

YOGA IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

(Professional paper)

Elena Nikolova

*National Sport Academy „Vassil Levski”, Sofia
Department Theory of the Physical Education, Sofia, Bulgaria*

Abstract

Subject of the present article is the application of some yoga elements in physical education lessons. A brief historical review is made, concerning formation and establishment of yoga as social practice and the notion for its application in physical education. An opinion about the essence of yoga is stated and its position in physical education with its purpose for harmonic development of children and young people. Various questions are examined, which are related to using of yoga elements in curricular and extracurricular work in physical education. A conclusion is emphasized that yoga can successfully find its place as a method in physical education, providing that it is practiced under the guidance of well-prepared teachers, who apply it not as a religion or medical remedy, but in its form of specific motor activity with cultural-educational effect.

Keywords: *spiritual teacher (“guru”), physical exercises of yoga, Classical yoga of Patanjali, school of Hatha -Yoga, historical overview of Yoga, motor activity, physical education in schools, physical and mental development, extracurricular school work of physical education, motor activity, physical education in schools*

In contemporary conditions more and more untraditional sports and sport disciplines seek and find its place in the curriculum of physical education in respect of satisfying the need for various motor practices.

Yoga as social practice has derived from the remote history of Ancient India. In the last decades this holistic method for self-improvement of body and spirit has broadly expanded throughout the world. The number of people, who are interested of yoga at the beginning of 21st Century reaches over 435 million people, of which 62% are Hindus, 14% are Americans, 12% are European, 2% are African and the rest 10% are from other Asian countries and Australia. The tolerance in Indian culture allows existence of various philosophic schools with its own approach, methods, practices and spiritual teacher (called “guru”). Many spiritual teachers establish international organizations from their followers.

One of the pioneers of the notion for applying theory and practice of the Yoga System in physical education is the teacher Swami Kuvalayananda (1883-1966). In 1924 he established the first scientific institute in India for yoga studying, which now carries his name. At that time yoga practices, veiled in mystery and mystics, were passed only from teacher to chosen and worthy students. Under his guidance for the first time in history,

in laboratory conditions are held multiple scientific experiments, which reveal that the regular yoga practices has not only positive effect on the human health, but also have healing effect for various deceases

He is a chairman of the Commission for Physical Education of the State Government and a member of Central Consultant Council for Physical Education in the country. He develops and proposes new scientific program for physical education in which central place take physical exercises of yoga (asana) and also gender equality (Luchanski, 1993; Alter, 2007).

Interest towards yoga in our country arises approximately during the thirties of the last century. After the sixties amateur groups for yoga activities were formed, mainly by the initiative of enthusiastic yoga followers which have mastered relevant knowledge and abilities by self-preparation.

Legitimate presence of yoga in the public space is accomplished by Decision of Chairmanship of Central Council of Bulgarian Association for Physical Culture and Sport for development of Republican Yoga Commission. Its chairman has been Prof. Krum Rachev, dean, vice-rector of VIF “Georgi Dimitrov” (now National Sports Academy (NSA) “Vasil Levski”) (Central Council, 1989).

In 1991 the Republican yoga commission is registered as non-profit organization under the name "Bulgarian Yoga Federation", again under the chairmanship of Krum Rachev, (Decision, 1991).

The presence of yoga as method in physical education is mainly realized through pioneer efforts and initiatives of engineer Ventsislav Evtimov (Evtimov, 1994)

Theory of physical education is scientific discipline, formed on the basis of the last achievements of science in all fields of human knowledge. The existence of yoga as method in physical education requires clearing various questions related to releasing this method from symbolism of Ancient India's philosophy, which is seen in elements from esotericism and mysticism.

The main goal of yoga, as method in physical education, is to contribute for the harmonic development of children and young people. With regard to this it is appropriate to mention the genius thought of Pierre de Coubertin from his speech during the Parisian congress in 1994: "...there are not two parts to a man, body and soul; there are three, body, mind and character. Character is not formed by the mind, but primarily by the body" (Coubertin, 1985)

It is conceived that classical Yoga System is developed by the Indian spiritual teacher Patanjali about 2nd century BC. This system contains of 8 elements or 8 sub-systems, which are interconnected. Before we can examine their applicability in school physical education should be mentioned its characteristics, which distinguish it from other means of influence.

Firstly, yoga is not a religion. Religious knowledge is characterized with accepting certain dogmas – truths, which do not allow contradiction. Knowledge, related to theory and practices of yoga is expanding, extending and enlarging through appliance of scientific methods in the numerous scientific centers and institutes already established throughout the world. The first organized center for yoga learning in the world is established in Mumbai, in 1918 by Shri Yogendra, also called the Father of Modern Yoga Renaissance.

Secondly, yoga is not medicine. Regardless that the continuous practicing of motor and respiratory exercises can improve the practitioner's health condition, it should be known that the physical education teacher is not a doctor and must not use this method as medical treatment. People with recorded medical conditions should be directed to medical doctors – specialists.

Thirdly, yoga is not a sport. The Yoga System is realized through harmonic activity of its eight sub-systems. Development and usage of only one of these sub-systems – static poses (asanas) as possibility for organizing and holding competitions reduces yoga to version of Artistic gymnastics.

In a widespread belief is perceived that yoga is a system of physical exercises with spiritual element, when the truth is the opposite: yoga is spiritual practice which is realized during execution of static poses. Yoga is above all a personal experience which has no outer

reflection. That's why it is pointless, to be discussed competition on the path of spiritual development.

Other essential difference between yoga and sports lays in the methodology and approach when conducting the activities. In sports training targeted actions for reaching high sports achievements in the respective sport discipline are applied. This approach is logical corresponding to athlete's preparation for high achievements in sports competition.

Different approach is used for yoga activities – the load from execution of asanas is gradual till feeling minimum pain. Other practices of that system are "pranayama" (control over movement of fine energy | "prana" by breathing control), procedures for cleansing the body "mudri" (psychic gestures) and "bandhi" (postures accompanied by energy blocking).

Application of yoga in physical education is examined as method where no commands are used. The activities are not forced upon. Students' participation is of their own volition. No aims should be reached for a definite period. That's the reason why Shri Yogendra defines yoga as unspecific method for physical education.

Classical yoga of Patanjali contains the following interconnected elements:

- *Yama (self-control)
- *Niyama (abstention)
- *Asana (yoga poses)
- *Pranayama (control of breathing)
- *Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses)
- *Dharana (concentration)
- *Dhyana (meditation)
- *Samadhi (super-conscious state) (9, II.29),

(Foiershtain, 2001).

Usage of yoga elements in curricular and extracurricular work of physical education should be mainly oriented towards asana practicing, accompanied by elements of breathing control and concentration. Besides that, the physical education teacher and also the students should be acquainted with the elements of YAMA and NIYAMA, without which self-improvement of student's individuality will face serious difficulties. We will briefly examine the content of these two elements.

*YAMA (self-control).

Yama is a group of five cultural norms, which the yogi should take into consideration. Everyone who has taken the path through self-improvement by yoga (Foiershtain, 2001) is referred to as yogi). The cultural norm prescribes what should be the yogi behavior at every social situation in interaction with other people. Patanjali shows that those cultural norms are obligatory for everyone, regardless the differences of the social situation, in which a social interaction takes place, and also from the social status of people involved in it (9, II.31), (Foiershtain, 2001). Those norms are as follows (9, II.30), (Foiershtain, 2001):

*AHIMSA (non-violence). That norm requires restriction of behavior, directed towards abstention of violence to other person by thought, speech or action.

*SATYA (truth, authenticity, honesty). Yogi's speech should be distinguished by honesty, sincerity and accuracy when stating facts from reality. The information which the yogi presents should be accurate, precise and useful. It is necessary to be avoided windiness and talking for the sake of talking.

*ASTEYA (abstention from theft). The actions of the yogi should be conformed to the accepted laws of society. That norm doesn't allow him to obtain something which belongs to someone else by illegal actions. Besides that, this norm requires not to be taken without a reason and purpose time of the other, as well as not to misuse the attention and generosity of our friends.

*BRAHMACHARYA (continence). That norm requires abstention from random sexual activity with different partners as well as turning the primitive, self-centered sexual pleasure in priority of human existence.

*APARIGRAHA (absence of greed). Greed is defined as ravenous crave for possession of things (material values, power, credit or recognition), which are not needed for normal existence of man. Absence of greed is defined as desire to possess only things, which are necessary for execution of social responsibilities of yogi. That norm includes denial of perfidy and envious thoughts.

*NIYAMA (abstention)

While the first group of cultural norms is directed towards regulating yogi's relations with the outer social environment, then the second group is directed to formation of basic features of his character. Those are the following five norms (9.II.32), (Foiershtain, 2001):

*SAUCHA (purity of body and mind). That norm can be seen in two directions:

- ✓ purification of body through usage of water, other necessary substances and cleansing practices, consumption of pure food and usage of clean clothes;
- ✓ purification of mind from negative thoughts and emotions, which are blocking the heart's work. Kindness, generosity, tolerance fill the heart of yogi, joy and enthusiasm is emanated from his body.

*SANTOSHA (contentment, satisfaction). That rule means to accept without indignation and dissatisfaction what's happening with the yogi or around him. Satisfaction appears to be in the mind of the yogi in a case of success or failure, when acquisition or loss. Yogi is satisfied with what he possesses, which leads to spiritual balance and inner harmony.

*TAPAS (heat or flame, askeza). Askeza is a way of living, which corresponds to the asceticism requirements). Simplicity and austerity in way of life is the essence of that norm. Reaching definite personal goal, regardless the area requires the yogi to renounce his actions and activities which turn him away from his purpose. Avoiding small pleasures of life and pleasant experiences requires "burning out" those desires which lead him astray. Rejecting the "inappropriate", i.e. not

leading to the aim self-centered thoughts and laziness requires character and strong will.

*SVADHYAYA (study, self-education, independent learning). The wish for self-knowledge, for learning, getting information for physical and social processes in which our life spins is the essence of that rule. In Ancient India that rule is related to studying holy books – Veda and Upanishadi. In the current global age when knowledge is of fundamental value this rule requires independent studying of the last science achievements. As a well-known fact, science is continuously accumulating new knowledge.

*ISHVARA-PRANIDHANA (worshipping and service to Ishvara). That norm requires actualization of its interpretation. PRANIDHANA means "absolute devotion", "full dedication" when ISHVARA in Hinduism means Superior or High Superior (i.e. God) and master in the social sense of the word, as in Bulgarian the words God and master has the same root. Which is the superior principle which drives the behavior of modern man, who lives in the conditions of democracy and market economy? Without a doubt that's the self-improvement of its personality and achieving social realization. In that sense that culture norm should be viewed as requirement for achieving the life goals of yogi.

The third element in classical yoga of Patanjali is indicated as ASANA (seated position, pose). This term stands for the yoga posture of human body (9, II. 46), (Foiershtain, 2001). Patanjali mentions that this posture is stable and comfortable and besides that brings satisfaction and happiness to those, who practices it. Using notions as "stability" and "satisfaction" shows that through the specific pose which the body takes are provoked specific changes in the yogi psychics.

Patanjali has no defined postures for execution. They are developed during the subsequent period of yoga development in the school of HATHA – YOGA. There are around 84 accepted basic postures, but in the contemporary practice 32 are conceived to be quite enough. Some postures do not require any special conditions for execution. Practicing the seating pose for maximum relaxation is necessary to be made under the guidance of physical education teacher, who has specific knowledge of the effect of its influence.

Mastering the next elements *Pranayama (breathing control), *Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses), *Dhara (concentration), *Dhyana (meditation) also should be done under the guidance of physical education teacher, who is well-prepared and trained for this practices.

Yoga could successfully find its place as a method for physical education, provided that it is executed under the guidance of well-trained teachers, who apply it not as religion or medical remedy but, as in its form of specific motor activity with cultural-educational effect.

REFERENCES

Alter, J.S. (2007). Yoga and Physical Education: Swami

- Kuvalayananda's Nationalist Project. *Asian Medicine*, 3(1), 20-36.
- Central Council of BSFS. (1989). Protocol № 22, Decision № 1/19.VI.1989.
- Coubertin, P. (1985). Speech delivered during the Parisian congress. In: A. Solakov & N. Georgiev, (Selection of works, comp.), *Spiritual Heritage of Pierre de Coubertin*, 2(p.11). Sofia: Medicina i fizkultura.
- Decision. (1991). № 1/05.03.1991 of Sofia City Court, Agency department by case № 8523.
- Evtimov, V. (1994). Yoga in Kindergartens, Schools and Universities. *Yoga*, 3(4), 61-78.
- Foiershtain, G. (2001). *Encyclopedia of Yoga*. Sofia: LIK.
- Классическая йога (йога-сутры Патанджали и Вьяса-Бхашья). (1992). [Classical Yoga (Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and Vyasa Bhashya. In Russian.] Москва: Наука.
- Luchanski, V. (1993). The Great Scientist and his Deeds. *Hatha Yoga, Monthly issue of Bulgarian Yoga Federation*, 1(1), 4-5.

Correspondence:

Elena Nikolova

National Sport Academy „Vassil Levski” - Sofia
Department Theory of the Physical Education

Studentski grad 1700 Sofia, Bulgaria

E-mail elena_nikolova.tfv.nsa@abv.bg