

APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES OF YOGA VASISTHA TO ENHANCE THE STUDY PRACTICES AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF MODERN-DAY STUDENTS

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Abstract

The integration of ancient wisdom with contemporary practices can offer valuable insights into improving modern education. This paper explores the principles found in Yoga Vasistha—a key text in the Vedantic tradition—and applies them to the study habits and academic performance of students. Specifically, it focuses on two sets of principles: the four "gatekeepers to Nirvana"—self-control, inquiry, contentment, and company of holy ones—and the four parameters that define the outcome of any action: place (Desha), time (Kaal), material (Dravya), and quality of action (Kriya). By applying these principles, the paper proposes methods for students to enhance the quality of their studies, increase focus, and achieve desired academic outcomes. The Yoga Vasistha suggests these parameters as a gateway to liberation, Moksha. However, for a student, achieving great success in his studies can be envisioned as achieving Moksha. This paper suggests practical ways to incorporate these timeless teachings into the modern student's routine, aiming to achieve greater academic success.

Keywords: Yoga Vasistha , Academic Performance, Study Techniques, Self-Control, Inquiry, Contentment, Time Management, Study Environment, Educational Philosophy, Vedantic Principles.

INTRODUCTION

In the fast-paced, competitive world of modern education, students often struggle with maintaining focus, managing time effectively, and sustaining motivation. Traditional study techniques often emphasize discipline, focus, and external methods of learning, but they may neglect the deeper philosophical and psychological aspects that influence the learning process. Yoga Vasistha , an ancient Indian text, offers profound principles that transcend mere academic skills and delve into the mental and spiritual processes that underpin all action. By applying these teachings, students can not only improve their academic performance but also achieve a more balanced and fulfilling approach to learning.

This paper explores how the principles of Yoga Vasistha—specifically the four gatekeepers to Nirvana and the four parameters of action—can be integrated into modern study routines to enhance academic output and overall well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. **Yoga Vasistha and Its Philosophical Foundations:** The Yoga Vasistha is considered a foundational text whose study is believed to lead to liberation. In the context of spiritual progress, liberation is traditionally understood as the freedom from the cycle of birth and death. However, the Yoga Vasistha expands this concept, emphasizing the importance of the state of mind in achieving liberation. The author posits that while liberation represents a long-term goal, individuals must navigate the practical realities of life and work towards short-term objectives, such as achieving success in competitive examinations. The text provides a comprehensive framework for the paths to liberation, particularly highlighting the roles of four "door keepers" of the temple of liberation and four key parameters that yield the most fruitful outcomes of action. (Shastri 2016, #).

2. **Effect Of Studying Along With Right Students:** The Yoga Vasistha refers to the "Company of Holy Ones" as one of the gatekeepers to the temple of Liberation. Research has demonstrated that Team-Based Learning (TBL) leads to improved academic outcomes, particularly in terms of academic performance (Koles et al. 2010, #). This paper explores the connection between these two concepts, drawing a correlation between the gatekeeper mentioned in Yoga Vasistha and the impact of collaborative learning on academic success.

3. **Effect of Time of The Day on The Learning:** The Yoga Vasistha identifies Kaal (Time) as one of the key parameters that influences the quality of the outcome of an action (Kriya). For instance, the Rudra Pooja is believed to

yield greater benefits when performed on Mahashivratri compared to other days. Similarly, research has indicated that the efficiency of study varies depending on the time of day (Millar, Styles, and Wastell 1980, #). This paper further investigates the relationship between Time and learning effectiveness, exploring how temporal factors impact academic performance.

4. **The Role of Environment in Learning:** The importance of the study environment (*Desha*) in improving concentration and output has been widely discussed (Hill and Epps 2010, #) (Ramli, Ahmad, and Masri 2013, #). This literature links directly to the principle of *Desha* in *Yoga Vasistha*, emphasizing how the right environment can significantly enhance academic focus.

5. **Holistic Learning Approaches:** The significance of employing effective learning techniques, such as mind maps and visual aids like charts, in enhancing learning and memory retention has been extensively studied in educational research (Dunlosky et al., 2013). These techniques are designed to optimize both the time spent on and the depth of understanding of the study material. Similarly, The *Yoga Vasistha* highlights *Kriya* (commonly interpreted as technique or Tantra) as one of the key parameters influencing the outcome of an action. This paper explores the connection between the *Kriya* parameter outlined in the *Yoga Vasistha* and contemporary learning techniques, proposing that the integration of these elements can enhance the effectiveness of learning for students.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this research are:

1. To examine how the four gatekeepers—self-control, inquiry, contentment, and company of holy ones—can enhance the quality of study and academic performance.
2. To analyze the four parameters of action—*Desha*, *Kaal*, *Dravya*, and *Kriya*—and their relevance in improving the output of student studies.
3. To develop a practical framework for students to incorporate these principles into their daily study routines.
4. To propose a model where students can align their academic goals with the principles of *Yoga Vasistha*, leading to improved learning outcomes and personal growth.

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a **qualitative approach**, combining theoretical analysis with practical application:

1. **Literature Review:** A comprehensive review of the *Yoga Vasistha* text and its relevant principles that can be applied to improve studying techniques.
2. **Case Studies and Practical Applications:** Reviewing real-world examples of students who have successfully applied these principles in their academic pursuits.
3. **A synthesis of scientific studies related to the methods to improve quality of studies:** Examine studies that concur with principles of *Yoga Vasistha* to improve outcome of students' studies.
4. **Integration of Findings:** To propose key action points for students based on this paper to improve their outcome of studies.

DISCUSSION

Using the principles of Four Gatekeepers to The Temple of Liberation

1. **The Role of Self-Control in Academic Success:** Self-control, referred to as *Shama* in spiritual terms, is considered a fundamental gatekeeper to the Temple of Liberation. *Shama* signifies a state of mind that remains unaffected by the fluctuations of life, including the highs and lows, and personal likes and dislikes. It embodies a balanced and stable mindset, even amidst crises or adverse events. In the context of educational research, this concept parallels the ability of a student to maintain focus and discipline. For instance, a student who has cultivated *Shama*—the capacity for self-regulation—can remain undistracted by external stimuli. For example, if a football match is taking place in an adjacent room and a goal is scored, a student with *Shama* would resist the urge to watch the match and instead continue studying. Furthermore, regardless of temporary setbacks or notable achievements in their academic journey, a student with a *Shama* mindset is less likely to experience disproportionate emotional reactions, such as excessive frustration or undue elation. Such a student maintains focus and continues their work with consistency. A *Shama* mind, therefore, possesses the resilience to stay committed to one's goals, regardless of external circumstances, which is a critical attribute for achieving academic success.

2. **The Power of Inquiry (Vichara):** The *Yoga Vasistha* places significant emphasis on the practice of Inquiry, or *Vichara*. For a spiritual practitioner seeking *Nirvana*, it is deemed essential to remain continually engaged in *Vichara*. The nature of *Vichara* is clearly articulated in the *Yoga Vasistha*, where it is suggested that one should consistently contemplate fundamental questions such as, "Who am I?" and "What is the nature of this creation?" This ongoing process of reflection fosters creativity, facilitates the identification of appropriate resources for seeking answers, deepens one's understanding of the nature of existence, and cultivates a genuine interest in the subject. Ultimately, this relentless pursuit of self-knowledge is regarded as a path that leads to liberation.

The principle outlined in *Yoga Vasistha* can similarly be applied to enhance the quality of a student's studies. If a student consistently engages in contemplation about their subject of study, irrespective of their location—whether eating, bathing, participating in a social gathering, or in any other setting—the student begins to develop a deeper interest in the subject. As a result, relevant knowledge naturally flows to the student. This continuous reflection fosters a process of deeper exploration into the subject, leading to an improvement in learning outcomes. The ongoing pursuit of a more profound understanding of the material unlocks the vast reservoir of knowledge within the subject. In spiritual terms, this process can be equated to the attainment of *Yoga*—a union with the subject, where the student transcends the boundaries between themselves and the subject matter, essentially becoming one with it.

3. **Contentment as a Tool for Stress Reduction:** Contentment or *Santosha* is one of the gatekeepers to The Temple of Liberation mentioned in The *Yoga Vasistha*. A content person would be free of anxiety, external comparison, desired for immediate rewards, and stress, would have a stable mind. Such a person would live a relaxed life. This paper proposes to apply the same principle viz. Contentment to improve the quality of studies. plays a significant yet often overlooked role in improving the quality of learning in students. In the context of academic performance, contentment is more than just the absence of dissatisfaction; it represents a harmonious state of mind that allows students to engage with their studies with focus, clarity, and perseverance. A content student is less likely to be overwhelmed by the stress and pressures that often accompany academic demands. In contrast, students who experience chronic dissatisfaction or anxiety may find it difficult to concentrate, retain information, or remain motivated. Contentment, therefore, provides a mental foundation that enhances a student's ability to focus on the task at hand, enabling them to absorb and understand the material more effectively. It helps a student to be consistent, free from external demands, free from pressure of competition and thus can set long term academic goals. With a relaxed state of mind, the student can develop creative thinking and problem solving abilities. With contentment, their cognitive resources are not consumed by negative emotions, rather they are directed towards understanding of complex problems and deeper learnings. This in turn helps in improving academic performance and provides deeper connection to the subject.

4. **Company of Holy Ones (Satsang) in Collaborative Learning:** The influence of one's social environment on the mind is well-documented, as reflected in the adage, "A man is best known by the company he keeps." In the context of academic learning, research has demonstrated that a student's quality of learning can be significantly enhanced through collaborative learning (Koles et al., 2010). While the previously discussed gatekeepers—*Shama*, *Vichara*, and *Santosha*—demand substantial self-discipline and effort for their successful implementation, *Satsang* or *Sadhu-Sangati* (association with virtuous individuals) represents a more accessible path to the Temple of Liberation. In this context, there is an inherent collective mentality aimed at achieving shared goals, and individuals can benefit by aligning themselves with this collective momentum.

However, as emphasized in the *Yoga Vasistha*, the key lies in the company of the "right" people, often referred to as *Sadhu-Sangati*. A *Sadhu* is defined as one who aids in the attainment of the ultimate goal, or *Sadhya*. For a student, the ultimate goal is the enhancement of learning quality. It follows that being in the company of the right individuals naturally facilitates the achievement of this objective. It is well-recognized that students have compromised their academic success due to associations with unproductive company. For example, if a student preparing for competitive exams associates with individuals more focused on leisure activities, such as movie enthusiasts, cultivating the qualities of *Shama* and *Vichara* becomes an arduous task. Conversely, when surrounded by peers who share similar academic aspirations, even if a student is momentarily distracted, the collective focus of their companions will help redirect the student's attention to their studies.

Being in the right company naturally creates an environment conducive to continuous academic discussions (*imbibing Vichara*), minimizes distractions (*imbibing Shama*), and provides mutual support, all of which collectively contribute to improved learning outcomes. Therefore, if a student is unable to independently cultivate *Shama*, *Santosha*, and *Vichara*, it is advisable to seek the company of virtuous individuals, or *Sadhu-Sangati*, as this association can significantly enhance their academic journey.

5. **Application of Desha, Kaal, Dravya, and Kriya in Effective Learning:**

In Vedic philosophy, the concepts of **Desh (place)**, **Kaal (time)**, **Dravya (substance or material)**, and **Kriya (action)** play crucial roles in determining the outcome of any **karma** (action or deed). These factors are seen as key parameters that influence the effectiveness and consequences of actions performed in the material world. The Vedic texts, particularly the *Yoga Vasistha*, *Bhagavad Gita*, and *Manusmriti*, elaborate on how these elements interact to shape the results of one's actions. This paper subtly emphasises that study, learning is an activity and is impacted by these four parameters significantly.

○ **Desha (Place):** In Vedic thought, the place where an action is performed holds significance. The environment, context, and sanctity of a place are believed to influence the spiritual and material outcomes of actions. A holy or sacred space, such as a Prayag in India or Somnath or any Jyotirlinga is considered conducive for actions that seek spiritual growth or wisdom. On the other hand, actions performed in an impure or unsuitable environment might yield less favorable results or hinder spiritual progress.

Research has shown that the place and environment in which studying takes place significantly influence learning outcomes (Hill & Epps, 2010). Specifically, factors such as well-lit spaces, minimal noise, a pleasant ambiance, and the absence of distracting smells and visual stimuli contribute to an enhanced quality of learning. These environmental elements are critical in improving focus and concentration, thereby leading to more effective and efficient study outcomes.

○ **Kaal (Time):** Time, or *Kaal*, is an essential determinant in the efficacy of any action. The Vedic scriptures emphasize the concept of "auspicious" and "inauspicious" times, where certain periods of the day or year are more conducive for specific actions. The notion of *muhurta* (a favorable time for performing an activity) is deeply embedded in Vedic rituals and decision-making.

For example, in the context of spiritual practices like puja (ritual worship), certain times (like *Mahashivaratri* or *Akshaya Tritiya*) are considered more spiritually potent, making actions performed during these times more likely to yield greater benefits. Similarly, in academic or practical endeavors, performing actions during the *Brahma Muhurta* (the time just before dawn) is considered most effective for focusing the mind and achieving clarity. Academic research has proven the strong relationship between academic performance of a student in relation with time of the study that suits on an individual level (Millar, Styles, and Wastell 1980, #).

○ **Dravya (Material):** *Dravya* refers to the material used or the substance involved in performing an action. In Vedic rituals and practices, the quality and appropriateness of the material used are believed to influence the outcome. For instance, the offerings made during sacrifices (yajnas) are carefully selected for their purity and appropriateness. Similarly, the tools, instruments, or resources used in day-to-day actions like learning, work, or rituals are also considered significant. As an example, in contemporary India, usage of ghee of local breed of cow is preferred over that of cross breed, foreign cow while performing *Agnihotra*.

It is a common knowledge that a student needs to use right and good quality study material for getting better academic performance. A study material with below characteristics can enhance the quality of studies output significantly:

- Clarity - Study material should use simple, clear, and precise language and should avoid jargon or overly complex terminology.
- Simplicity - Each topic should be explained in a straightforward manner, with definitions of key terms and concepts clearly presented.
- Logical Flow - The study material should logically progress from one concept to another in a block building manner so that foundations are set properly for the learner.
- Headings and subheadings - Proper use of headings, subheadings, bullet points, and numbered lists can make study materials easier to navigate. They help break down large chunks of information into digestible parts, which enhances focus and comprehension.
- Directly related to objectives - Study material should be closely aligned with the course syllabus or learning objectives and avoid unnecessary information.
- Practical Examples - Examples should be relevant to the subject matter and demonstrate the real-world application of concepts.
- Active Learning Features - Should include tests, quizzes, case studies.
- Visual aids - Should include mind-maps, diagrams, charts, tables, and infographics.
- Multimedia contents - Videos, interactive simulations, or audio content can enhance learning significantly.
- Study Material should be concise and include summary at the logical ends of the topics.
- Study material should have references that are valid, up to date and credible.
- Should provide good supplementary material for deeper studies.
- Should provide mechanism of assessment and feedback.
- Should encourage growth mindset.

○ **Kriya (Action):** Kriya, or the action itself, is the most direct factor in determining the outcome of karma. The nature, intention, and execution of the action all play significant roles. In Vedic thought, there is significant importance given to *tantra*, or technique, procedure for performing various actions related to spiritual upliftment (e.g. Pranayama, Meditation, Yoga), as well as rituals (Pooja, Homa, Yajna etc.). If these techniques are followed properly, then the actions come to fruition properly, otherwise not.

For students to succeed in their learnings, study techniques matter a lot. Research has shown that proper study techniques improve the outcome of the studies significantly (Dunlosky et al. 2013, #). Some good study techniques include -

- Using Mind Maps, charts, and other visual tools.
- Self Testing
- Teaching what is learnt.
- Writing summary.
- Writing down instead of reciting.
- Repetition periodically.
- Breaking study time into short intervals.
- Break study into small goals.
- Collaborative learning
- Peer quizzes.
- Visualizing Techniques - creating mental images.
- Meditation, Yoga, Pranayama, knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The principles of *Yoga Vasistha* offer timeless wisdom that can be applied effectively to modern-day student life. By incorporating the four gatekeepers of the Temple of Liberation viz. *Shama* (Self-Control), *Santosha* (Contentment), *Vichara* (Inquiry, or quest for knowledge), and *Sadhu-Satsang* or *Satsang* (Company of Holy Ones), and four parameters that fructify the action viz. *Desh* (Place), *Kaal* (time), *Dravya* (Material) and *Kriya* (action itself, technique) into their study routines, students can enhance their academic performance, cultivate a deeper sense of purpose in their learning, and achieve greater personal growth. The integration of these principles is not only beneficial for academic success but also for fostering holistic well-being in students.

A lot of research is done and is going in the field of education in modern days to improve the efficiency of learning for the students so that students absorb maximum learnings yet remain stress free. The profound wisdom given in *Yoga Vasistha* can surely address this aspect. While modern research focuses primarily on techniques, material and environment, *Yoga Vasistha* gives an additional perspective to modern research such as self-control, contentment, and quest for knowledge (constant contemplation). Interestingly, these tools (four gatekeepers and four parameters) mentioned here find their application not only in academics but also in other areas of life (sports, business etc.). The incorporation of these tools don't need a lot of efforts, rather, most of them can be used very easily. Particularly, *Shama*, *Vichara*, and *Sadhu-Sangati* are easy to work upon to improve the quality of study. Most of the tools given in *Yoga Vasistha* are low-cost, easy to implement and are timeless. The author concludes that these tools given in *Yoga Vasistha* will be useful to modern day students to improve their learning quality, particularly when the students are overwhelmed by inflow of new and new information along with increasing health, social, psychological and family stress.

Future research could explore more empirical studies involving diverse student populations to validate the applicability of these principles across different educational contexts and cultural backgrounds.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest in relation to this research.

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