



Role of Yama-Niyama in Socio-personal Development of an Individual in the post-Covid Era

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Abstract: Corona virus disease (Covid-19) struck China for the very first time in Dec 2019. Since then, it has killed millions of people. Worldwide, almost every individual has been a victim of this pandemic in some way or the other. Apart from pharmacological treatment, Yoga has been extremely effective in the fight against Covid-19. Here we will focus only on *Yama-Niyama*, the first and foremost two pillars of *Ashtanga Yoga* (an eight-fold path of Yoga). The theoretical aspect of these two Yoga limbs is being discussed, which can be helpful in the socio-personal development of an individual in the post-Covid period. As no machine can function without an engine, in the same way, *Ashtanga Yoga* is incomplete without the practice of *Yama-Niyama*. Although practicing *Yama-Niyama* is directly proportional to the moral upliftment, their pursuance has the potential to develop an all-around personality. However, in this age of materialism, almost everyone has turned a deaf ear to these powerful practises, and if this continues, it will undoubtedly lead to a significant societal moral collapse. To come out of this scenario and bring social harmony, man will have to churn his inner self by incorporating the profound perspectives of *Yama-Niyama* in lifestyle on a routine basis. It is not just a fantasy, but we are convinced that if every individual starts adopting *Yama-Niyama*, then collectively, an extraordinary change will be clearly visible in the society. This will help rejuvenate the entire community severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: *Yama* • *Niyama* • Covid-19 • Socio-personal development.

Introduction

A new and unprecedented disease, Covid-19, was declared a pandemic by the WHO on 11 March 2020 (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). Apart from taking millions of lives, this pandemic posed a great threat to everyone's physical, mental and social well-being. There was no sector – education, economy, business, tourism, entertainment, sports, environment etc. left, which had not been affected by Covid-19 in the past two years (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Verma & Prakash, 2020). The government and all front-line warriors have been able to control this corona virus disease to a large extent through social distancing, home quarantine, various vaccinations, regular Yoga practices, ayurvedic treatment and home remedies

(Guner, Hasanoglu & Aktas, 2020). Continuous efforts are still being made to have complete control over this global crisis. Even though at a slow pace, but with some restrictions and precautions, people have started returning to their normal routine. But no one can deny that this infectious disease has hollowed out the entire roots of our society like a termite (Akat & Karatas, 2020). Apart from health concerns, Covid-19 has negatively impacted the socio-personal development of every individual. By winning over this epidemic, in the visionary outcome of a robust and dynamic futuristic society, the two precedent pillars of *Ashtanga Yoga*, i.e., *Yama* & *Niyama* can be viewed as milestones (Desai, 2020).



Basically, *Ashtanga Yoga* is an eight-fold path which includes – *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana*, *Pranayama*, *Pratyahara*, *Dharna*, *Dhyana* and *Samadhi*. The goal of the present study is to explain how *Yama* and *Niyama* can change the mindset from “only personal growth” to “personal growth along with society” in the post Covid era. This study represents the importance of *Yama* and *Niyama* in context of socio-personal development. Personal development can be interpreted as a lifelong process, in which skills of an individual are continuously nurtured to achieve an ideal personality. While the betterment of every citizen of a society in all aspects is referred to as social development. Here, the idea behind the practice of *Yama-Niyama* is to develop such a kind of ideal system which can simultaneously uplift the individual and the whole society as the *Yama* helps to restrain negative behaviours and impulses, while the *Niyama* to enhance the virtues or positive traits. This practice educates pursuance of excellence on personal and social level altogether.

Brief introduction to *Yama*

*ahimsāsatyāsteyabrahmacaryāparigrahā
yamāḥ* (P.Y. 2/30)

Maharshi Patanjali in his *Patanjal Yogasutra* (fundamental text on Indian philosophy of Yoga) (P.Y.) categorised *Yama* into five different segments, namely *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Satya* (truthfulness), *Asteya* (non-stealing), *Brahmcharya* (celibacy) and *Aparigraha* (non-possessiveness) (Dashora, 2016). These five segments are the set of disciplines specified for the smooth operation of social systems. These *Yama* shield a person from the *klishtha vrittis* (negative thought waves) sprouting unstoppable in the *Chitta* (mind), which paves an individual to the path of virtues. Also, the undesirable and reprehensible acts of society can be neutralised through the compliance of *Yama*. In this way *Yama* represent the pinnacle of human behaviour and the sanctity of the soul.

Brief introduction to *Niyama*

*śaucasamtoṣatapaḥsvādhyāyēśvarapraṇidhān
āni niyamāḥ* (P.Y. 2/32)

Niyama are likewise divided into five segments in a similar manner, specifically known as *Shauch* (purity), *Santosh* (contentment), *Tapas* (austerity), *Swadhyaya* (self-study) and *Ishwar Pranidhaan* (Complete surrender to God) (Dashora, 2016). These firm resolutions of self-discipline prescribed for human upliftment have been collectively termed as *Niyama*. These magnificent practices help in staying away from the evil *samskaras* (mental impressions of an action) falling on the *Chitta*. Regular practices of all *Niyama* provide emotional stability as well as enrich the beauty of the soul.

Hence, in post-Covid period, implementation of the phenomenal heritage of *Yama-Niyama* can enhance a sense of responsibility on individual and social level. This leads to the path of self-refinement, which can inculcate quality relationships and implant integrity & ethicality in society.

Objectives

1. To lay the foundation of the fundamental principles of *Yama-Niyama*.
2. To understand the role of practicing *Yama-Niyama* during Covid-19 pandemic.
3. To explain how the practice of *Yama* and *Niyama* can bring a significant change in socio-personal development in post Covid period.
4. To bring awareness regarding sense of equality, catholicity, liberality, nobleness at individual and societal level.

Significance of the study

We are all aware that practice of many *Asana* (physical postures) and *Pranayama* (breathing process) techniques have already proven their potentiality as tools for enhancing the immunity and general well-being during the critical time of the Covid-19 pandemic (Nagendra, 2020). This study sheds light on



the direct and indirect impact of *Yama-Niyama* in the process of internal refinement during the Covid-19 pandemic, and how these moral behaviours can affect an individual's socio-personal development in the post-Covid era, if they are followed sincerely on a regular basis. Practice of *Yama-Niyama* brings mindfulness into each action and, therefore, it cultivates a higher state of being which helps to deal with Covid-19 conditions and support to recover from it, at an individual and social level together.

Efficacious and Remarkable Tools of *Yama*

1. *Ahimsa*: Practice of ultimate non-violence by words and deeds

Ahimsa is a moral and ethical principle of not causing harm to anyone. It is a core value system which encourages morality, noble values and equality in society. Non-violence stands as the foundational block for a peaceful society. The mind is the main cause of all actions; practice of *Ahimsa* balances the mind and brings harmony in action. For instance, at the time of Covid-19, people were in a critical state of mental violence as everybody was running behind their selfish goals irrespective of others' loss. Because being violent is not beneficial for our surroundings, therefore it is always expected to be kind and non-violent for the betterment of self and society.

2. *Satya*: To adhere to the principle of truthfulness

Satya means being honest to self and others by words, deeds or actions. It implies transparency and honesty in every sphere of human activity. Being truthful is a very strong framework to achieve anything. Teachings of *Satya* can be applied in every aspect of life and get benefited. Faith is born from the observance of the truth. When we follow the truth, we are filled with confidence and our inner power encourages us to make the right decisions. In the circumstances of a social crisis like Covid-19, all the individuals are supposed to be truthful in compliance of essential guidelines and stay in discipline with

complete sincerity. Following the rules and regulations with complete honesty will fill us with confidence and inner strength.

3. *Asteya*: The principle of non-stealing

Adherence to this principle implies non-accumulation of things. It refers to let go all the wants and desires, as desires are the root cause of stealing. Non-stealing is not only about materialistic things, it includes thoughts and emotions as well. Practice of *Asteya* increases self-awareness. When a person becomes self-conscious, his physical and mental powers flow in a harmonious way which makes a person mentally relaxed. It eliminates all unnecessary desires from within. Thus, this practice helps to be in a state of contentment and the person does not pay attention to other things.

4. *Brahmacharya*: The principle of control over the senses

This principle refers to self-discipline. Practice of *Brahmacharya* means control over senses, desires, avoiding over sufficiency, debilitation, and adultery in any of their manifestations. Control over the senses restores vital energy, which, as a result, can enhance the inner capabilities and physical as well as mental strength. Due to observance of celibacy, there is no corrosion of *Dhatu*s (essential elements of the body) in the body and an individual can retain more energy to heal.

5. *Aparigraha*: The principle of non-possessiveness

It involves a person's ability to possess something while being non-attached to things as well as "taking what is truly necessary and no more". During Covid-19 it was experienced that there was a huge scarcity of essential commodities due to excessive accumulation by few people. People suffer from a shortage of essential things, necessary for survival. Excess stockpiling is the main cause of societal imbalance. Hence, in post-Covid period, the practice of *Aparigraha* can create a sense of equivalence.



Significance of *Yama* During Covid and Post-Covid Phase

We observed that during the pandemic, people had to face some kind of inconvenience, due to which there was physical and mental anguish among the general public. But it is the fact that the violence motivated by emotions instead of solving the problem, exacerbates it. Therefore, it is prudent to follow the principle of *Ahimsa* and focus on the solution instead of being violent. In the beginning, many misleading facts were spread in society about this strange and unprecedented epidemic, and the period continues even now (Augustine, 2021). Even in this time of calamity, some people did not hold back from sacrificing *Satya* to fulfil their petty selfishness. This rapid-growing industry of falsification is hollowing out the conscience of the entire humanity. The third pillar of *Yama* is *Asteya*, which has become endangered in this age of selfish desires. Research conducted in Indonesia reveals that thefts have increased in Makassar city during Covid-19 (Syamsuddin et al., 2021). Crimes like corruption, dowry, and bribery, which are motivated by greed and jealousy, are also the result of the violation of non-stealing on the mental level. And the unauthorised aspirations of possession of the property of others give rise to social upheaval by creating mental deviations on the individual level. In this sequence of social problems, one of the most serious and concerning issues prevailing in our society is sexual harassment, which occurs due to the non-observance of *Brahmacharya*. An article published in a research journal shows a surprising increase in cases of sexual abuse during Covid-19 in Bangladesh (Mamun, Hosen, & Mamun, 2021). Such crimes are the severe consequences of a perverted mindset, which affects the oppressed people emotionally and ruins their lives. Many other such crimes have quickly spread their tentacles among all of us during this crisis. People were found to be accumulating more and more materialistic resources during this adverse

period of the Covid-19 pandemic, causing unnecessary social imbalance. The non-observance of *Aparigraha* caused this state of social upheaval.

As man is a social animal, society plays the role of a mirror for the common public. Therefore, it gets crucial to pay attention to the cleanliness and renovation of this mirror on a regular basis for public welfare and social development. Re-establishment of a civilised and robust society is possible by overcoming the negative feelings like hatred, grudges, discontentment and dissatisfaction prevailing in the community by following the principle of *Yama*. Hence, it can be suggested that in the post-Covid period, the fundamental principles of *Yama* should be strictly followed to compensate for the personal and social impairments caused by this pandemic.

Efficacious and Remarkable Tools of *Niyama*

1. *Shauch*: Principle of 'purity and cleanliness' both internally & externally: It promotes the purity of body as well as mind. When the principle of *Shauch* appears in someone's life it leads to physical and mental purification. Along with this the environment around us should also be kept pure, only then better health can be maintained. *Shauch* also indicates purification of thoughts. Therefore, each individual must have a refined thought process as the foundation of a strong society can be laid only on the quality thoughts of every citizen.

2. *Santosh*: Principle of genuine satisfaction It's an art of having a sensation of gratitude. Contentment means feeling satisfied with what we have and giving up on all unnecessary desires. Feeling of satisfaction must come from within. When a person is not satisfied internally, this feeling disturbs the mind. Paucity of contentment in any kind of pandemic or crisis can bring mental and emotional imbalance on individual and social level. Therefore, it is extremely important to establish the feeling of satisfaction with all



that we have and stop running after desirable things. Adherence of *Santosh* brings emotional balance while reducing social anarchy.

3. *Tapas*: The principle of self-discipline

Practice of *Tapas* transforms us internally and refines our conscious awareness. It means to bear all the difficulties which bring positive changes in our life. This practice enables us to be more disciplined and dedicated, which enhances our inner strength. For instance, strictly following the rules and regulations of Covid-19 is also a kind of tenacity. To bear mental and physical sufferings and keeping one's mind under control is the main concept behind the principle of austerity.

4. *Swadhyaya*: Principle of self-realisation

Adherence to the principle of *Swadhyaya* creates self-understanding. Continuous study of spiritual literature helps to purify and refine inner self. It means to do such kind of study by which our thoughts, mind and ultimately the soul becomes excellent. *Swadhyaya* develops the ability to see our true inner nature with the help of life lessons and the sacred literature revealed by our seers and sages many moons ago. It is essential to keep our self away from negative thoughts during any unfavourable circumstances.

5. *Ishwar-Pranidhaan*: Complete surrender to God

Ishwar Pranidhaan is dedication, devotion, and surrender of the fruits to The Supreme Power. This practice teaches selfless action of *Bhakti Yoga* (spiritual practice based on devotion). To reach to the absolute refinement of the self, we must dissolve our egocentric nature and surrender our-self. Through this simple act of devotion, our soul gets automatically reconnected with The Supreme Soul. Adherence of this practice fills our actions with grace, inner peace, and plentiful love. Thus, in any kind of critical condition, one should surrender oneself towards The Supreme Power and dissolve ego. This practice can help to develop faith and self-confidence within, to fight any circumstances.

Significance of *Niyama* During Covid and Post-Covid Phase

The firm resolutions of self-discipline prescribed for human upliftment have been termed as *Niyama*. Regular implementation of *Niyama* in daily life brings emotional balance and clarity in one's life, which helps to execute the energy inherent in an individual in a proper direction. Just as some rules and regulations are established for an organisation's successful and smooth operation, so that strategic management can be maintained, in the same way, *Niyama* leads to a stable life by incorporating self-discipline in a dispersed personality. In the absence of *Niyama*, the day-to-day activities become irregular, resulting in the degradation of personal identity in the long run.

The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the critical importance of personal and environmental hygiene (*Shauch*) in achieving the state of overall health (Sharma & Sharma, 2020; Kaushik, Agarwal, & Gupta, 2021), and the difficult times of lock-down taught us how to be happy and satisfied (*Santosh*) with the maximum use of limited resources. Strict restrictions like lock-down and quarantine were no less than austerity (*Tapas*), observance of which helped in overcoming the problem to some extent (Brooks et al., 2020). Today, it is crucial to understand that those unnecessary hectic routines which are by-products of the modern lifestyle need to be broken to get engaged in self-realisation (*Swadhyaya*), so that we can accept the reality of life and understand the cycle of birth and death, thus focusing on making our life more meaningful. Despite scientific advancements and the sufficiency of modern medical resources, humankind has still not been entirely successful in finding out the causes of Covid-19 and getting rid of it. Somewhere we all have to accept that there must be some supernatural power beyond the human brain, which is governing this universe. We all have to perform our routine works honestly and



should dedicate the results to the Almighty (*Ishwar Pranidhaan*), so that we can maintain the tranquillity in our mental state.

Thus, it is evident that if today every person gradually begins to incorporate purity, contentment, austerity, self-study and devotion to God as an integral part of his daily routine, then indeed, in the next few decades, a major revolutionary change in human civilisation will be clearly visible.

Yama-Niyama: Powerful and Revolutionary Tools for Socio-personal Development

For multiple reasons, the rapid decline of moral values can be observed in modern society, dragging humankind away from humanity (Parihar, Parihar & Sharma, 2018). This is why there is an absolute need for *Yama-Niyama* to reunite the present scattered community. *Yama-Niyama* are the consistent mental efforts to cultivate the willpower that illuminates the whole personality. Although it is disappointing that these two early and influential pillars of *Ashtanga Yoga* have remained limited to a few lines of books (Freeman, Vladagina, Razmjou, & Brems, 2017). However, it is worth considering why *Maharishi Patanjali*, the pioneer of Yoga, placed *Yama-Niyama* first and foremost in achieving life's ultimate goal. Basically, *Yama-Niyama* are collective efforts of moral upliftment, on practising physical, mental, social and spiritual development of every individual occurs naturally either directly or indirectly (Srinivasan, 2016). In this way, these two limbs of *Ashtanga Yoga* are intended to be incorporated into human behaviour in order to attain personal and social refinement. These practices can be considered as code of conduct for day-to-day living, which in long term will gradually bring miraculous changes on an individual and social level.

Conclusion

The consistent practice of *Yama-Niyama* has the potential to channelise the physical, mental and emotional energy inherent in human beings in the right direction. To strengthen the

roots of moral values in the deep-down mindsets of the entire human society, the practical implementation of *Yama-Niyama* is absolutely essential (Patil, 2020). Psychologists also agree that adherence to moral values is the key to strong personal and social relationships (Tsang, 2002). In addition to moral development, researchers have proved that the regular practice of *Yama-Niyama* has a beneficial capability to regulate the level of vital energy in our bodies (Xu et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2021). Hopefully, the entire community demolished by the Covid-19 pandemic will emerge with better physical health, improved socio-personal development, stronger psycho-emotional perseverance and powerful personality, which will lay the groundwork for global upliftment characterised by the universal brotherhood. All that is needed is to understand the profound significance of *Yama-Niyama* and to implement them in our lives.

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