

The Concept of Liberation in Yoga Philosophy

Amit Kumar Das, Research Scholar, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam

Email : amit61178@gmail.com

Rupam Dey, Research Scholar, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam

Email : deyrupam59@gmail.com

Moumita Saha, Research Scholar, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam

Email : sahamoumita532@gmail.com

Abstract :

Yoga is a way to unite the self with God. The word *yoga* appears in many sacred Indian scriptures, including both *śruti* (revealed texts) and *smṛti* (remembered texts). In particular, yoga is explained in Indian philosophy, especially in the *Yogasūtras* written by the great sage Patañjali. In his teachings, Patañjali places great importance on devotion to God, known as *Īśvara-bhakti*. He claims that only via sincere and persistent dedication can yogis obtain a state of eternal enjoyment, free of all pains and illness, collectively referred to as *kleśa*. Patañjali outlines a disciplined path that yogis must follow, known as *Aṣṭāṅgayoga*, or the eightfold path of *yoga*. This system emphasizes devotion to God, where the sacred sound *om* is chanted as a symbol of the divine, representing God in the form of *nirguṇa Brahman*, or the formless aspect of the Supreme. This path is called *rāja yoga*, the royal path of meditation and inner realization.

Rāja yoga is divided into two parts. The first is the external or indirect path, which includes practices like moral conduct, personal discipline, physical postures, breath control, and withdrawal of the senses. These prepare the body and mind for deeper spiritual work. The second part is the internal or direct path, which includes concentration, meditation, and ultimate absorption into spiritual consciousness. These inner practices help the yogi move inward toward union with the Divine.

Keywords: God, spiritual, *yoga*, *aṣṭāṅgayoga*, *kaivalya*.

Introduction: Maharshi Patañjali penned the *Yogasūtras* around 200 BCE, providing the framework for traditional *yoga*. The *Yogasūtras* are a basic text of traditional *yoga*, forming

part of the *yoga darśana* that accept the Vedas as a genuine and ultimate authority as the source of truth. *Yogasūtra* consists of four pādas. Those are- *Samādhi pāda* i.e., the doctrine of full realisation of yoga's purpose, *Sādhana pāda* i.e., the self regulated path of yogic cultivation, *Bibhūtipāda* i.e., the benefit gained from the regular practice of *yoga* and *kaivalyapāda* i.e., the realisation of yogic perfection. Patañjali provides four systematic phases that lead to self- evolution and awareness of human nature.

This study employs a philosophical inquiry to analyse the concept of realisation as articulated in the concept of yoga sutras of Patañjali.

Spiritual freedom through yoga philosophy

Liberation is a very essential component in *yoga* philosophy. It represents the ultimate purpose of human life. In the *yoga* philosophy, liberation from bondage is known as *kaivalya* or ultimate independence. The spiritual tradition emphasises the importance of liberation from the cycle of pain and bondage that pervades all existence. The idea of bondage which results from the predictable link between actions and their effects.¹ The self no longer connects with the body, mind or emotions once it has achieved liberty. No longer is there any devotion, sorrow, distress or ambition. The enlightened being does not acquire *karma* and is free from reincarnation. The soul resides in its unadulterated consciousness in an irreversible, tranquil and eternal state.

In the *yogasūtra*, Patañjali defines *yoga* as the state of mental peace that results from the cessation of the citta's modifications, allowing the individual to realise their actual nature.² *Yoga* is a strategy for achieving escape from suffering through focused practice and self-realization. The objective of *yoga* philosophy is to separate *puruṣa* from *prakṛti*, to conquer ignorance, to put an end to suffering and to obtain *kaivalya* or ultimate freedom. There are five types of *citta* modifications-

- (i) *Pramāṇa* i.e., right cognition- like perception, inference and verbal testimony.
- (ii) *Viparyaya* i.e., wrong cognition- as in the situation with mistaking a rope for a snake.

¹ *The Concept of Yogic Literature*, iii. p-69.

² *yogaścittavṛttinirodhaḥ// Yogasūtra*, i.2.

- (iii) *Vikalpa* i.e., imagination- it is purely a verbal notion that has no validity in reality, similar to the concept of hare's horn.
- (iv) *Nidrā* i.e., absence of cognition- people who wake up from deep sleep, typically claims that they were unaware of anything throughout that period, it is known as *nidrā*.
- (v) *Smṛti* - it refers to the ability to remember prior experience by means of the mental impressions they leave behind. The technique of claiming mind through focused practice and mediation is called *yoga*.

The Yogasūtras highlight five basic causes of suffering and bondage, including – *avidyā* i.e., ignorance, *asmitā* i.e., egoism, *rāga* i.e., attachment, *dveṣa* i.e., aversion and *abhiniveśa* i.e., fear of death.³ In this philosophical framework, the self (*puruṣa*) becomes bound by its false association with the mind's dynamic changes. The attainment of liberation is defined by the proper differentiation between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, followed by the elimination of mental fluctuations and the realisation of the *puruṣa*'s actual essence. Suffering is an integral part of human life. Liberation refers to breaking free from this cycle. It is the ultimate goal, because repetitive lives are considered to prolong ignorance and misery. This insight eliminates the ego and resulting in permanent inner peace. It is considered as the highest form of knowledge i.e., *jñāna*. One achieves a state of wholeness or unity with the divine through emancipation. In order to achieve ultimate freedom and liberation, spiritual seekers might use the eight fold yogic practices described in the *yoga* philosophy as guidance. Those are - *yama* i.e., abstention, *niyama* i.e., observance, *āsana* i.e., posture, *prāṇāyāma* i.e., regulation of breath, *pratyāhāra* i.e., withdraw of the senses, *dhāraṇā* i.e., contemplation, *dhyāna* i.e., fixed attention and *samādhi* i.e., concentration.⁴ Eightfold *yoga* or *aṣṭāṅgayoga* is significant because it provides a thorough and practical blueprint for achieving liberation by purifying the body, regulating the intellect and awakening the spirit. It promotes ethical life, mental clarity and self-realisation. In order to promote a more harmonious and moral existence, *yama* entails controlling one's actions, words and thoughts. Five varieties of *yama* are- (i) *ahiṃsā* i.e., non-violence, (ii) *satya* i.e., truthfulness, (iii)

³ *avidyā'smitārāgadvēṣābhiniveśāḥ pañcakleśāḥ*// *Ibid.*, ii.3.

⁴ *yama-niyamāsana-prāṇāyāma-pratyāhāra-dhāraṇā-dhyāna-samādhayo'sṭābaṅgāni*// *Ibid.*, ii.29.

asteya i.e., non-stealing, (iv) *brahmacharya* i.e., celibacy and (v) *aparigraha* i.e., non-acceptance of gifts.⁵

(i) *Ahimsā* : *Ahimsā* is the practice of entirely avoiding damage to any kind of life. The most important of all yamas, it is regarded as the beginning and conclusion of basic training.

(ii) *Satya* : It means prioritising honesty above dishonesty in discourse. This also indicates accurate memory or precise remembering of previous experiences.

(iii) *Asteya* : It instructs us not to steal or claim someone else's property. It also means that we should not have a yearning or craving for things that belong to others.

(iv) *Brahmacharya* : It refers to self-discipline and control over the senses, particularly sexual organs.

(v) *Aparigraha* : This idea emphasizes detachment from ownership and discourages the accumulation of needless objects.

Niyama is the practice cultivating virtue in order to achieve growth and spiritual development. Five kinds of niyamas are- (i) *śauca* i.e., purification, (ii) *santoṣa* i.e., contentment, (iii) *tapas* i.e., penance, (iv) *svādhyāya* and (v) *īśvarapraṇidhāna* i.e., devotion to God.⁶

(i) *Śauca* : It alludes to keeping both physical and mental purity. Cleanliness involves taking care of the body through hygiene and nutrition whereas mental and emotional purity results from values like sympathy, generosity, happiness and non-attachment

(ii) *Santoṣa* : It involves feeling satisfied with what we get via genuine and acceptable efforts.

(iii) *Tapas* : Tapas refers to the ability to withstand physical discomforts like cold and heat as a component of spiritual training.

⁵ *ahimsā satyāsteya-brahmacaryāparigrahā yamāḥ*// *Ibid.*, ii.30.

⁶ *śauca-santoṣa-tapaḥ-svādhyāyeśvarapraṇidhānāni niyamāḥ*// *Ibid.*, ii. 32.

(iv) *Svādhyāya* : Studying sacred texts help us grow spiritually since they provide deep philosophical insights.

(v) *Īśvarapraṇidhāna* : It represents a life of devotion characterised by unwavering self surrender and constant remembrance of God.

An *āsana* is a comfortable, stable pose that represents stability and over all health.⁷ Such practices help to regulate mental control and also supports the regulation of other essential facets of the individual. A healthy body reduces destructions and discomfort that interfere with mental focus. It provided mental and physical stability, creating the way for more profound practices like breath control, concentration, meditation and eventually self-realization.

The goal of *prāṇāyāma* is to achieve the highest possible level of physical, mental and spiritual harmony. Three types of *prāṇāyāma* are- *puraka*, *recaka* and *kumbhaka*.⁸ By regulating the inflow and outflow of breath, one can foster mental clarity and attention. *Puraka*- during the practice of *prāṇāyāma*, *puraka* is the first stage in which the practitioner intentionally inhales deeply, filling their lungs as fully as possible. *Recaka*- it is a subsequent *prāṇāyāma* phase that involves the entire regulated release of breath, usually lasting the duration of the inhalation phase. *Kumbhaka*- this step in *prāṇāyāma* concentrates on maintaining breath retention which is usually done throughout the entire previous inhalation.

Pratyāhāra is a purposeful withdrawal of the senses from outside stimuli, which allows the practitioner to concentrate on their inner experience. *Pratyāhāra* marks the change from the outer limbs (*āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*) to the inner limbs (concentration, meditation and absorption). Withdrawing the senses reduces sensory overload and allows the mind to rest.

Dhāraṇā is a focused mental exercise in which the focus is on a selected object.⁹ Radhakrishnan describes *dhāraṇā* as a condition of continuous mental concentration.¹⁰ The

⁷ *sthira sukham āsanam*// *Ibid.*, ii.46.

⁸ *bāhyābhyantarastambhavṛttiḥ deśakāla-saṁkhyābhiḥ paridṛṣṭo dīrghasūkṣmah*// *Ibid.*, ii.50

⁹ *deśabandhaścittasya dhāraṇā*// *Ibid.*, iii.1.

¹⁰ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. ii. p-357.

process of entering *samādhi* begins at this stage. *Dhāraṇā* reduces distractions which helps to discipline the mind and improves mental stability, strength and steadiness.

Dyāna, also known as meditation, is process of the focusing mind on a specific object for an extended period of time, which results in a deep insight.¹¹ Meditation leads to a clear and deep understanding of the object, free from distractions. The transition from *dyāna* to *samādhi* requires a total inward attention, in which the mediator losses all senses of self and outside world and feeling the mediation object's pure presence. *Dyāna* is characterized by a dualistic consciousness of subject and object, but *samādhi* dissolves the duality and just a single awareness is left. It is a spiritual realisation that leads to emancipation rather than merely a mental state.

Samādhi represents the ultimate stage of yogic understanding including the attainment of spiritual illumination. *Samādhi* is the state in which discriminating, clear knowledge arises from concentrated meditation on both subtle and gross forms.¹² At this stage the meditator, the object of mediation and the process of mediation itself are all fully one. Two types of *samādhi* are- (i) *samprajñāta* or conscious and (ii) *asamprajñāta* or super conscious. The *samprajñāta samādhi* involves four stages. *Savitarka samādhi* is the result of meditating on a concrete, physical object from the external world. Because throughout this stage, awareness of a particular object is still present. When the mind concentrated on subtle aspects like tanmātras, that state of *samprajñāta samādhi* is known as *savicāra*. *Sananda samādhi* is the state of meditation at which the mind starts to concentrate on finer things like the senses. *Sasmita samādhi* is the state in which the focus of meditation is the ego-principle, or *asmitā*. At this level, the mediator recognises the true essence of personal identity. The *ṛtti-nirodha* process gradually develops through the stages of *samprajñāta samādhi* and is eventually perfected in *asamprajñāta samādhi*. This represents the supreme state of *yoga*, characterized by a blissful and enigmatic condition that is hard to describe and even harder to achieve - often referred to as divine ecstasy. Here, the mind stops perceiving the existence of any object as the object of concentration. This *samādhi* is two types- *bhavapratyaya* and *upāyapratyaya*. In the state of *asamprajñāta samādhi*, consciousness is shown in its true nature, free of the control of mind. Once *asamprajñāta samādhi* is stable, the mind stops

¹¹ *Yogasūtrabhāṣya*, iii.2.

¹² *tadevārthamātranirbhāsaṁ svarūpaśūnyamiva samādhiḥ// Yogasūtra*, iii.3.

functioning becomes one with the gunas. When the *asamprajñāta samādhi* becomes steady, bodily functions stop and the mediator is permanently detached from the body. This is known as *kaivalya* or liberation in *yoga* philosophy.

Conclusion: Patañjali teaches that genuine *yoga* entails ceasing all mental alterations or movements. This helps the soul (*ātman*) become free from the mental sufferings (*kleśas*) that disturb human life. He shows the path of devotion i.e., *bhakti* to God, where one completely surrenders to a higher power. He recommends reciting the sacred syllable Om, which stands for *īśvara*, the definitive and divine entity as one of the key practices. To reach this goal, Patañjali introduces *kṛya yoga*, which is a practical path to discipline the body and mind. It is followed by practicing the eight steps of *yoga*. By practicing these eight steps regularly, a seeker or yogi can move toward spiritual freedom or liberation.

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