system and a reconstructive process (Baddeley, Eysenck, & Anderson, 2020).

Thus, memory in Yoga consists of two aspects:

1. **Retention** – the *saṁskāra* or impression left by experience.
2. **Recall** – the reactivation of that impression.

The Process of Memory in Yoga Philosophy

Yoga philosophy describes three interrelated stages of memory formation:

1. **Anubhava (Experience/Perception)** – Direct experience of an object or event. In neuroscience, this corresponds to **encoding**, the transformation of sensory input into neural representations (Squire &

13 Psychological Concepts and Psychotherapy in Yogadarśana

Kandel, 2009).

2. **Saṃskāra (Impression/Retention)** – Experiences leave subtle imprints (*saṃskāras*) in the mind. Patañjali emphasizes their durability, stating that impressions persist across time and even lifetimes (Yoga Sūtra, 4.9). Neuroscience recognizes a similar process through **synaptic plasticity**, the strengthening of neural pathways due to repeated activity (Kandel, 2001).
3. **Pratyabhijñā (Recall/Reproduction)** – The act of re-evoking stored impressions. Psychology distinguishes between explicit retrieval (conscious recollection) and implicit retrieval (unconscious influences of memory) (Schacter, 1996).

The Eternity of Memory and Rebirth

According to Yoga, *saṃskāras* survive death and continue across lifetimes, supporting the doctrine of karmic continuity. Although mainstream science does not affirm reincarnation, parapsychological studies have documented cases of children reporting past-life memories (Stevenson, 2001). While controversial, such research resonates with Patañjali's assertion that memory transcends spatial and temporal limits.

The Contents of Memory

Patañjali identifies three components of memory:

- Śabda (Word/Label)
- Artha (Object/Referent)
- Jñāna (Knowledge/Conceptual Awareness)

This tripartite model foreshadows modern **semiotics**, where meaning arises from the interaction between

signifier, signified, and referent (Saussure, 1916/1983).

In yogic meditation, these three aspects may converge. For example, in concentration on Īśvara, the practitioner contemplates the name (*śabda*, “Om”), the reality (*artha*, divine presence), and the knowledge of existence (*jñāna*). This corresponds to **savitaraka samāpatti** (Yoga Sūtra, 1.42).

Clearance and Purification of Memory

The ultimate yogic goal is **purification of memory**, freeing consciousness from conditioning. Patañjali explains:

स्मृति परिशुद्धौ स्वरूप शून्येवार्थ-मात्र निर्भासा निर्वितर्क
*smṛti parīśuddhau svarūpa śūnyevārtha-mātra nirbhāsa
nirvitarkā*

When memory is purified, the mind appears empty of its own nature, and only the object shines forth—this is *nirvitarka samādhi* (Yoga Sūtra, 1.43).

Modern neuroscience supports this in part: advanced meditation reduces activity in the **default mode network**, which is heavily tied to autobiographical memory and self-referential thought (Brewer et al., 2011).

Scientific Implications

- **Neuroscience of Saṃskāra** – The yogic idea of *saṃskāra* parallels **engrams**, the physical neural traces of memory (Josselyn & Tonegawa, 2020).
- **Meditation and Memory Purification** – Meditation has been shown to reduce rumination and regulate emotional memory processing (Hölzel et al., 2011).
- **Beyond Constructive Memory** – Psychology emphasizes memory’s reconstructive nature

15 Psychological Concepts and Psychotherapy in Yogadarśana

(Bartlett, 1932), whereas Yoga stresses transcending memory to access **pure cognition (prajñā)**.

Conclusion

Patañjali's theory of memory provides both a **philosophical framework** and a **psychological model** that parallels modern science. It describes memory as a process of encoding (*anubhava*), storage (*saṃskāra*), and retrieval (*pratyabhijñā*), while also emphasizing the ultimate purification of memory as central to liberation. Contemporary psychology and neuroscience validate many aspects of this model, yet Yoga extends the discussion by situating memory within the quest for transcendence and spiritual freedom.

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Cognition in Yoga Darśana

Just as **Yāntrika-vidyā** (mechanical technology) works through the dynamics of kinetic and potential energies, **Māntrika-vidyā** (mental or psychic technology), developed in ancient India, operates through *bhāvanā-saṃskāra* or psychic energy. *Yoga Darśana* (the philosophy of Yoga) explains how this psychic energy may be cultivated and directed towards achieving various higher goals. Yoga enables mastery over one's own mental processes, empowering the practitioner to generate mental states conducive to life's higher purposes. For instance, Yoga helps foster the attitude of **niṣkāma-karma**—performing actions for their own sake, without attachment to material gains, and finding satisfaction in the excellence of performance rather than in external rewards.

Citta-vṛttis: The Five Primary Mental Functions

Yoga psychology, as codified by Patañjali, studies mental functions under the category of *citta-vṛttis* (modifications of consciousness). He identifies five such functions:

वृत्तयः पञ्चतयः क्लिष्टाक्लिष्टाः

vṛttayaḥ pañcatayyaḥ kliṣṭākliṣṭāḥ (Yoga Sūtra 1.5)

Mental functions are five in number, and may be either afflictive (*kliṣṭa*) or non-afflictive (*akliṣṭa*).

These five are:

1. **Pramāṇa** – Cognition / Valid knowledge
2. **Viparyaya** – False cognition / Error
3. **Vikalpa** – Imagination / Conceptual construction

4. Nidrā – Sleep

5. Smṛti – Memory

1. Cognition (*Pramāṇa*)

Cognition (*pramāṇa*) consists in the acquisition of valid knowledge. Nyāya philosophy distinguishes between **pramā** (knowledge itself) and **pramāṇa** (the means of acquiring knowledge). Nyāya thus defines:

pramākaraṇam pramāṇam – “That which causes valid knowledge is *pramāṇa*.”

Patañjali, however, identifies cognition itself with *pramāṇa*. He enumerates three kinds of valid cognition:

प्रत्यक्षानुमानागमाः प्रमाणानि
pratyakṣa-anumāna-āgamāḥ pramāṇāni

(*Yoga Sūtra* 1.7)

“Perception, inference, and authoritative testimony are the sources of cognition.”

Thus, according to Yoga, cognition arises through:

- Perception (*pratyakṣa*)
- Inference (*anumāna*)
- Authoritative testimony (*āgama*)

The Nyāya school adds a **fourth source of knowledge**, namely **comparison** (*upamāna*):

pratyakṣa-anumāna-upamāna-śabdaḥ pramāṇāni

(a) Perception (*pratyakṣa*)

Perception arises when the sense organs come into direct contact with their respective stimuli (*indriyārtha-sannikarṣa*). Nyāya defines it as:

19 Psychological Concepts and Psychotherapy in Yogadarśana

इन्द्रियार्थ-सन्निकर्ष-जन्यं ज्ञानम् प्रत्यक्षम्

indriyārtha-sannikarṣa-janyaṃ jñānam pratyakṣam

“Knowledge arising from the contact of sense-organs with objects is perception.”

Ancient Indian thinkers considered perception to begin only when sensations are consciously realized. Modern psychology, however, often treats sensation itself as a basic form of cognition (Sinha 1948: 69, 100).

Perception is of two kinds:

- **Positive perception** – realization of the presence of a stimulus.
- **Negative perception** – realization of the absence of a previously perceived stimulus (e.g., “the glass is missing from the table”).

(b) Inference (*anumāna*)

Inference is cognition based on reasoning. For example:

यत्र यत्र धूमः तत्र तत्र वह्निः –

yatra yatra dhūmaḥ tatra tatra vahnīḥ –

“Where there is smoke, there is fire.”

Here, the perception of smoke leads to the inference of fire. Inference requires not only reasoning but also the support of imagination and memory.

(c) Statement of Ṛṣi of Śāstra (*āgama*)

Many kinds of knowledge are not accessible through direct perception or inference. Testimony from reliable authorities or tradition (*āgama*) becomes necessary. Knowledge is transmitted across generations, enabling progress and preventing stagnation. Without such testimony, each person would have to rediscover

everything afresh, resulting in mere repetition rather than advancement. Thus, testimony functions as a vital means of cognition, particularly in historical, cultural, and spiritual domains.

(d) Comparison (*upamāna*)

Cognition can also arise through comparison. For example, one recognizes a *nīlagai* (blue cow) in the forest by comparing it to the familiar cow of one's village. Here memory plays a crucial role, as past experience is recalled and applied to a new object.

Beyond Ordinary Cognition: Yoga and Extrasensory Perception

Ordinary cognition is limited by the range of the human senses. Our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin can only register stimuli within specific ranges. Beyond this, cognition fails.

Yoga begins precisely where ordinary sensory perception ends. It provides techniques to awaken **extra-sensory perception (ESP)**—the ability to perceive distant, subtle, or hidden realities. Through yogic practices, one develops heightened faculties such as **divya-dṛṣṭi** (divine sight), **divya-śruti** (divine hearing), **divya-gandha** (divine smell), **divya-sparśa** (divine touch), and **divya-rasa** (divine taste). Ultimately, Yoga leads to the direct realization of the **universal consciousness**.

Stimulus and Response in Yoga Psychology

According to Patañjali, all mental functions—cognition, false cognition, imagination, sleep, and memory—give rise to affective states of comfort (*sukha*) or discomfort (*duḥkha*). These responses depend on the nature of the stimulus and the organism's receptivity. Thus, comfort and

21 Psychological Concepts and Psychotherapy in Yogadarśana

discomfort are not sensations in themselves, but **qualitative responses** to stimuli.

Yoga emphasizes that ordinary sensory perception is limited by the **range of sensibility** of the organs. Modern psychology responds to this by increasing stimulus intensity (as per Weber–Fechner’s law). Yoga, on the other hand, offers a unique solution: it expands the **sensitivity of the perceiver** through disciplined practice. Thus, Yoga transforms ordinary cognition into extraordinary cognition—culminating in blissful realization of the Self (*ātman*) as the universal consciousness (*Brahman*).

Conclusion

Yoga, therefore, is not merely a study of mental processes like modern psychology. Rather, it is a **science of psycho-engineering**—a practical discipline that systematically refines and redirects mental functions towards higher ends. Where psychology analyzes, Yoga transforms. By cultivating and harnessing psychic energy, Yoga leads the practitioner from ordinary cognition to superconscious realization.

Psychological Disorders and Their Cure: A Yogic Perspective

Abstract

From the earliest stages of human civilization, psychological disturbances have been recorded and various healing systems developed to address them. In the Indian tradition, Patañjali's *Yoga Darśana* presents one of the earliest systematic psychological frameworks. This paper examines his classification of mental processes, the root causes of mental afflictions (*kleśas*), the development of psychological disorders (*cittavikṣepas*), and therapeutic approaches through *Kriyā-Yoga*. It further situates this yogic psychology in dialogue with Ayurvedic perspectives, demonstrating its enduring relevance in contemporary discussions of mental health.

Introduction

Psychological disorders are not uniquely modern phenomena. Since ancient times, individuals across cultures have experienced depression, anxiety, delusions, and compulsive behaviors. While modern psychiatry attempts to explain these conditions through neurochemical and biopsychosocial models, traditional Indian thought, especially Patañjali's *Yoga Darśana*, offers a profound philosophical-psychological approach. Unlike modern systems that often fragment body and mind, Yoga integrates them within a holistic framework of human well-being.

Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* (ca. 200 BCE–400 CE) describe mental processes, their disturbances, and pathways for psychological healing. By categorizing mental activities as

23 Psychological Concepts and Psychotherapy in Yogadarśana

either conducive to peace (*akliṣṭa*) or harmful (*kliṣṭa*), Patañjali anticipates the modern psychological distinction between adaptive and maladaptive cognition.

Mental Processes and Their Disturbances

In *Yoga Darśana* 1.5, Patañjali asserts:

वृत्तयः पञ्चतय्यः क्लिष्टाक्लिष्टाः

Vṛttayah pañcatayyah kliṣṭākliṣṭāḥ

Mental modifications are of five kinds, and each may be either painful (*kliṣṭa*) or non-painful (*akliṣṭa*).

This categorization emphasizes that psychological well-being depends not merely on the presence of mental activities, but on their qualitative orientation. A similar distinction exists in modern psychology between constructive thought patterns (e.g., problem-solving, creativity) and pathological patterns (e.g., rumination, obsession).

The Five Root Causes of Mental Malfunctions

(*Kleśas*)

According to *Yoga Darśana* 2.3–2.9, all psychological disturbances stem from five fundamental afflictions:

- **Avidyā (Ignorance)** – the misperception of reality, taking the impermanent for permanent, the painful for pleasurable, and the non-self for the self (*Yoga Sūtra* 2.5). This corresponds to cognitive distortions in modern psychology.
- **Asmitā (Egoism/Possessiveness)** – identifying the self with body, mind, or possessions (*Yoga Sūtra* 2.6). This results in fragile self-concepts and narcissistic tendencies.

- **Rāga (Attachment)** – craving pleasurable experiences (*Yoga Sūtra* 2.7), analogous to addictive behavior.
- **Dveṣa (Aversion)** – hatred toward painful experiences (*Yoga Sūtra* 2.8), often manifesting as avoidance disorders or phobias.
- **Abhiniveśa (Fear of Death/Clinging to Life)** – primal anxiety, persisting even among the learned (*Yoga Sūtra* 2.9). Modern parallels include death anxiety and existential fear.

Development of Psychological Disorders

(*Cittavikṣepas*)

When left unchecked, these afflictions intensify into *cittavikṣepas* (disorders of mind and consciousness). Patañjali enumerates them in *Yoga Sūtra* 1.30:

- **Vyādhi** – psychosomatic illness without organic cause.
- **Styāna/Ālasya** – lethargy and depression-like states.
- **Pramāda** – carelessness and personality disorders.
- **Anavasthitatva** – instability and inconsistency, akin to impulsive personality traits.
- **Avirati** – obsessive-compulsive tendencies.
- **Bhrāntidarśana** – psychotic delusions and hallucinations.
- **Alabdhabhūmikatva** – hysteria or inability to grasp reality.

These descriptions reveal a nuanced understanding of mental pathologies that parallels modern psychiatric classifications, though framed within metaphysical

25 Psychological Concepts and Psychotherapy in Yogadarśana language.

Psychophysiological Symptoms

Patañjali also noted accompanying physical manifestations:

दुःख दौर्मनस्य अङ्गमेजयत्व श्वास-प्रश्वासाः विक्षेप-सहभुवः

Duḥkha daurmanasya aṅgamejayatva śvāsa-prāśvāsāḥ
vikkṣepa-sahabhuvāḥ (*Yoga Sūtra* 1.31).

These include sadness, restlessness, frustration, and irregular breathing — symptoms now well-recognized in psychosomatic and anxiety disorders.

Therapeutic Framework: *Kriyā-Yoga*

To address these afflictions, Patañjali recommends *Kriyā-Yoga* (*Yoga Sūtra* 2.1–2.2), a discipline aimed both at attenuating disturbances and preparing the mind for *samādhi* (deep concentration). Its threefold path comprises:

- **Tapah (Austerity/Discipline)** – restructuring habits and bodily regulation, akin to modern behavioral therapy.
- **Svādhyāya (Self-Study)** – introspection, philosophical study, and reflective counseling, similar to cognitive therapy.
- **Īśvara-praṇidhāna (Faith in the Divine)** – cultivating surrender and resilience through devotion, enhancing coping capacity.

This triad integrates behavioral regulation, cognitive restructuring, and spiritual resilience into a comprehensive therapeutic program.

Integration with Ayurveda

Ayurveda, the sister science of Yoga, identifies mental disorders under *Manas Roga-s* and explains them through *doṣic* imbalances (vāta, pitta, kapha). While Yoga emphasizes introspective transformation, Ayurveda prescribes diet, herbal medicines, and lifestyle adjustments. Together, they constitute a holistic framework of psychological care that addresses body, mind, and spirit.

Conclusion

Patañjali's psychology provides an insightful framework for understanding mental disorders, integrating causes, symptoms, and therapeutic practices. Its emphasis on the transformation of mental processes through *Kriyā-Yoga* anticipates modern psychotherapeutic approaches while offering unique spiritual dimensions often absent in contemporary psychiatry. In dialogue with Ayurveda, this system presents a rich interdisciplinary model for addressing mental health that remains relevant to both traditional and modern contexts.

Yoga Therapy for Psychological Disorders: A Pātañjala Perspective

Psychological disorders have been recognized since antiquity, though the methods of addressing them have varied greatly across cultures. In many early societies, responses were often rooted in superstition, ritual, or coercion. By contrast, Indian traditions developed more nuanced frameworks for understanding and treating mental distress, particularly through **Āyurveda** and **Yoga Darśana**. These systems recognized psychological disturbances as **manas-roga** (mental illnesses) and prescribed therapeutic approaches that combined herbal medicine, ethical

27 Psychological Concepts and Psychotherapy in Yogadarśana discipline, and psychospiritual practice.

Among these contributions, the work of **Patañjali** stands out for its systematic integration of psychology and therapy within the broader discipline of Yoga. Far from being a purely spiritual pursuit, Patañjali's Yoga is presented as a structured path for cultivating mental stability, reducing suffering, and restoring balance to the mind. His insights provide not only a philosophical explanation of the roots of mental disturbance but also a practical framework for treatment.

The present chapter focuses on Patañjali's Yoga Darśana, which presents Yoga therapy as a comprehensive treatment for psychological disorders, particularly those of a neurotic nature. Patañjali's approach emphasizes training the mind, achieving mental relaxation, and regulating physiological processes through breath control.

Taken together, these practices form a holistic strategy for managing psychological disturbances, particularly those of a neurotic or functional nature. By emphasizing training of the mind, relaxation, and the regulation of vital energies, Patañjali's Yoga anticipates many modern approaches to psychotherapy and psychosomatic medicine. Its relevance today lies in its ability to bridge philosophical insight with practical methods for mental health care, offering a time-tested model that complements contemporary psychology.

Yoga Therapy According to Patañjali

As mentioned above, Patañjali's Yoga therapy consists of three interrelated components:

1. **Training of Mind (Meditation)**
2. **Relaxation of Mind**

3. Training of Breath (Prāṇāyāma/Relaxation of Body)

Each component addresses specific dimensions of psychological functioning and contributes to restoring mental balance.

1. Training of Mind (Meditation)

Meditation (*dhyāna*) is central to Patañjali's therapeutic model. He explicitly prescribes meditation as a countermeasure for psychological disturbances:

तत्-प्रतिषेधार्थम् एक-तत्त्वाभ्यासः

Tat-pratiṣedhārtham eka-tattvābhyāsaḥ

(Yoga Darśana 1.32)

“To counteract these disorders, meditation on a single principle must be practiced.”

Through focused meditation, the mind attains stability, reducing the oscillations (*citta-vikṣepa*) that characterize psychological disorders. Patañjali further identifies **meditation on the Divine** as a direct path to inner stability. The practice involves **continuous remembrance of Īśvara (God/Ultimate Reality)**, facilitated through the repetition of *Praṇava (Aum)*:

- *Tasya vācakaḥ praṇavaḥ* (YD 1.27)
- *Tajjapas tad-artha-bhāvanam* (YD 1.28)

This form of mantra-based meditation generates **neurocognitive quietude**, enhances concentration, and reduces anxiety—paralleling modern findings on **mindfulness-based therapies** and **mantra meditation**, which show significant benefits in reducing stress, depression, and rumination.

2. Relaxation of Mind (Citta-śamana)

Relaxation of the mind is the second therapeutic principle. Patañjali suggests multiple strategies to reduce mental agitation and restore calm:

Mental Loosening (Freedom from Passions):

वितरग-विषयं वा चित्तम्

Vitarāga-viṣayaṁ vā cittam

“When the mind becomes detached from passions and objects, disorders are counteracted.”

Undivided Concentration (Ekāgratā):

विषयवती वा प्रवृत्तिर् उत्पन्ना मनसः स्थिति-निबन्धनी यद् १ ॥३५

Viṣayavatī vā pravṛttir utpannā manasaḥ sthiti-nibandhanī (YD 1.35)

“Directing attention toward a single object or thought cultivates stability.”

Self-directed Attention:

विशोका वा ज्योतिष्मती

Viśokā vā jyotiṣmatī (YD 1.36)

Concentration on one’s inner self or an internal luminous image generates clarity and calmness.

Dream/Sleep-based Relaxation:

वप्न-निद्रा-ज्ञानालम्बनं वा

vapna-nidrā-jñānālabhanam vā (YD 1.38)

Recollection of peaceful dream states can induce mental quietude.

Object-based Concentration:

यथाभिमत-ध्यानाद् वा

Yathābhimata-dhyānād vā (YD 1.39)

Concentration on any chosen object can facilitate relaxation.

Patañjali further extends the scope of concentration to include objects ranging from the smallest atom to the vastest entity:

परमाणु-परम-महत्त्वान्तोऽस्य वशीकारः

Paramāṇu-parama-mahattvānto'sya vaśīkārah (YD 1.40).

In modern psychological language, these methods correspond to **attention regulation techniques** widely applied in **cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)**, **mindfulness-based interventions**, and **relaxation training**, which are effective in anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive tendencies, and depressive states.

3. Training of Breath (Prāṇāyāma)

The third pillar of Patañjali's therapy is **breath regulation** (*prāṇāyāma*), aimed at relaxing the body to support mental calmness. Patañjali emphasizes the interdependence of physiological and psychological states:

दुःख-दौर्मनस्य-ङ्गमेजयत्व-श्वास-प्रश्वासा विक्षेप-सहभुवः

*Duḥkha-daurmanasya-aṅgamejayatva-śvāsa-prāśvāsā
vikṣepa-sahabhuvaḥ* (Yoga Darśana 1.31)

“Disturbed breathing accompanies
psychological agitation, sadness, and
restlessness.”

By regulating breath, the mind too becomes steady:

प्रच्छर्दन-विधारणाभ्यां वा प्राणस्य

Pracchardana-vidhāraṇābhyām vā prāṇasya (YD 1.34)

“Through controlled exhalation and retention, the mind attains relaxation.”

31 Psychological Concepts and Psychotherapy in Yogadarśana

Patañjali defines prāṇāyāma as the suspension of inhalation and exhalation:

तस्मिन् सति श्वास-प्रश्वासयोः गति-विच्छेदः प्राणायामः

*Tasmīn sati śvāsa-praśvāsayoḥ gati-vicchedaḥ
prāṇāyāmaḥ (YD 2.49)*

According to Vyāsa's commentary, prāṇāyāma comprises three types:

1. **External (Bāhya)** – suspension after exhalation.
2. **Internal (Ābhyantara)** – suspension after inhalation.
3. **Stilled (Stambhavṛtti)** – suspension when breath is neither inhaled nor exhaled.

Later traditions identified these as **Recaka (exhalation)**, **Pūraka (inhalation)**, and **Kumbhaka (retention)**. A fourth type, described as *Bāhyābhyantara-viśayākṣepī caturthaḥ* (YD 2.51), transcends normal inhalation and exhalation, pointing to advanced states of breath control.

The therapeutic significance lies in **autonomic regulation**: breath training influences the parasympathetic nervous system, reducing stress responses, stabilizing heart rate, and enhancing emotional regulation. This is consistent with contemporary findings on **slow breathing practices**, **HRV biofeedback**, and **diaphragmatic breathing**, which are effective in anxiety, PTSD, and psychosomatic disorders.

Patañjali concludes that mastery of prāṇāyāma prepares the mind for concentration:

धारणासु च योग्यता मनसः

Dhāraṇāsu ca योग्यता मनसः (YD 2.53)

“Through prāṇāyāma, the mind becomes fit for concentration.”

Discussion

Patañjali's Yoga therapy integrates **cognitive, affective, and physiological regulation**, offering a comprehensive approach to mental health. Meditation cultivates attentional stability and reduces rumination; mental relaxation techniques alleviate anxiety and intrusive thoughts; breath regulation harmonizes psychophysiological functions.

From a modern scientific perspective, these techniques map onto:

- **Meditation** → Mindfulness, mantra-based therapies, metacognitive training.
- **Relaxation of Mind** → Cognitive restructuring, focused attention, detachment-based interventions.
- **Prāṇāyāma** → Breathwork therapies, autonomic nervous system regulation, psychophysiological resilience.

Conclusion

Patañjali's Yoga Darśana offers a holistic therapeutic framework for psychological disorders. By combining **meditation, relaxation techniques, and breath regulation**, Yoga therapy addresses both the **psychological roots and physiological correlates** of mental disturbances. This ancient model anticipates many principles of modern psychotherapy and psychophysiology, making it a valuable resource for contemporary mental health interventions.

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