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## THE YOGIC EXPERIENCE UNDER SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

### 1. Introduction

Time and again man and the mystery of his being has been the focal point of our study and research. "Humanity's attention", says Dr. Alexis Carrel, "must turn from the machines and the world of inanimate matter, to the body and soul of man, to the organic and mental processes which have created the machines and the universe of Newton and Einstein."<sup>1</sup> Over the years, man has devoted a great deal of his time and energy to the study of mental phenomena, the macrocosm; he has practically ignored the sublime and noble demands of the innerself, the microcosm. Psychologists regard this neglected source of energy as the untapped human potential. It is a common belief that by activating this force, man can tap the unlimited energy in his psyche and thus find his fulfilment in life. In our times, Transcendental Meditation claims to utilize this great human potential to a considerable degree, in a scientific way. The wider application of this meditative method to people drawn from every walk of life paved the way for various objective studies and reporting of the experiences. The present article is an attempt to examine some of these research studies from the point of view of psychological sciences.

### 2. The Movement called TM

a) *From the Himalayas*: Transcendental Meditation (TM) in the present form was initiated by His Holiness Maharshi Mahesh Yogi. He was a disciple of Swami Brahmananda Saraswati (also

called Guru Dev) when he was the Sankaracharya of Jyotir Math (1941-1953) in the Himalyas. In 1958, five years after the death of Swami Brahmananda, Mahesh Yogi started "The Spiritual Regeneration Movement" in Madras, on the occasion of the 89th birthday celebration of Guru Dev. The traditional Yoga insisted on concentration and control of the mind for attaining pure consciousness. But Maharshi eventually realized that an experience of the transcendental values of consciousness, as opposed to intellectual analysis of them, is possible through a method other than that of classical Yoga, namely, through the Transcendental Meditation technique. According to a TM Publication,<sup>2</sup> "On the basis of the evident seriousness, reliability, and success of the teaching procedure, the net-work of teachers and the number of people practising the TM technique grew rapidly. As of the end of 1975, over 10,000 teachers from almost every nation had been trained, and they in turn had instructed over one million individuals in the practices of the TM technique. Over 400 centres have been established in the United States alone for the purpose of teaching the TM programme."<sup>3</sup>

b) *Source of Inspiration*: Mahesh Yogi always insisted in his talks that though the technique of TM as a practical aspect of the science of Creative Intelligence is a comparatively new discipline, it has got its roots in vedic and later Indian religious literature. It was only a rediscovery of the simplicity, effectiveness and naturalness that characterized the ancient Indian Yogic practice of meditation. His immediate predecessor and perceptor, Guru Dev, is said to have opened the way for the discovery of this simple method of meditation for the ordinary people, irrespective of their religious persuasion in contrast to the arduous method of meditation adopted by the enlightened ones in Hindu *advaitic* or *Sankhyan* tradition. Mahesh Yogi, however, did not regard this popular method as something new and alien to the Hindu Sacred

2. David W. Orme-Johnson & John T. Farrow, eds. *Scientific Research on the Transcendental Meditation Programme, collected papers Vol. 1* (W. Germany: MERU Press, 1976), reprint form, p. 27.

3. The following centres have been instituted for teaching TM Programme: (i) World Plan Executive Council, California, US; (ii) Maharshi International University, Iowa; (iii) Maharshi Institute of Creative Intelligence, Sankaracharya Nagar, Rishikesh, India; (iv) International Administrative Centre, Salisberg, Switzerland; (v) Maharshi European Research University, Weggis, Switzerland.

1. Alexis Carrel, *Man the Unknown* (Bombay: Wilco Publishing House, 1959), p. 12.

Scriptures but as something hidden in them, and as something naturally flowing from their resourcefulness.

### 3. The Concept of Creative Intelligence

TM claims to be a science of creative intelligence. Its aim is to get at the very roots of our thought. In broad outline, TM may be sketched as follows. With the aid of a trained teacher, the aspirant is initiated in to the TM technique.<sup>4</sup> A personal *mantra* is chosen. It may not have any specific meaning, but its vibration affects some parts of the brain. The inward journey is supposed to reach the inner recess of consciousness. Since this is regarded as a different stage from those of waking, sleeping and dreaming Maharshi, following the lead of *Mandukhya Upanishad*,<sup>5</sup> calls it the fourth. This 'mental diving' is never a forced one for it is built on the natural tendency of the mind to go beyond our ordinary conscious level. In fact, Intelligence that comprises the conscious level forms a very small portion of what is held in man's psyche. The conscious level of our mind is enriched as we dive deeper into the subconscious levels by means of TM technique. The creativity of mind is enhanced proportionately. Apparently, it is an addition of a perfection to the active mind. From a theoretical point of view as accepted in the Upanishads the Self transcends or frees itself from all limitations and enters into the fourth state of consciousness mentioned above. The declared aim of TM technique is to re-establish harmony in the individual human being and to give him peace; this is accepted as the only means to attain inner peace, wisdom and happiness. Scientific research into this restful state attained through meditation is claimed to have revealed that inducement of such a state in man increases his creativity. The rest and relaxation derived through TM is found to be radically different from the same effects obtained through the natural process of sleep. It relieves one from all the accumulated stresses and strains of life. The ability to learn increases whereas by the use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco, etc, this ability tends to decrease. As a consequence of such meditation, a person is enabled to do

4. It consists in a simple form of meditation whereby mind is freed from all specific thought in the waking state and, consequently, it attains an expansion of consciousness which stirs up creative activities.

5. *Man. Up.* 7.

more work and to do it efficiently. Such are the results reported by the researches in this field.

This creativity is linked with certain specific conditions, namely, a well-balanced life and mental growth. Again this idea is based on the assumption that being less specific compared to the consciousness of the waking state, the various levels of unconscious can become the source of inspiration for creativity, like making new combinations and novel designs, composing unheard melodies, finding proper solutions to riddles and puzzles and so on. It enriches the memory by removing the repressions buried in the various layers of sub-conscious and thus makes a person more authentic.

The first serious attempt to establish the claims of TM was undertaken by R.K. Wallace, in 1968, then a graduate student in the Department of Physiology at the University of California, Los Angeles. His area of investigation was the Physiological effects of the TM technique in individuals practising the technique regularly. These studies resulted in a Ph.D. thesis entitled "*The Physiological Effects of Transcendental Meditation: A Proposed Fourth Major State of Consciousness*" (1970). The definite effects of TM technique were attested in terms of reduced metabolic rate, changes in blood chemistry, increased skin resistance and a consistent pattern of changes in the electrical activity of the brain as recorded by the EEG.<sup>6</sup> These researches point out that "the state induced by the Transcendental Meditation technique was not to be thought of as some sort of exotic distortion impressed on the nervous system from outside, but rather should be considered as a new, yet entirely natural state of consciousness comparable to, but perhaps actually more fundamental than, waking, dreaming, or deep sleep."<sup>7</sup>

6. David W. Orme-Johnson *op. cit.*, p. 28; for other accounts on these experiments refer to: (i) Robert Keith Wallace, "Physiological Effects: of Transcendental Meditation", *Science*, 167 (1970), 1751-1754; (ii) Robert Keith Wallace *et al.*, "A Wakeful Hypometabolic Psychologic State", *American Journal of Physiology* 221 (1971), 797-799. (iii) Robert Keith Wallace and Herbert Benson, "The Physiology of Meditation", *Scientific American* 226 (1972), 84-90.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

#### 4. Transcendence from a Religious and Scientific point of View

i. *Transcendence as expansion*: The very expression "transcendental meditation" needs explanation. The term 'meditation' is taken here in its ordinary sense, namely, as a continuous devotional exercise of contemplation; but the qualifier 'transcendental' may mean several things. It usually signifies a mental process which goes beyond what is already given. Such a transcendence of the mind is, in a sense, necessary to liberate oneself from the enslaving relation one has with the concrete situations of life. Even in the formation of concepts there is a transcendence from the individualizing notes of the concrete reality. This process is more evident in the case of fine arts. For instance, originality in art often depends on the ability of the self to be free from the definite forms that mind already possesses, and in utilizing and visualizing the rich content of the deeper layers of mind. The greater the effort of the artist to free himself from the forms already conceived, the better is his performance and originality.

In psychology, transcendence can also mean the 'absence of attention'. When focal attention is absent, there is no definite perception, and this provides a lot of rest and relaxation to the conscious mind, setting aside physical and mental tensions and strains. But from the psychological point of view a number of inhibitions come from the self (ego), and as the ego dissolves by self-forgetting, these constraining factors disappear. In such a mental situation body-functions follow the control of the sub-cortical nucleus—the most natural and prenatal form of body-control. Consequently the cortex gets full relaxation and thereby unconscious inhibitions are resolved to a certain extent.

Over and above these, transcendence involves growth and progress in it. Every form of transcendence implies a transition from a familiar and secure state to an unfamiliar and insecure state. That is to say, they involve risks. All living beings are instinctively driven to take some such risks. Unlike other beings, man and higher animals can foresee possible dangers and obstacles. As a result, as we know, they hesitate to take the risk. When the threat to security is too great they may even refrain from accepting the challenge and risk. This may come in the way of "expansion" or development, which is implied in transcendence. The TM technique is said to increase man's capacity to take risks and the courage to say good-bye to the familiar and secure and to move on to the unfamiliar and uncharted areas.

ii. *Anxiety and TM*: Another area where TM makes some valid claims is in the region of perplexed mind. Today man has become all the more anxious about his future, his health, security, career and so on. Heideggerian thought presents the phenomenon of death as the source of man's great anxiety. As long as man lives, the fear of death looms large over his very existence. The only way a man can be free from it is to cease to exist. In the ultimate analysis, death means a separation of the soul from body. Hence the real source of anxiety revolves round the separation of the soul from the body. Many of the major world religions profess the survival of the soul after death. Mere knowledge of this is of no avail to man at present. But if one gets an experience of death and still survives, then one may find it easy to think of one's own impending death with peace and ease. By all accounts, such a re-living seems to be impossible. Still, a temporary intentional separation may give each individual some faint experience of death. Actually this is what happens in the TM. The pure self, diving deeper into the hidden layers of consciousness, frees and separates itself from all objects. The pure self dwells in its own abode and existence. Wrapped in its own existence, self is led to timeless and unlimited avenues of experience. Hence it is an intentional death. If one can feel free and at home with such an experience, no anxiety can pose a threat to his peace for he is now free from the basic anxiety of death. As a result of this, TM is considered as a panacea for all the mental disorders and abnormalities and neuroses.

iii. *TM and Education*: Another field in which TM has made a substantial claim is the field of education. The literal meaning of the term *Vinaya*, the equivalent to the word education, is to lead, or guide somebody. In a sense, the purpose of education is also to lead one out of his ignorance and thus to make him free. The *Upanishads* understand self, in its pure state, as absolute freedom and as a bound reality in its earthly existence. True knowledge acquired through education can make the soul realize that it is complete freedom, an awareness which brings liberation to the soul. TM, being a practice of transcendence, a leading out of the limitations of the present, can fulfil this goal of educational process.

iv. *The 'Maharshi Effect'*: The betterment of individual consciousness by the practice of TM is supposed to result in the refinement of collective consciousness at every level—family, community, city, state, and the nation as a whole. This influence

imparts to the society peace, harmony and progress. According to Maharshi Mahesh Yogi, if even one percent of a city population participates in the Transcendental Programme, it will effect a transition to greater orderliness and harmony in that city. This projected change in the life of a community is known as 'Maharshi Effect'. Believing that a refinement of national consciousness is taking shape, the Maharshi inaugurated the dawn of the Age of Enlightenment for mankind on 12 January 1975. He regarded the second year of this Age (1976) as the year of World Government and the third year (1977) as the year of Ideal Society. How far the propagandist elements and fanfare attached to this movement deserves our attention is a matter to be decided by each, individual scholar.

v. *Wider Area of Application*: The availability of the TM technique as a natural means for producing transcendental consciousness (a fourth stage of consciousness which may develop into a fifth stage of consciousness or cosmic consciousness) has stimulated an intensive study of psycho-physiological correlates of higher state of consciousness at the Maharshi European Research University (MERU). In order to illustrate the integrative style of functioning of the mind and body developed through the practice of the TM technique, MERU started a series of studies of the electro-physiological and electroencephalographic changes (EEG) in advanced participants in TM programmes. These studies arrived at the following observations: i) EEG frontal alpha coherence, indicating orderliness of brain function; ii) neurological efficiency as measured by paired Hoffmann reflex; iii) high creativity test scores indicating fluent, flexible, and original thinking; and iv) clear experience of transcendental consciousness during the practice of Transcendental Meditation technique.<sup>8</sup> Making use of these and similar observations, further scientific study has been conducted by MERU in the field of psychology (the relation between TM practice and intelligence, learning, academic performance and development of personality), physiology, sociology (rehabilitation and productivity and quality of life) and parapsychological phenomena (the TM—Sidhi programmes). These researches are still in the nascent state and a definite evaluative judgement about them at this stage would be certainly premature. Yet this movement illustrates how a so-called re-

8. David W. Orme-Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

ligious phenomenon can be subjected to scientific study. Having detached it from the context of Hinduism, will such a scientific investigation destroy its religious character is another question which has still to be studied.

## 5. The Religious Relevance of TM

i. *A Help to Self-Transcendence*: Spiritual writers regard self-transcendence as a noble characteristic of human activity.<sup>9</sup> "To a certain extent true knowledge and love is possible only by a self-transcendence."<sup>10</sup> The human person in his natural selfhood is a dynamic openness to transcendence... "Through knowledge, a person goes beyond himself into the world of being. Knowing is a cognitive self-transcendence..." "Likewise, through love, a person goes beyond himself and enters into communion with others".<sup>11</sup>

What is actually transcended here in this process? Transcendence is certainly an action of an agent. As long as this action continues its agent cannot be the object of transcendence. Hence what is transcended is the objectifiable aspect of the primordial or pure subject. This self-transcendence involving self-forgetfulness is interpreted as self-enriching in Christian theological circles. Does the soul become richer by intentionally becoming the object

9. Cf. "God's grace and Man's guilt", Paul Ramsey, *Nine Modern Moralists*, Paul Ramsey ed. (New York: A Mentor Book, 1970). In this work self-transcendence is taken to be the cause of man's unwillingness to repent. "The difficulty of repentance can be fully understood only in connection with man's nature as a self-transcending spirit. "We not only know, but we know that we know, and can ponder in thought over the very fact that we are able thus to reflect in thought" (p. 56). "These moments of self-transcendence may be multiplied endlessly by the single individual alone; he first sees himself, then sees himself seeing himself, and so on" (p. 58). "Self-centred self-transcendence sums up the endless and often puzzling convolutions of personal consciousness, and the complications it introduces into human relationships in the great novels of Dostoevski" (p. 57).

10. Bernard J. Tyrrell, *Christotherapy: Healing Through Enlightenment* (Bangalore: St. Paul Publication, 1978). "Self-transcendence is both the royal road to and in its higher modes a participation in, eternal life" p. 132.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

known? Does the self become enriched through personal communion with other individuals? Both questions are answered affirmatively. In other words, in the acts of knowing and loving, the subject or self is being perfected or becomes richer by the process of transcendence involved in them. This is becoming "blessed by being poor in spirit", by freeing oneself from what one already holds.

Now the question is whether the self-transcendence envisaged by philosophers, theologians and psychotherapists is similar to our identical with the achievements made through Transcendental Meditation. Both certainly speak of enrichment through transcendence. But there is a difference in the process or in the methodology involved in these two instances. In the act of knowing and loving the self-transcendence is only presupposed; it is not practised consciously. In the Transcendental Meditation all conscious forms of mind are positively and consciously eliminated with a view to improving the creative intelligence. In both cases the final result is the enrichment of the self.

ii. *TM as Religiously Neutral:* The ancient Hindu Scriptures, from which the method got its basic inspiration, was clearly theistic. Many regard even the Samkhya-Yoga system as basically theistic. Maharshi Mahesh Yogi himself presents TM as a method of God realization.<sup>12</sup> Yet it can be practised even by an atheist.

He makes a distinction regarding the concept of God i.e., God can be conceived, either "as a Supreme Being of absolute eternal nature, or as a personal God at the top of phenomenal creation."<sup>13</sup> The Maharshi, however, prefers to conceive God as on absolute. Now the question is whether the realization of an Impersonal Absolute can be considered as true practice of religion. But if TM discourages the adoration of a personal God, many theists may regard with suspicion at the very method of TM.

iii. *TM as a Means for Contemplative Prayer:* TM does not claim to be a method for contemplative prayer. But if we mean by prayer active awareness of the Absolute Reality, in line with the advaita-thought, Mahesh Yogi follows the state of tranquillity reached through TM technique as a form of prayer. Apart from the

12. Maharshi Mahesh Yogi, *The Science of Being and Art of Living*, (London. George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1968), pp. 265-294.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 265.

question of prayer, if one considers TM as a useful method to reach the Absolute, to love ones neighbour, to live peacefully, to be more creative and effective, it may be justified. It cannot, however, be considered as a better method for God-experience compared to other methods. A believer in a personal God would ask himself again and again whether the concentration on the positive qualities of God of which religions speak, and on our fellowmen and the world in which we are to live is not a better method than transcending everything to be enriched by the whole reality.

## 6. Conclusion

In recent times, through physiological, psychological, and sociological studies on TM effect, the connection between meditation generally understood as a religious phenomenon, and physical sciences has been established beyond doubt. We are yet uncertain whether in the near future the sciences would reveal that the physics of elementary particles and the science of human consciousness are parallel views of the same reality. However that may be, TM has given a chance to the physical sciences to investigate a highly developed tradition of man's inner search for reality and wholeness. If these studies could accelerate the process of unification of the two well-known paths of human knowledge, the inward and the outward, mankind would be eternally indebted to these men of science and religion who would work for this unification.