

Buddha and the Essence of Yoga

Sujan Das, Research scholar, Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University

Email: suja286397@gmail.com

Abstract:

The word “Yoga” is generally known as an ancient Hindu practice based on physical exercise and breath control. However, the main purpose of yoga was the path of self-knowledge and liberation, which is not limited to Patanjali’s yoga Sūtras. This paper analyzes how the Buddha, through his teachings and practice interpreted the deeper meaning of yoga from a new perspective and showed a new direction on the path of spiritual liberation. The buddha emphasized not the external form of yoga, but its inner purpose—purity of thought, restraint, and wisdom. According to his teachings, the three pillars of śīla, samādhi and prajñā—are the basis of true yoga practice. He presented not unity with the soul or encounter with Brahman, but the cessation of suffering, or Nirvāna, as the ultimate goal.

This paper shows, in the light of Pāli texts such as Dhammapada, and other Nikāya literature, that Buddha’s yoga was a path for transformation of consciousness and development insight. The Middle way he presented is a yogic perspective that balances extreme pleasure and extreme austerity.

Therefore, it can be said that Buddha did not reject Yoga, but rather captured its essence and transformed it into a new spiritual perspective, the main purpose of which was liberation from suffering.

Keywords: Buddha, Nirvāna, Yoga, Liberation

Introduction: Yoga, at present day it is well known to all of us. It stands for some series of physical exercises or relaxation techniques. Yoga is highly related to Indian Philosophy, and there are a separate school, namely, “Yoga Philosophy”. There are multiple thoughts, personality about yoga in Indian Philosophy, one of the most important among them, Gautama Buddha. Buddha also stands for liberation, by spiritual practices. Buddha was a great sage and religious teacher who discovered the path to liberation through self-knowledge. On the other hand, Yoga is a special system of self-control, mental control and

awakening of consciousness, the main purpose of which is the liberation of the soul or the ultimate realization.

Teaching of Buddha:

It is understood from the life of Buddha that he was a great yogi. He left his home as well as kingdom and concentrated sadhana through the practices of Yoga. From the Kalama, he learned different levels of meditation, which are originally part of the yoga system of that time. But he realized that meditation alone cannot give ultimate liberation. Then he adopted the ‘middle path’—that is a balanced life path, avoiding both extreme indulgence and penance. After initiated into Bodhisattva, his statement that is known as first discourse of Buddhism, i.e. “DhammacakkapavattanaSutta”. After his death his followers collected scriptures, literature about his teachings, among them ‘Tripitaka’ are the oldest literatures. These are, Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka, and Abhidhamma Pitaka.

Gautama Buddha’s teachings are mainly centred on the suffering of human life and the way to get rid of it. His Philosophy is not based on God or Soul, but rather a realistic, experience-based, ethical. Though here also mentioned some paths like yoga, which are need to practices. To easily understand the teachings of Buddha, a few key aspects can be highlighted----

(i) **Four Noble Truth:** This is the main foundation of the teaching of Buddha. Those truths are--

- a. There is Suffering.
- b. Cause of suffering.
- c. Cessation of suffering.
- d. The path to leading to suffering.

(ii) **Eightfold Path:**

This is the most desirable part of his teaching. It deals with eight paths, those are directly leads to the end of life, liberation. As a yogic person, Buddha also emphasized upon this. This path divided into three sections: morality, concentration and wisdom. Those Eight paths are as follows---

- a) Right View, b) Right Intention, c) Right Speech, d) Right Action, e) Right Livelihood, f) Right Effort, g) Right Mindfulness, h) Right Concentration.

(iii) Dependent Origination:

Dependent origination or Pratityasamutpada holds the key position of Buddha's Philosophy, it is the foundation of Buddha's teachings. It mentioned that, everything is conditional, this sutra explains that all events in life occur as a result of specific causes and conditions.

Influence of Yoga on the Buddha:

The core Yoga Philosophy is the cessation of mind – that is, achieving a state of stillness by activities of the mind. The Buddha also spoke of stabilizing and unifying the mind through equanimity, mindfulness, samadhi, etc. Buddha also accepted that, mind is the root of all causes or suffering, which is deeply related to yogic psychology. Another side, the Yama and Niyama of Yoga Philosophy and Noble Eight Paths of Buddha- both are based on self-purification and moral life. This proves that the approach taken by the Buddha to physical and mental restraint is consistent with the practice of yoga. Samadhi is the ultimate goal in Yoga, Buddha used Samādhi as a means to attain wisdom. For Buddha, Samadhi is a mirror- wisdom is seeing the truth in that mirror. This goes beyond the one-dimensional meditation concept of Yoga Philosophy.

It is clear that, there some similarities between Buddhist view and Yoga and liberation also the main target of both. In Buddhist Philosophy, the path to liberation is based on three fundamental practices—Śīla (morality), Samādhi (Meditation) and Prajñā (Knowledge). Together, these are called the Tṛīśikṣa. Gautama Buddha taught that by practicing these three steps in sequence, one can be free from suffering, attachment, and ignorance and attain Nirvāṇa.

- a) **Śīla (Moral Purity):** Śīla is the foundation of the Buddha's teachings. It symbolizes behavioral restraint, morality, and virtue. According to the Buddha, if śīla is not practiced, the mind remains polluted and meditation or knowledge cannot develop. There mentioned five precepts for ordinary householders:

- (i) Not to kill animals
- (ii) Not to Steal
- (iii) Avoid sexual immorality

(iv) Refrain from lying

(v) Not to take intoxicants

b) **Samadhi (Mindfulness and Meditation):** Samadhi means concentrating the mind or stabilising the mind. It is a state where the mind leaves thoughts of the past and future and focuses on the present moment. There are three layers of meditation---

Mindfulness practice - awareness of body, feeling, mind and thoughts.

Breath awareness – attain to breathing

Vipassana – meditation for insight and analysis of thoughts.

Samadhi calms the mind and creates a suitable foundation for the emergence of Wisdom (Prajñā).

c) **Prajñā – Knowledge and understanding:** Prajñā is the realization of real truth, which destroys craving, delusion and ignorance. This is the ultimate path to liberation in the view of the Buddha. This knowledge does not come from text book or learning theories; it comes from meditation and insight. Prajñā is actually a deep understanding of the nature of real life and the mind - which opens the door to Mokṣa or Nirvāṇa.

Buddha's meditation methods such as Satipatthana or Anapāsasati, and yogic meditations such as samadhi-meditation-samadhi-these methods are still effective for mental health worldwide. The meditation practices of both Buddha and Yoga together help in achieving a deeper understanding of human consciousness and peace. Just as Buddha shows the path to liberation through intuition, virtue and meditation, yoga also puts mind-sense restraint and self-purification as the ultimate goal. In both paths, it is not external rituals, but self-realization and internal cultivation—this is the key. In the modern era, by combining these two paths, Buddhism and yoga, it is possible to develop a holistic lifestyle of spiritual development, mental peace, and human compassion.

Conclusion:

Both Buddha and Yoga are two luminaries of Indian spiritual thought, whose main goal is to open the path to liberation from suffering of human life and self-knowledge. Although there are some fundamental differences in philosophy, such as the concept of self-consciousness -there is a deep similarity between the Buddha's Middle way and the Eightfold

Path of Yoga. The Buddha took various elements of the yoga system, such as meditation, mental control, and self-purification and transformed them into a practical and humanistic philosophy. His Saipatthana, Vipassana, and the Eightfold Path create a way to self-realization and liberation that is not just theoretical, but practical and easy to understand for everyday life.

At present situation, where mental stress, restlessness, and self-isolation are on the rise, the combination of Buddha's teachings and the philosophy of Yoga can show the way to a peaceful, conscious, and moral way of life. The combined understanding of these two streams not only gives people spiritual liberation, but also promotes compassion, mercy, and equality in society.

Reference:

1. Bodhi, b. (Ed.). (2005). In the Buddha's words: An anthology of discourses from the Pāli Canon. Wisdom Publications.
2. Bryant, E. F. (2009). The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali: A new edition, translation, and commentary. North Point Press.
3. Buddhaghosa. (1999). The Path of purification (Visuddhimagga) (b. Nāṇāmoli, Trans.) Buddhist Publication society. (Original work composed ca. 5th century)
4. Easwaran, e. (2007). The Dhammapada (2nd ed.). Nilgiri Press.
5. Feuerstein, G. (2008). The Yoga tradition: Its history, literature, philosophy and practice (Revised ed.) Hohm Press.
6. Gethin, R. (1998). The foundation of Buddhism. Oxford University Press.
7. Hanh, T. N. (1998). The heart of the Buddha's teaching: Transforming suffering into peace, joy, and liberation. Broadway Books.
8. Nāṇāmoli, B. (1991). The path of serenity and insight. Buddhist Publication Society.
9. Samuel, G (2008). The origins of yoga and Tantra: Indic religious to the thirteenth century. Cambridge University Press.