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## Yoga as an Essential Aid to Effective Media Literacy

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**Abstract:** *The word 'Media' is a powerful source of information that not only helps in generating awareness but also used as tool to publicize propaganda, apart from giving the right information to the mass. Over the centuries media's role has gradually shifted from being 'public voice' to 'personal or group voice'. Issues related to media bias and manipulation has been in focus with the entry of private media organizations. While oscillating between the truth and the false due to poor ability to distinguish, the general masses end up trapped in what is being shown and what is being propagated in media day-in and day-out. The intelligentsia and the common man at times are confused as to who sets the agenda for the discussion? Is it the people or the Media in a given environment? Our perception and bias towards an issue is shaped by the information the media provides. In a fast changing world the ability to see through makes the modern man vulnerable to various challenges, it is upto the man to face the challenges that he/she encounters routinely and try to make oneself clear with issues and challenges that encounters. Today more people go to recreation centers throughout the world in order to have a peaceful mind and soul, also to see things more clearly than others. In Chapter II, verse 26, of Yoga Sutra, Patanjali states: "The means of attaining cessation [of the fluctuations of the mind] is the unceasing vision of discernment". Clarity and cognizance can be brought within us through sense internalization. To look through our unconsciousness (what media shows) we first need to have control over the tendencies of mind (Chitta Vritti Niradha), which is possible through yogic practices as said in the texts. Such practices enhance coordination between body and mind and equip us with Vivek (power of discrimination) to shield/nourish us from possible effects of media. A definition of yoga says, it is a perfect understanding between the nerves of action and nerves of knowledge working together in concord. It strengthens our conscience that assists our viewpoint. A strong conscience is like a sensitive balance that gives the slightest difference between right and wrong. It teaches us how to make peace with imperfection that we see in others and ourselves, in other words the yoga teaches us how to break pattern by timely and voluntary disengagement of sense organs which otherwise breeds stress and inappropriate response with regard to issues that bother us and our environment. The great wise Shankara states (in VIVEKA CHUDAMANI) that our identification with material existence rather than the essence of it is the actual cause of our continued sufferings even beyond this lifetime, therefore the existing code of media ethics and good practices need spiritual revisit in order to instill good and dispassionate thinking habits while acquiring knowledge and its subsequent dissemination to the public through media. Such practices will turn an otherwise stressful career into an exciting, successful and socially responsible profession by harmonizing individual need with universal order.*

**Keywords:** *yoga, Media-literacy, yellow journalism*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The media has started as a single source, today it has grown into an ecosystem in itself. Our present societies are loaded with information or what we call as information loaded societies. We are processing more information than our fathers and our ancestors did. Our environment is filled with information and comes through various channels and mediums. This information makes us behave the way we are. Acceptance of the information that is broadcast in any channel, print media or any other media is prone to irregularities like message distortions and willful dereliction of facts leading to wrong perception and confusion within the mass. The matter of discussion in today's world is how to deal with issues that emerge from different sources and report the same issues/story differently. This has lately become a topic of great concern which needs thoughtful elaboration to work out effective means to deal with this virtual threat. Regardless of the source, most of the time media organizations and agencies can't be trustworthy in many aspects, as they try to manipulate the information according to the needs of the organization

and at times to protect the state, or benefit a group of individuals or organizations. Apart from this media can't be trusted in disseminating right information and representing facts, rather media ads extra flavor by language and exaggerate the information to achieve short term competitive advantage over public good. Media started losing its credibility with rapid growth of new technologies and corporatization as a result of technological advancements, the media moves much faster that in turn makes the media agencies to simply report rather cross checking the facts. The monopoly of few media organizations and agencies without any effective means of checks and balance ultimately pushed the societies to be media literate to deal with the adverse effect. In this context of media literacy it implies more of an inner control mechanism of those disseminating and receiving information. When we refer inner mechanism it invariably indicates internal discipline of all concerned ensuring highest public good and able to decode the right information given by the media. Yoga is an ancient science of harmonizing body, spirit and mind which entitles a person with abundance of spirit and sense of well being. A self motivated person performs his duty/reporting in a dispassionate manner taking into consideration the essence of facts by avoiding triviality and gibberishes for short term benefits.

The freedom of press in India and elsewhere has made the Media more powerful, even state is at times is weaker and not able to control the power the media wields. During the famous Newspaper wars between William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer II, a word "yellow journalism" [1] came into existence for the first time. The News or information that is being presented to the audience lacks authenticity as it is not fact based, much of the information was from the unknown sources and speculative but public accept it to be true. There were few trials in some section like, (i) forming of paid News and money power division by the Election Commissioner, (ii) deputing a senior officer to look into those divisions by the Central Board of Direct Taxes for the heavy investments made by political parties in the market and (iii) monitoring it by The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) which was published as an article, 'Corruption in media affects the health of democracy' in THE HINDU. Still, there is a need for strict monitoring in many divisions of media. Any agenda that needs to be reached to the public for the interest of a particular person or group is being disguised as News and released through media. Few Bollywood movies namely Peepli Live, Joker, Mumbai Meri Jaan, Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani etc present the negative and positive aspects of media very minutely. It represents the scenario of the media present media industry like- how it is being managed by powerful personals; how "TRP" is important to earn revenue through advertisements. P. Sainath, Rural Affairs Editor, The Hindu stated: "Either we finish paid News, or paid News finishes us". Choosing the information that is based on facts, and that is constructive to the audience from a sea of information is the most challenging part of media today. The public today depend on the media more for their day-to-day decision, this can't be ignored as it is said, that the media is the fourth pillar of our democracy and that it plays a vital role in shaping our present and future generation. If one is successful in inducing the mass understand and make media literate, this will lead to a social and political revolution. Making the public media literate make the common man able to question the information in-spite of accepting everything to be true, especially when it is through the media agencies and organizations.

## **2. YOGA AND ITS RELEVANCE**

Media Literacy in general means, the overall ability from collection, processing and publishing information. However, with the advancement of media, the definition of media literacy too evolved. Centre for Media Literacy, proposed a very appropriate definition for media literacy for 21<sup>st</sup> century that says, it is this century's approach in giving a structure to overall media process from print visual and internet. It aims to build the responsibility media plays in society and self expression that is needed for the citizens of a democracy [2].

Citizens around the world are bombarded with information from all directions that has to be processed on every second/minute basis, though we try to believe in media to a large extent and at times we try to find the actual facts, humans are still confused with authentic and false information. Moreover, media biasness could be hidden by clever arbitration and partial projection of facts which often goes unnoticed and unquestioned. But it is said that man is the most intelligent species on earth that can differentiate between right and wrong. But not every human being is capable of doing so expect few. But it is possible to differentiate if one has a peace of mind, which is very much essential in the present contest of human evolution and challenges. There may be several approaches to tackle this

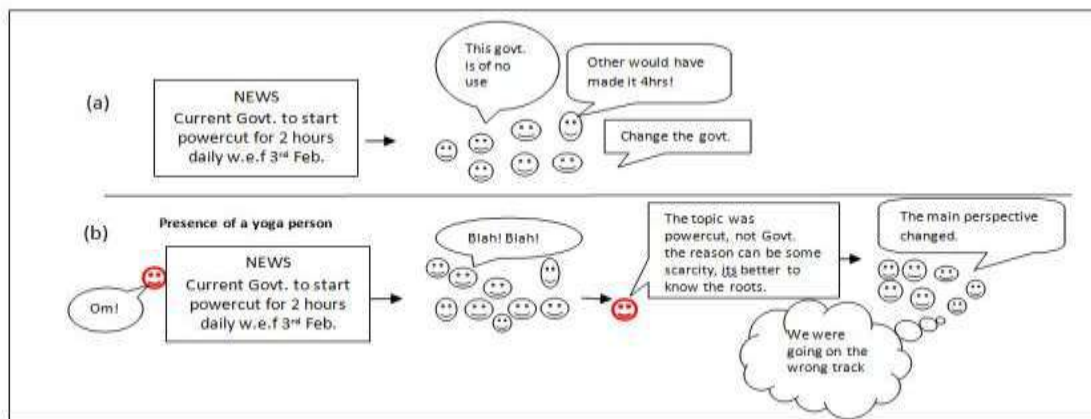
problem. A simple and very practical approach for this may be adoption of yoga or popularization of yogic principles in media houses thereby making outreach easier. The basic premise of Yoga says about 'Citta Vritti Niradha' which means controlling the tendencies of minds ie *Pramana, Vikalpa, Viparyaya, Smriti* and *Nidra*, in order to bring back its clarity and alertness by way of dissolving negativity that may arise in dealing with daily life. A sincere yoga practitioner can develop better control over his senses and thereby acquire inner strength and skill to make appropriate response which otherwise may bring undue sufferings in day to day life. The human mind after any amount of conventional external training or course may remain unsettled and away from sense of well being. Under such circumstances of spiritual poverty and ignorance, an individual may opt for advantageous strategies for livelihood being unconscious of their harmful and social consequences; the profession of journalism is not different from such diversion. But if trained holistically in a larger perspective of yogic principle and universality the same individual may feel elevated to see things from a superior reason of commitment to life and humanity to which he belongs.

People have been practicing yoga to attain 'moksha' or 'nirvana' for centuries, and this can be possible when one has mastery over his senses and can maintain peace within irrespective of any given environment. Yoga has a way special significance in the history of India, and it is this practice that has given the world the new dimension of self control over body and mind. Today yoga is practiced at international level cutting across the religion and races. June 21 is recognized as international Yoga day by the United Nations. We are seeing a world full of sufferings and pain, watching these images and reading the news of sufferings every day will make the human being vulnerable to internal suffering and loss of peace within. Yoga aims to make Self-realization that will help overcome the sufferings which will ultimately lead to 'the state of liberation' (Moksha) or 'freedom' (Kaivalya). Free living in all aspects of life, health and harmony is one of the main objectives of Yoga practice. Yoga, being broadly thought as an 'immortal cultural outcome' of the Indus Saraswati Valley civilization has proved itself providing both material and spiritual strengthen of humankind. Basic human values are the very identity of Yoga Sadhana [3]. Living in an environment that is potentially filled with stray information, needs finest sense of discrimination to choose the right over wrong that makes a lot of difference in engineering social change and human development. The human mind uses internal benchmark that responds to outer stimuli before generating an action. A benevolent benchmark is a sign of internalization of yogic principle which otherwise initiates unorganized thoughts and self defeating response. In terms of yoga, *jaग्रiti, swapna, nidra* and *turiya* constitutes the mind which has no physical presence and this is what defines the subconscious, unconscious and super-conscious mind [5]. These together are responsible for increase of the intellectuality of a person and practice of yoga helps in achieving this goal.

If we relate to the verse of Yoga-sutra chapter 2 - verse 4, it says, a lack of insight (avidya) is the source of most kleshas (obstacles) and can be latent, incipient, fully fledged or overwhelming. This teaches us that, if we don't have a strong vigilant on ourselves, avidya can invade us at any moment and can take over our thinking capacity [4]. Verse 27 of the same chapter states the seven stages of enlightenment, first of which is to realize what to avoid and second being awareness of the means for that removal [5]. Similarly, following this yoga sutra, one learns how in the sea of media one can avoid the unwanted junks. While in chapter 3 - verse 17, it is stated that, the name, task and experience associated with an object are interconnected. With meditation one can attain knowledge (jnana) by virtue of which one can distinct between the three with the concern of the form of expression of all living beings. These were compiled by Sage Pantajali back in 400 CE that contains the knowledge of yoga from older traditions [7]. So, this gives us a clear view that since ancient times it is known that we will be left in a pool of information or materials irrespective of good or bad and we all by ourselves has to judge and protect ourselves from the attack of the wrong or bad. And hence, Yoga has the power to imbibe in ourselves how to deal with such confusions and dilemma in our day today life. Thus, media literacy and yoga can be connected to make someone self realize what to accept and what not to when it comes in context with the information that are being showed to them through media. When the question arise, Why yoga? It is indeed necessary to mention that those who practice yoga imbibe into them buoyancy to work, blending the forces and processes of life instead of uncalled conflicts and confusions created by external or their own nature. There are huge mentions about Hatha Yoga in literatures. It is said it has three elements to achieve its goal, BODY, MIND and BREATHE [7]. Where there are the innumerable *asanas* or postures for the maintenance of the physical body along with due taming with *Kriyas*, which are the actions to be

done with it along with *mudras* (gestures) made and *bandhas* (arresting the body). Such practices can effectively arrest media superfluity to reinstate its credibility among mass. Although the blending of yoga with media literacy is not that easy nor customizing yogic practices for media persons when the choices are between easy and convenient and right and reasonable but it can surely help the media houses to evolve through the period of crises and to get through the issues related to it. Moreover, the mass we are referring to ranges from the highly educated literate to the illiterate sections of the society. It is not possible to reach each individual and make them media literate. But, one has the option for video and audio source to reach the practice of yoga helps to built this within oneself, which will enable the individual to judge right from wrong. A routine practice of yoga will enable a sense of discernment within one's mind that will allow them to recognize truth and make them aware of the surroundings they are in. The reputed organizations like the Art of Living Foundation of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Isha Foundation of Sadh Guru, Patanjali Ayurveda of Baba Ramdev etc have been successful in integrating yoga in lifestyles of modern people by popularizing yet not compromising its essence [8, 9, 10]. Such efforts have already gone a long way to bring positivity in the media world as well by toning down its nuisance value in terms of growth and substantiality.

Figure 1.0 gives us a simple idea on what yoga may do with respect to media literacy. The practice of Yoga not just enlightens the person performing, but helps in propagating the practice at small or large levels. As shown here, the person performing/practicing Yoga was able to distinguish what the News is actually about and how just by jumbling the words the focus of the News was shifted to an entirely different agenda. When this person put forward the actual News to the few people he met, he made them realize how they were going on the wrong road just by following the News blindly. Media uses the power of jumbling words or audio-visual in a ways that reflects the matter they want mass to discuss. It uses this ability very tactfully to present to the audience they want, pushing their own agenda and at times a groups agenda this seems completely normal to the common man and get trapped easily. Majority of the public fall into the trap set by the state or an organization, the media helps the state and the organizations to push their agenda at the cost of the common man, they are able to induce the subtle hidden messages through various forms and rout it through the mainstream media. These hidden messages often go unnoticed by the larger sections of the society. Media literacy in a way helps the people to overcome and see through these media texts and other forms.



**Fig -1:** a) People (non-yoga) discussing what they got through the media but in the way the media personals wanted them to; b) One person who does yoga did discussed the News but with the awareness that this may not be the whole scenario and was able to sort out the actual News from unwanted adjectives added to it.

It has been stated in a paper that Yoga is a performance, which create the resonance in oneself to the right direction, by aligning right behavior (*yama-niyama*), proper posture (*asana*), life force control (*pranayama*), interiorisation of the mind (*pratyahara*), concentration (*dhyan*), developing intuition (*dharna*) and *Samadhi* (ultimate-realization) [11]. This is important in the context we are dealing with as we can see this in our media; the information source itself doesn't act as a medium but a producer or processor. This is the main cause for the need of media literacy. Inclusion of yoga in our lives will align our mind as mentioned above, that keeps our mind aware of our environment or while going through any media information. A person visualizes the media information and will be

able to analyse the information through the practice of Yoga. Making people media literate through the practice of Yoga is challenging but not difficult. As it is said that Yoga helps us concentrate and at the same time helps us understand our environment, it also helps us to make the right decisions and make us better human being.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Media literacy aims at dealing with the fabrication of information that can be seen in almost all media sources, even though it can't be generalized to all media. Relating Yoga with media literacy is not easy but if introduced, one could be sure of good results. Schools colleges' universities and institutions are introducing yoga to overcome stress and strain, apart from making the individuals attain the inner peace for taking the right decisions and not getting distracted by the environment one inhabits as we are part of the nature and not outside. Yoga introduces a person to the art/power of awareness that will guide the individual in making his own assessments rather get carried away under others influences. Yoga makes the individual to be able to be in present state of mind in a given environment that in turn enables him to evaluate his surroundings. Yoga is known for its excellent effect on the physical body apart from the mental health, it helps in presence of mind, makes oneself aware, when a human mind is free from confusion, it will be smart enough to make the right judgments.

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