

INSTABILITY AND INACTIVITY OF THE MIND

(Insights from Patanjali's yoga sutras: An analysis)

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Abstract: It is believed that human brain can perform approximately 38 trillion operations in a second! That's 500 hundred times more than the world's fastest Super computer. Each individual exhibit behavior with align to the directions from the brain. Human brain is the most active machine in the world (24x7). The way brain works is still a conspiracy, and scientists are trying to dig the cognitive functions of the brain in terms of Mental Activity and Inactivity. Present Article try to consider the inactive state of mind and how that state of mind, in turn leads to instability in terms of Patanjali's yoga sutras. It is an effort to align the cognitive perspective with Indian perspective on psychology.

Index Terms - Inactivity, Instability, Delusions, Doubt, Lethargy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Be it physical or mental, voluntary or involuntary, we are constantly in a state of activity from our first breath to our last. voluntary actions can be stopped at our will. With some effort or practice, we can make certain involuntary actions voluntary. But ultimately, there are actions and phenomena which are out of our control and beyond our restrictions and cannot be stopped without putting an end to one's own life. Put simply action is life and inaction are death. This unique activity of man has certain improvement in the world we live in today, compared to days even a century ago. Clearly there are two kinds of activity physical and mental; (Who is 'we?').

What is instability, and what does it have to do with inactivity?

All activity that results in progress is essentially the expression of abilities - innate and developed or acquired. Genetically passed o traits are innate abilities, while acquired or developed abilities are those that have been nurtured through extensive effort and practice. A failure of an adequate expression of these abilities as required for the actions and demand of the circumstances finally results in a state we call

instability. This failure to express abilities might be an output of some causes or obstacles. In this article, these obstacles will be delved into as mentioned in Patañjali's Yoga sutras.

These obstacles are:

1. Inactivity of the Body - व्याधिः (vyādhiḥ)
2. Inactivity of the Mind - स्त्यानम् (styānam)
3. Doubt - संशयः (saṁśayaḥ)
4. Erroneous Actions - प्रमादः (pramādaḥ)
5. Lethargy - आलस्यम् (ālasyaṃ)
6. Intemperance - अविरतिः (aviratiḥ)
7. Delusion - भ्रान्तिदर्शनम् (bhrāntidarśanam)
8. Inability to self-actualise - अलब्धभूमिकत्वम् (alabdhabhūmikātvam)

The above mentioned estimated causes or obstacles are interrelated and progressive. What this means is that if a person is experiencing, say, inactivity of the mind, it strongly hints that he/she is also experiencing physical inactivity. Likewise, someone suffering from delusions is also quite likely to be intemperate and lethargic.

PHYSICAL INACTIVITY

How can we talk about physical inactivity? When our bodies are active at some level throughout our lives, aren't we always active?

Bhagavad gita clearly communicates that action is life and inaction are death. Since we are never inactive, one would question what physical inactivity is and this is the juncture where we bring distinction between voluntary and involuntary physical activity. Physical inactivity refers to a state where activity that would normally be voluntary is reduced to a bare minimum for an extended duration of time. This presents itself for two reasons –

1. Result of physical ailment

2. Result of conscious choice

Ailments can thus be classified into the following varieties:

1. आगन्तुः – Ailments caused by accidents

These ailments are caused by unexpected, unfortunate accidents or accidental events. (One could argue that some of these may have been fortunate in hindsight, but it is universally accepted that they result in immediate inconvenience.) from a medical perspective these ailments are not due to any internal imbalances or causes.

2. शारीरः – Somatic Ailments

This form of ailment originates from the imbalance or deficiency of a proper diet, regular physical exercise and proper sleep.

3. मानसः – Ailments due to unfriendly and injurious emotions/thoughts

This is ailment at the thought level - brought on by nurturing injurious or dangerous thoughts and emotions. This also includes the scarcity of noble intentions and ennobling behaviour.

4. स्वाभाविकः – Ailments due to natural reasons

Every human born grows old, and with age comes increased susceptibility to certain problems, which are all classified into this category. There are some other natural ailments, such as uneasiness at higher altitudes, giddiness due to fast movement (on mountainous roads and roller coasters), and so on.

What happens when the body slows down?

A physical slowdown impedes the mind too, Because the body constantly tries to conserve energy. Keeping the body inactive leads the brain (mind) to the conclusion that it is safe and secure, and it cuts down on all activity it deems unnecessary in order to use minimum energy. So, maintaining a sharp mind when the body is inactive requires additional effort.

How can our minds be inactive? How does mental inactivity differ from silencing the mind (such as through meditation)?

It is indeed possible to separate physical and mental activity with a good deal of effort. there are instances where physical and mental (in)activity appear to have no effect on each other. For instance, anyone who

performs repetitive tasks knows that after performing the same task more than some number of times, the body quickly develops muscle memory(procedural), letting the person perform the same without involving the brain much. Conversely, mental activity does not necessarily mean physical activity.

Thus far the first obstacle has been considered - inactivity of the body. This brings us to the second obstacle - inactivity of the mind.

How can our minds be inactive? How does mental inactivity differ from silencing the mind (such as through meditation)?

Inactivity of the mind is not the same as the inactivity of the body. The body is a lumbering machine that, without energy or control, is merely a sack of bone, sinew and fluids. The mind is what controls the body. When the mind is unable to control the body, the body either behaves erratically or settles into a state of physical inaction. But what, ultimately, is mental inactivity? To answer this question, let us review Bhagavad Gita. Gita likens the mind to a charioteer, controlling the horses (sensory inputs) which lead the chariot (the body) in the direction decided by the charioteer. When the mind does its job properly, the body behaves perfectly predictably. This gives us the definition of mental inactivity - it is simply a situation where the mind does not perform its task of harnessing one's abilities as required for the action at hand.

A little detour is in order here about a related concept - purpose.

One of the most famous lines in the Gita is कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन - Only the duty is important, not the outcome.

The Gita points out that personal interest in the outcome should be avoided. The logical reason for such a statement is that doing so has the potential to cloud one's judgment due to emotional involvement in the outcome, especially in instances which involve significant personal gain.

Coming back to purpose; we need to distinguish clearly between a goal and an outcome. A goal is what the task is meant to achieve. The outcome is what the task ends up achieving. Purpose is what motivates the doer to work towards the goal and bring about the outcome. Hence, a lack of purpose means that goals are not met, and outcomes are unsatisfactory. Since a sense of purpose (call it motivation if you wish) is an

entirely mental construct, we can understand that mental inactivity is simply the absence of a strong enough sense of purpose. It hence manifests at two levels:

1. Unaware of one's own potential pertinent to the task at hand
2. Aware of potential but not utilizing it to the necessary extent

Clearly, mental inactivity does not mean the mind is silenced, but quite the opposite - the mind is simply not controlling the body as it should. There are four major causes for this inactivity:

1. **Need for instant gratification** - Humans, by nature, constantly seek instant gratification, something that we can only overcome through conscious mental effort. When someone seeks instant gratification, he is unlikely to venture outside his comfort zone because he perceives the payoff as not worthy of the risk (even if such a perception may be false.) This means that with no new experiences, a person who utterly gives in to this need (desire?) ends up living a very methodical life, increasing the likelihood of inactivity.
2. **Flawed assumption** - when taking a decision, assuming without taking all the necessary data into consideration is a classic recipe for mistakes. Although the flawed assumptions may not be evident immediately, it is quite likely they will come into play later. A castle built upon pillars of salt will collapse at the first rain. The most common example of flawed assumptions is overconfidence.
3. **Vulnerability** - None of us is perfect. Some of us come to terms with it and move on. Others are unable to do so. These imperfections, small as they may be, create a feeling of insecurity. Insecure people are constantly worried about these flaws and think of them as vulnerabilities. This leads to a sense of helplessness, which overwhelms them and causes deviations in their behavior. Insecure people are most easily spotted by their attempts to overcompensate for these vulnerabilities.
4. **Perceived threat to self-esteem** - Individuals tend to stay away from anything that threatens their self-esteem, even if the alternative is inactivity. Fear of failure is one such perceived threat to self-esteem.

Staying in a phase of mental inactivity for an extended duration of time leads to doubtfulness, the next obstacle.

The mind is in many ways like a muscle, because If it is not regularly exercised, it becomes lazy and weak. This deterioration of mental abilities slows down development and shakes one's inner faith. This sets off a vicious cycle where inner faith being eroded leads to unwillingness to apply one's abilities, which leads to further erosion of inner faith.

(DOUBTFULNESS?) DOUBT

Doubt is uncertainty or lack of conviction. It also refers to the expression of an inferiority complex. It manifests in two ways:

1. Doubt about the task - when the individual is unable to channelize the intelligence required to carry out the task, s/he loses clarity about the course of action.
2. Self-doubt - This is noticed when the individual begins to question their own potential to complete the task. A deep-seated fear of failure makes a challenge look like a burden.

Self-doubt is egotism, a canvas upon which various self-destructive emotions are painted. Even a trace of self-doubt, given the chance to grow, will amplify over time and lead to one of the following:

1. Exhibiting a lack of understanding or reaction to any given stimulus
2. Confusion about how to react to a situation

Self-doubt gradually diminishes one's confidence. It is a huge red flag for an individual, a warning to correct course.

Are errors obvious, or are they accidental?

Errors are not always obvious, but in this case, they are. How?

The individual who previously exhibited a lack of comprehension cannot think (appropriately?) properly to execute an action or make a judgment. This leads to the individual losing the power of discretion.

It can now be seen that faulty attitude and actions are slowly becoming more and more strongly tied. Eventually, work stops completely and inactivity, which was earlier just a faulty attitude, begins to take a more problematic shape.

What shape does inactivity take now?

The more the self-doubt, the higher the number of mistakes made. The more the mistakes, the more the frustration as the person stumbles along the path.

At one point, the individual ends up interrogating him/herself to seek answers to the self-doubt. True answers to these questions are very much within him/herself, but to find them, one must carry out a systematic, coldly rational introspection. Unfortunately, the wall of self-doubt prevent individual from introspecting, and they instead try to seek these answers from others through feedback and opinions.

Another effect of this self-doubt is that the individual tends to think more superficially and irrationally, such as luck-driven actions and fear-driven superstitions. When pragmatic reasoning becomes poor, the person is no longer able to compare the results of practical and impractical actions. Moreover, the person no longer considers himself responsible for his own actions, since he no longer considers the errors to be under his control. Eventually, the person begins to blame others, or at times, the situation itself, instead of his own faults. This gradually reduces his drive to accept responsibility for his mistakes, and he soon loses the ability to course-correct, and his energy meant to work productively is instead expended on blaming others and avoiding responsibility. This lack of energy is the cause of the next obstacle - lethargy.

LETHARGY

What happens when errors are committed repeatedly?

Repeated errors lead to frustration and stagnation. Stagnation leads to apathy. Lethargy is nothing but apathy or loss of enthusiasm. Lethargy results in the individual procrastinating and putting off important and/or urgent tasks to a stage where work piles up and turns into an overwhelmingly large problem.

How does lethargy play upon the mind of the individual?

A lethargic person cannot decide how to start with a task. He cannot correct earlier errors or generate a new plan. Beyond a vague desire to rectify this problem, the person is incapable of anything else. This desire, due to improper channelization, results in intemperance.

What is intemperance?

Intemperance is the lack of moderation or restraint. A lethargic person overcompensates for the lethargy by attempting to do a task in an exaggerated manner - for instance, a corporate employee taking on a large project on a tight deadline without thinking it through, whether the deadline or the project is sensible, practical or feasible.

As the lethargy worsens, so does anxiety. Faced with a seemingly insurmountable task, the person seeks reassurance and comfort. This reassurance, which the person thinks can be obtained by completing the task, is difficult to get - simply because the person is incapable of doing so due to their mental state. Without even realizing it, the person has slipped into a state of intemperance. This unnoticed slip is the precursor to delusions.

DELUSION

Delusion is a false belief maintained in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. When intemperance reaches its peak, the individual subconsciously reacts by settling into delusion. Such a person makes misleading arguments and irrational decisions, fails to differentiate between right and wrong, and makes judgments founded on mistaken impressions. Deluded individuals are devoid of logic.

The combination and compounding of all these obstacles will result in severe loss of self-awareness.

What is self-actualization?

It is the ability to know one's own self and potential. According to Patanjali, any civilized human must rise above his animal instincts to contemplate higher states of existence. Food, sleep, procreation, recreation - in general, absence of fear to one's life or bloodline are the most necessities; a higher plane of existence is one where the satisfaction obtained from these necessities is no longer a concern. It is like Maslow's hierarchy of needs, with those on the bottom of the pyramid having been satisfied. Another way of putting it is that the five basic needs are means to an end and not ends in themselves. They are prerequisites for self-actualization. At the same time, they are not sufficient for self-actualization, owing to the obstacles discussed so far. An individual who is stuck in this divide between the basic needs and self-actualization for

too long gradually descends into hopelessness, frequently dealing with existential crises and depressive episodes. When such a strain is placed on the mind, the person succumbs to instability.

INSTABILITY

A person who feels worthless is left with nothing to rely upon for support. Instability is a state where the person is unbalanced and unreasonable. To make matters worse, instability is not a final state where the individual remains; rather, there is a vicious cycle where the instability leads to heightened inactivity, which increases instability, and so on. Instability causes grief and pain, and by gradually wearing down the person's mental fortitude, increases their susceptibility to mental and psychological disorders.

CONCLUSION

This article which intended to chart out the step-wise psychological patterns of deterioration is applicable to an individual or to a company as an entity or to a nation and even to a civilization.

This article explored the connection between the inactivity of the body and inactivity of the mind that eventually lead to a descent into instability. The descent, which manifested as an unstable existence, is perhaps capable of providing ground-breaking insight into how instability is a threshold to every psychological disease, discovered and defined till date. Instability is a gateway to psychological disorders, both neurotic and psychotic. The higher the number of individuals with inactivity of the body and the mind, the lesser is the well-being of the society.

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