

YOGA AS A PATH OF SPIRITUAL ADVANCEMENT AND SELF REALIZATION

Rinku Paul, Assistant Professor In Sanskrit, Hooghly Mohsin College

ABSTRACT

What is the supreme goal of human existence? It is here that yoga occupies a unique position and gives a categorical answer to this vital question. Yoga not only gives an integrating ideal but also provides techniques for attaining the goal of self-realization. Yoga-psychology is the nucleus of Indian psychology as a whole. Yoga is so very practical that can be lived every moment in life. Yoga is neither a sect nor a religion nor merely an abstract philosophy. If philosophy is the vision of truth, then yoga is its practical side making for its realization. To many it signifies some deep breathing exercises or bodily postures. But yoga is not so much a mode of physical exercises. In fact a man without limbs can practice yoga. Yoga is not only a view of life but also a way of life. Being a yogi he has to be transformed and renewed in life and mind. Yoga is a unique synthesis in which physical culture, spiritual discipline, ethics and psychology are harmoniously integrated into one. Thus, rightly conceived and correctly interpreted, yoga is the art of healthy living- physically, mentally, ethically, and spiritually. Yogasiddhi is the gospel of perfect life.

There are three motives which impel a man to the practice of yoga:

1. Desire to escape from the burden of life
2. Desire for psychic power.
3. Search for one's reality.

Search for reality or self-exploration is the only satisfactory motive for pursuit of yoga. Meditation has been the spiritual discipline of yogis in India since ancient times. The practice of meditation constitutes the very core of spiritual life and it is often referred to as 'dhyanyoga'. In this connection Swami Akhilananda states: 'Apart from its religious value, the practice of meditation has a tremendous influence in building up the total personality of man.'

KEYWORDS: Yoga, self-realization, personality, meditation

Introduction:

Yoga is derived from Sanskrit word ‘Yuj’ which means ‘to unit’ to join and indicates completion with the addition of the suffix ghan. This classical root yuj survives in German Joch, Latin jugun and also forms the parent root of English ‘yoke’ means ‘to couple’ to connect. Thus etymologically yoga means union of the individual soul with the universal soul. The goal of religion and of philosophy is union with the ULTIMATE. And yoga means just that union. Worldly life is an embodiment of yoga (union) and viyoga(disunion). But viyoga is inevitable in case of union with anything worldly and is thus notyoga in the proper sense of the term. The union that knows no parting or separation is the real yoga.

To understand correctly ‘what is yoga’? it is necessary to answer the counter question ‘what yoga is not’? Yoga is typically Indian in origin and has given content and orientation to psychological thinking in the East. In fact Yoga-psychology is the nucleus of Indian psychology as a whole. It is so very practical that can be lived every moment in life. Yoga is neither a sect nor a religion nor merely an abstract philosophy. If philosophy is the vision of truth, then yoga is its practical side making for its realization. To many it signifies some deep breathing exercises or bodily postures. But yoga is not so much a mode of physical exercises. In fact a man without limbs can practice yoga. Yoga is not only a view of life but also a way of life. Being a yogi he has to be transformed and renewed in life and mind. Yoga is a unique synthesis in which physical culture, spiritual discipline, ethics and psychology are harmoniously integrated into one. Thus, rightly conceived and correctly interpreted, yoga is the art of healthy living- physically, mentally, ethically, and spiritually. Yogasiddhi is the gospel of perfect life.

The clue to the modern views of personality is found in the concept of ‘asmita’ as expounded in ‘Yogasutras’(Y.S.II,6). According to Patañjali the transformation of purusa and buddhi into an apparent identity is an affliction called ‘asmitā or egoism. The feeling of personality arises from ahamkara or the principal of egoity which causes the exclusive feeling of ‘I’ and ‘Mine’. This view of personality when examined in the light of yogic view is due to avidyā or ignorance. This is traceable the false identification of purusa with prakriti and its component parts. According to Sri Aurobindo this view of personality which rests upon egoism is superficial. The reality behind personality can be known by going deep within ourselves and “when we have seen both ourself and our nature as a whole”. Indian wisdom

conceives this ego-personality as an illusion and suggests that to die to this pseudo-self is to realize one's real personality. It has been suggested in the Upanisads that one should peel off the five kosas or sheaths which represent layers of ego-personality to find the Atman which constitutes the real personality. The discipline of yoga is directed towards this consummation, that is, realization of this central core of personality.

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Yoga in generic sense refers to many forms of branches of yoga described in various yoga samhitas. It usually refers to principal yogas- Hathayoga, Karmayoga, Bhaktiyoga, Dhyanyoga, Rajayoga, Atma-yoga, Mantrayoga. But in a restricted and specific sense it generally means the yoga system of Patañjali. When yoga is mentioned without any epithet, it usually means Rajayoga. Patañjali's Yogasutras are the most important and the most authoritative work on this subject. The main contribution of this classic is eight-limbed or Astānga-Yoga usually called Rājyoga. It is so called as 'king of yogas' or the 'Royal way' as it is universally accepted by all other yogas and basically underlies them all. The term yoga is rather ambiguously used in three senses:

- i)The doctrine which describes union,
- ii) The process of discipline, both generally and specially, exercised in seeking union.
- iii) The state attained by such discipline i.e. the union complete or partial.

In whatever sense yoga is used it involves first, last and always, cessation of the mental function (citta-vṛttis). And Patañjali uses the very same words to define yoga(Y.S.1-2). This is the most precise and expressive definition of yoga which contains in one sutra the quintessence of Rāja-Yoga. The term yoga is used not only for ‘uniting processes’ but also for ‘isolating processes’ which are intended to help in the right direction towards ultimate reality. All the different forms of yoga though varying in approach have in common the goal of sāmādhi, self-realization or kaivalya. It is the basic thesis of all yogas that they regard the attainment of calm, one-pointed mind as a pre-requisite to this goal. In Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna advices Arjuna to lead a contemplative life and to practice meditation,Rāja-Yoga.

Steps of Integration in Rāja-Yoga

PatañjalaYogasutras divide the process of yoga into four stages(Padas):

1. Samādhīpāda- that of identification;
2. Sādhana-pāda- that of practice;
3. Vibhūtipāda- that of attainment;
4. Kaivalya-pāda -that of supreme realization.

However, Rāja-Yoga essentially comprises of eight main steps, which should preferably be practised in the given order in order to attain to yoga. These steps as given in Yogasutra 29 of Sādhana-pāda are called in Sanskrit:

“यमनियमासनप्राणायामप्रत्याहारधारणाध्यानसमाधयोऽष्टवङ्गानि” । (पातञ्जलयोगदर्शन II.29)

These steps will now be taken up in the subsequent sections in the prescribed order as given in Patañjali’sYogasutras. However, the first two steps (i.e. yama and niyama) which primarily deal with ethical discipline have been taken together. Likewise, the next three steps(i.e.āsana,prānāyāma, pratyahara) which primarily deal with the body and the senses have been taken up together. Taking collectively, these five steps constitute the external steps or limbs of,Rāja-Yoga.The last three steps called the internal limbs of ,Rāja-Yoga, primarily deal with the training and useof the mind. As these steps have profound psychological and spiritual significance for the main problem of integration of personality, these steps have been dealt with separately in three sections. These three namely dhāraṇa, dhyāna and samādhī together constitute ayogic technique designated as’ Samyama’(Y.S.III.4).

YAMA AND NIYAMA

In the eightfold path of Rāja-Yoga, the first two steps lay the very foundation for the path of yoga; yoga practice has often been referred as a way (mārga). According to Patañjali, the five restraints(yamas) as enumerated inYogasutras “ अहिंसासत्यास्तेयब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रहा यमाः। (पातञ्जलयोगदर्शन II.30)

are “ahimsa(non-violence),truth, non stealing,brahmacarya(chastity) and non-possession”, and the five observances(niyamas)asenumerated inYogasutras –

“ शौचसन्तोषतपःस्वाध्यायेश्वरप्रणिधानानि नियमाः(पातञ्जलयोगदर्शन II.32)

are “ purity, contentment, penance, study of scriptures and surrender to God”.

Yama and Niyama constitute ethical discipline and are basically concerned with ethics and morality in the broadest sense of these terms. The practice of these preliminary steps not only eradicates physical and mental ailments but also strengthens nervous system. Practice of yama actually means the practice of right conduct(sadacara), which has been emphasized in every religion. The noble eightfold path of Buddha Primarily deals with the practice of yama. In a sense, yama might be called inhibitionin psychoanalytic terminology. However, this can be called so with one very important reservation that in yoga this inhibition is a conscious practice directed to a well- defined aim. Niyama means observance of limits within which tension-free life may be lived. The practice of very first yama(ahimsa) serves the aim of clearing up built-in aggressions; and the practice of very first niyama (sauca) clears up the built- in compulsions. Thus yamas and niyamas which demand searching self-analysis have therapeutic value for mental integration.

In the ultimate analysis adequate practice of yama and niyama leads to purification of mind, which according toPatañjali is absolutely necessary for spiritual growth. Though yoga prescribes a code of mental and moral discipline yet it is not essentially a science of ethics. Dr. Radhakrishnan said, ‘The spiritual is not an extension of ethical it is a new dimension altogether.’ In- fact in yoga, the practice of ethics and higher psychology go together and underlie all spiritual realization. Ethical steps of yama and niyama primarily give spiritual turn to primary urges by sublimating and purifying them, resulting in greater harmony and integration. If one carries on the practice of yama and niyama for a long time and one ultimately becomes master of senses and mind is able to follow spiritual life without any

conflicts. This practice contributes to what is called ‘cittasuddhi’(Psychic Purity) which according to yoga is a pre-requisite for complete integration of personality.

ĀSANA-PRĀNĀYAMA- PRATYĀHĀRA

In yoga practice, the body should be placed in a favourable and conformable position before one can begin the practice of concentration and meditation. In fact it is considered desirable that the aspirant should choose the same spot, the same hour besides affixed posture for this purpose. Yama and niyama which are based on the principles of economy of nervous energy help the practice of asana, the third limb of yoga. Asanas are also directed to a similar purpose and help in the release of musculature towards free-functioning of bio- physical part of the personality. In point of fact, the first five limbs of Rāja-Yoga are intended to bring the body and the mind to the highest possible peak of health and efficiency.

“स्थिरसुखमासनम् ।” (पातञ्जलयोगदर्शन II.46)

The word “asana” means “easy, comfortable”. Patañjali, has defined it in the following way: ‘To sit in a posture fixedly and comfortably for a sufficient length of time is āsana, (Y.S.II.46). when one can comfortably remain in one particular posture at least for three hours at a stretch, he is said to have attained perfection in that āsana(āsanajaya). Āsanas not only give elasticity and endurance to the body but they also give a feeling of well-being to the mind.

“तस्मिन् सति श्वासप्रश्वासयोर्गतिविच्छेदः प्राणायामः ।” (पातञ्जलयोगदर्शन II.49)

Prānāyāma , the fifth limb of Rāja-yoga, has been defined by Patañjali in Yogasūtra 49 of Sādhana-pāda. Like āsanas, prānāyāma is also a bio- physical process. Both āsanas and prānāyāma bring about integration and enhancement of prana-sakti, the vital force. Asanas, prānāyāma has a greater bearing on the control and discipline of mind. The spiritual significance of āsanas and prānāyāma lies in the freedom of the mind through the release of certain vital areas of the body like spiritual cord, cortex and muscles etc.

“स्वविषयासम्प्रयोगे चित्तस्वरूपानुकार इवेन्द्रियाणं प्रत्याहारः ।” (पातञ्जलयोगदर्शन II.54)

Pratyāhārā, the fifth limb of Rāja-yoga, is the one step preliminary to the practice of dhāraṇa (concentration). “When the senses have withdrawn from their objects and transmuted themselves into the modes of consciousness, this is called pratyāhārā.” (Y.S.II.54). In actual

practice pratyāhārā means to cultivate “unconcern” towards the so-called vital concerns of life. Preliminary steps of yama, niyama, asana, prāṇāyāma help the practice of pratyāhārā in the release of acquired emotional charge and giving a proper orientation to life organism as a whole. In this direction of setting life free from its conditionings, this process which begins with yama reaches its climax in pratyāhārā. However, pratyāhārā itself finds its fulfillment in the stage of samādhi. Pratyāhārā by serving this end, reinforces the process of integration of personality.

DHĀRANĀ

Now we shall deal with three internal limbs (antaranga) of Astangayoga; the triad of which is characterized as samyama. The first of these three, which is the sixth limb of Rāja-yoga is called ‘dhāranā’, which etymologically means to “hold fast”. According to Patañjali’s -

“देशवन्धचित्तस्य धारणा।” (पातञ्जलयोगदर्शन III.1)

“Fixity of mind on one spot is called dhāranā”. (Y.S.III.1)

It is for the perfection in dhāranā that the first five steps of external yoga have to be practiced. Specially success in dhāranā is essentially dependant on pratyāhārā. Swami Akhilananda observes: “Apart from the religious and philosophical attainments of man through the practice of concentration, we also recognize its pragmatic value in the integration of human mind and personality.”

DHYĀNA

Dhyāna is the next logical step after dhāranā; with the attainment of perfection in dhāranā, dhyāna starts automatically. Patañjali’s defines it in the following way:

“तत्र प्रत्ययैकतानता ध्यानम्” (पातञ्जलयोगदर्शन III.2)

“Flow of all the mental faculties without cessation towards the object of meditation is called dhyāna or meditation.” (Y.S.III.2)

When the mind’s energies are focused upon one subject whether external or internal, concrete or abstract and if the flow of thoughts remains steady towards that object without any cessation as ‘oil poured from the vessel to another’, it is dhyāna or meditation. Meditation is essentially an individual matter in the sense that it is not for society but for one’s spiritual

advancement. The conscious mind may be very wise but the unconscious may be equally foolish and it is essentially the latter which is re-educated by meditation. At the stage of meditation (dhyāna) needs to be clearly distinguished from concentration (dhāranā). Concentration is the first stage of the process which develops into meditation. The practice of dhyāna gradually leads one to the spiritual freedom. Thus the process of dhyāna helps in revealing total range of conscious i.e. the unconscious, the conscious and the superconscious. Consequently dhyāna yoga develops the dynamic powers of the total mind. In this connection Swami Akhilananda states: ‘Apart from its religious value, the practice of meditation has a tremendous influence in building up the total personality of man.

SAMĀDHI

Dhyāna reaches its culmination in samādhi. Dharana, Dhyāna and samādhi are the three consecutive stages of the same process of concentration of mind. Samādhi is the fixity of the mind. According to Patañjali’s

“तदेवार्थमात्रनिर्भासं स्वरूपशून्यमिव समाधिः।” (पातञ्जलयोगदर्शन III.3)

Patañjali’s definition of samādhi (Y.S.III.3) has been translated by Swami Prabhavānanda in the words: “When , in meditation, the true nature of the object shines forth, not distorted by the mind of the perceiver, that is absorption(samādhi) .” Samādhi is generally classified as of two kinds : samprajñāta and asamprajñāta. In this first kind, mind takes up various aspect of prakṛti for communion, with the result that consciousness of individuality still remains. In the second kind there is no substratum for meditation and the individuality is completely lost. In this stage there is no trace of cittavṛtti except the residuum left by previous functions of citta(samskara). This is seedless Samādhi, the highest stage of Patañjala Yoga. In Samādhi complete conquest of an individual’s past, of his unconscious is achieved; his emotions are fully integrated and his intellect, emotions and will are coordinated. Thus apart from spiritual and psychic value, it has profound therapeutic significance. In the end, it may be asserted from yogic viewpoint that full spontaneity, full expressiveness, and full freedom remain unattained until the goal of yoga—that is Samādhi—is achieved.

Yoga is primarily a method of self-culture towards the growth of perfection of personality. This ideal of perfect personality or liberated personality finds its expression in the Indian ideal jīvanmukti, according to which personality is fullness, perfection and wholeness. Towards this aim, yoga does not exclude empirical goals but provides for them as progressive

stages to self- perfection. In the words of Indra Sen: “Yoga is a systematic study of personality as a whole, empirical and the ultimate, with a practical normative standpoint.”

Conclusion :

Yoga psychology in its pursuit of discovery of self has made a thorough investigation into human personality. In this earnest search for its ultimate knowledge, it finally came to discover that essence of personality was a consciousness which is qualitatively superior to normal consciousness. This self-consciousness which is an essential quality of self or personality. Yoga has been able to know that the true secret of personality lies in the discovery of purusa or realization of the self.

Swami Siddheswarananda said, we should not imagine that meditation furnishes us with a means to evade our obligations, and offers us an escape from life. Meditation will prepare us, if we follow in practice the rules of yoga to fulfill, better than in the past, our individual duties and obligations. That is because we rebuild our character upon solid foundations. In this way, everyone becomes, according to one's disposition, a better citizen of the world and a more useful servant of humanity.

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