

Universal Approach to Yoga Philosophy in the Context of Indian Philosophical Heritage

Dr. (Mrs) Mukta Biswas

Yoga philosophy, one of the most developed systems of Indian philosophy constitutes an integral part of rich heritage of India. The origin of *yoga* is untraceable and lost in antiquity. *Yoga* postures depicted on seals, stones and statues discovered among the relics of the Indus Valley civilisation indicate that it was prevalent in India even before the advent of Aryans. The word *yoga* is used in various senses. It means spiritual unification, i.e., the union of the soul with absolute, concentration of the mind and complete suppression of the mental modes. In the *Amarakosa*¹ and the *Mahabharata*² the word *yoga* is used in the sense of means. In most of the Vedic texts the concept of *yoga* has been clearly mentioned. In the *Rgveda*,³ the term *yoga* has been taken in the sense of yoking or harnessing, achieving the unachieved and the like. The sense of yoking is used in many later Vedic works also e.g. *Satpathabrahmana*⁴ *Taittiriyabrahmana*⁵ etc. In the *Gayatri* hymn of the *Rgveda*, Visvamitra meditated on the glory of the Sun for the illumination of his understanding, *bhargodevasyadhimahi*.⁶ Here, it is not only a prayer but an intellectual meditation. The meaning of *yoga* as meditation is echoed in the *Samaveda*⁷ and *Suklayajurveda*⁸ too. With the growth of religious and philosophical ideas in the *Rgveda*, the word *yoga* which is originally applied to control of steeds began to be applied to the control of senses. In the Upanisadic literature *yoga* is spoken of as restraint of the senses through which the final realization can be achieved.⁹ The *Srimadbhagavadgita* defines *yoga* as the higher state of mind from where, a person is never shaken even by

the greatest pain or misery. That state free from all pain and misery is *yoga* according to *Gita*. Yoga is also defined in the *Gita* as skill of preserving the equanimity or equality of the mind¹⁰. Yoga according to Patanjali's definition is the final annihilation of all the mental modes.¹¹ According to Patanjali, *yoga* means an internal discipline by which the mind is progressively stilled and taken up into the stage of *samadhi*. This concept of *yoga* has a great impact on the life and works of contemporary Indian philosophers like Swami Vivekananda, Rishi Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Radhakrishnan, Rabindranath Tagore and others. They emphasized the importance of *yoga*. Sri Aurobindo, one of the greatest mystic philosophers of the twentieth century, maintains that *yoga* is a process by which an individual transcends from the empirical to the trans-empirical level. It raises the ordinary human mind to the higher and wider modes of consciousness. In brief, *yoga* transforms ordinary human personality into a supermind. In this paper an attempt has been made to highlight Patanjali and Sri Aurobindo's view in the context of Yoga philosophy. Aurobindo's concept of *yoga* had an immense impact on Indian mind, impressed the public opinion in western countries and influenced the leaders of various civil, political and human rights movement. The Yoga System of Sri Aurobindo is called *Supramental Yoga* or *Integral Yoga* or *Yoga of Self-Surrender*. It is a system of spiritual practice with the aid of which a *sadhaka* may ascend to the level of trans-empirical reality and also descend to the level of life and matter of divinise them. According to Sri Aurobindo, the supermind is the higher level of existence, which is beyond matter, life and mind. It has the capacity for growing upwards and coming face to face with *Saccidananda Brahman* and descending down to the level of matter, life and ordinary mind and divinising them. A direct link is established between *Saccidananda Brahman* on the one hand, and the state of ordinary human existence on the other, through the super-mind.

It is to be noted that besides *Patanjali Yogasutra*, there are numerous works on Yoga namely *Sivasamhita*, *Devibhagavata*, *Hathoyogapradipika*, *Yogasastra of Dattatreya*, *Gherandasamhita*, *Satcakranirupana* etc. There are numerous Upanisads affiliated to Yoga namely *Nadabindu*, *Yogatattva*, *Mauktika*, *Yogacudamoni* etc. Moreover, numerous Tantra works and works by Gorakhnatha also deal

with the philosophy of Yoga. Yoga philosophy, an ancient school of thought, has a perennial value for the human beings in all ages and in all spheres of life. Yoga aims at making human personality healthy, normal and balanced by removing its physical and mental disorders. It considerably increases an individual's physical fitness and mental energy. The higher and pure consciousness is aroused in an individual through Yoga. An individual is able to rise to higher state of existence by following the methods of Yoga. In the present modern scientific age, life is replete with tensions and stresses. The prolonged suppression of emotions like anger, fear, despair etc. results in various mental disorders. Modern medical science also accepts that emotional disturbances lead to physical and mental ailments. According to Patanjali, physical health and mental health are equally important for the normal development of personality. Nonetheless, mental health is more important than physical health because it is the mind, which can give appropriate orientation to personality development. It has been found by modern psychiatrists that certain types of physical disorders are due to mental causes. For instance in some cases indigestion, constipation, headache, affections of the heart and kidneys are caused by certain types of affections of the mind. Persons living in advanced societies are fast losing meaning of their lives. Despite the fact that they live in the midst of crowds they have a deadful feeling of loneliness and isolation and despite the fact that they live in the midst of material abundance, they have a feeling of boredom, worthlessness and aimlessness. Many of them suffer insomnia, free floating anxiety, hypertension, split personality and so on. There is high incidence of mental ill health in industrially advanced societies.

According to Patanjali, the mental modes are the sources of sufferings. The main causes of sufferings are nescience or ignorance (*avidya*), feeling of individuality (*asmita*), love (*raga*), disgust (*dvesa*) and will to live (*abhinivesa*).¹² The concept of *Avidya* is accepted by almost all the schools of Indian philosophy as the root cause of sufferings. According to Yoga, *avidya* consists in mistaking the non-eternal for the eternal, the impure for the pure, the unpleasant for the pleasant and not-self for the self.¹³ Due to *avidya*, one forgets the real identity of anything. On the otherhand *avidya* is the cause of *asmita*. self-esteem, egoism, the sense of the supreme importance of I is the result of *avidya*. in the

Yogasutra, *asmita* is defined as erroneous identification of oneself with the instruments of body and mind.¹⁴ With such an identification, everybody wants to assert himself and dominate the objective world. If one fails to do so, he or she gets frustrated. The third kind of sufferings is *raga* which is defined by Patanjali as the desire for an object which yielded pleasure in the past and is remembered in the present time.¹⁵ It arises from recollection of pleasurable memories. Anything that is pleasant and agreeable to one mind becomes attached to that. The thirst and the hankering after pleasure or the means to get it preceded by a remembrance of the pleasure, who has enjoyed it is called *raga* or attachment. *Dvesa* is the fourth kind of sufferings. According to Patanjali *dvesa* is the anger towards an object which yielded pain in the past and is remembered in the present time.¹⁶ It is not only aversion to painful things but also anger towards them. The anxiety wish to removal or the means to overcome preceded by remembrance of the pain is called *raga*. The last kind of sufferings is *abhinivesa* or fear for death. People want to enjoy every moment and tries to avoid the painful feeling of death. Yoga philosophy defines *abhinivesa* as the instinctive love of life and dread of death.¹⁷ Vacaspati Misra in his *Tattvavaisaradi* defines that *abhinivesa* is the fear of death. This fear is common to both the men and animals, wise and ignorant.¹⁸ It is possible for an individual to reduce those five sufferings of his mind through the practice of yogic concentration. Yoga advocates control over the body, the senses and the mind. A sound mind needs a sound body. Sensual and passions distract the body as well as the mind. To overcome them, Yoga advocates the eightfold path of discipline (*astanga yoga*)¹⁹ consisting of abstention (*yama*), observance (*niyama*), posture (*asana*), regulation of breath (*pranayama*), withdrawal of senses (*pratyahara*), attention (*dharana*), meditation (*dhyana*) and concentration (*samadhi*). Patanjali describes the usefulness of practicing the *yogangas*. He says that through the performance of the *yogangas* and with the dwindling of impurity, there comes about the radiance of wisdom, which develops us to the vision of discernment.²⁰ *Yama* is the first limb of *astanga yoga* which means abstinence. It involves the conscious effort on the part of a practitioner to refrain from doing things that keep his mind involved in the discriminate struggle for survival and satisfaction within the existing scale

of values in life. The *yamas* are five in number, namely *ahimsa* or non-violence, *satya* or truthfulness, *asteya* or non-theft, *brahmacharya* or continence and *aparigraha* or non-acceptance.²¹ *Ahimsa or non-violence* is regarded as an important vow in Patanjali's *Yogasutra*.²² In the view of Patanjali *Ahimsa* or non-violence does not only means abstinence from killing animals or human beings, but also restraining from injuring others physically, verbally and mentally. *Satya* or truthfulness is a great virtue and accepted by all the people. According to Patanjali through the practice of truthfulness, the practitioner gets the power of attaining the fruits of work for himself and for others.²³ The third kind of *yama* is *asteya* or non-theft.²⁴ The next rule in Patanjali's code of social conduct is *brahmacharya* or continence which is actually observed in spiritual discipline. The Yoga philosophy accords high value to *brahmacharya* or continence.²⁵ Here, aspirants are asked to practice continence for the attainment of ultimate goal. The fifth and the final *yama* is *aparigraha* or non-accumulation. Through the practice of non-accumulation, the practitioner becomes non-attached to the worldly things even to the body itself.²⁶ The second *yoganga* of Patanjali's *Raja yoga* is *niyama* or observance.²⁷ *Niyama* consists of *sauca* or cleanliness, *santosa* or contentment, *tapah* or austerity, *svadhyaya* or self-study and *isvarapranidhana* or surrendering to God. *Sauca* means purity. It has two aspects. One is internal and the other is external. Yoga refers not only the external cleanliness, but also internal cleanliness. Internal *sauca* or purity of mind occupies an important position in yogic discipline. Hence, it is necessary on the part of the practitioner to be pure by mind. When the impurities of mind viz. pride, jealousy, hatred etc. are completely washed away, then the is said to be internally pure.²⁸ The second type of *niyama* is *santosa* or contentment. Discontentment leads to suffering. In the Yoga philosophy, it is said that contentment culminates into the best type of happiness.²⁹ The third type of *niyama* is *tapas* which traditionally means austerity. *Tapas* has its spiritual value. Through the practice of austerity, the body and senses have got the resistance power.³⁰ The fourth kind of *niyama* is *svadhyaya* or self study. One should read such books which is beneficial and will help one to realize the transitoriness of the world.³¹ *Isvarapranidhana* means surrendering to God. Patanjali in his *Yogasutra*

declares that through surrendering to God, the practitioner attains the supra-conscious ecstasy.³² *Asana or posture* is the third step of *astanga yoga*. It means different postures of the body. Yogic *asanas* may produce physical well-being of an individual. If one regularly practices *asanas* he or she may be free from physical ailments and fill in all circumstances.³³ The fourth limb of Patanjali's Yoga is *pranayama* means control of breath. Patanjali in his *Yogasutra* declines that by throwing out and restraining the breath, mind becomes controlled.³⁴ The last outer aspect of the Yoga, according to Patanjali is *Pratyahara* or withdrawal of the senses. Patanjali says that when the senses are restrained from their external objects is called *pratyahara*.³⁵ The fifth step of Raja Yoga is *dharana* or concentration. Patanjali in his *Yogasutra*, defines that holding the mind on a particular object is called *dharana* or concentration.³⁶ The next aspect of the main discipline of Yoga is *dhyana* or meditation. Patanjali defines that *dhyana* is the uninterrupted flow of *citta* towards the object of meditation.³⁷ *Samadhi* or contemplation the final and last step in the practice of Yoga is the ultimate tranquil state of mind. It leads to the realization of the inner self, which is not separate from the universal soul.³⁸

Patanjali's view on *yoga* that it is the complete suppression of all mental modes and that it has the *kaivalya* of the *sadhaka* alone for its aim which can be attained by *yogangas*, is not acceptable to Sri Aurobindo. He aims at the liberation of the cosmos i.e., the liberation not only of the spirit but also of the matter, life and mind from the laws of necessity. Sri Aurobindo had direct intuitive vision of the ultimate reality and he records his spiritual experience in vivid detail. Certain contradictions and inconsistencies, which are found in some of the Vedantic scriptures, were resolved and reconciled by Sri Aurobindo in his Supramental Yoga. According to Sri Aurobindo the spiritual progress of entire humanity may be achieved through the method of Supramental Yoga. In his view, the spiritual ascent of all mankind is the ultimate goal of the Supramental Yoga. According to Sri Aurobindo human beings may attain perfection by following the spirit but rather it means the perfection of the entire personality both physical and spiritual. It is necessary, therefore, that the body of an individual must undergo transformation so that it may perform its functions in accordance with the highest spiritual of the human personality. In his

view, the body of an individual must be ultimately divinised. The actions of an individual may become divinised when the body becomes divinised. The Vedic seers speak of *jyotirmayadeha* through its spiritual transformation.

Sri Aurobindo also believed that the human body could be divinized and it could be made luminous through *adhyatmayoga*. Sri Aurobindo laid stress on the quietness and peace of mind for practising Supramental Yoga. In his view, silence and equanimity of mind are most important prerequisites for practicing Supramental Yoga.

In modern age, the advancement of science has made tremendous material progress but there is rapid decline in moral values in human beings. The moral principles are essential for a sound health. It may also be noted that the moral principles laid down in Yoga philosophy enable a person to be a good human being and to be an embodiment of character, nobility and humility. Many individuals try to reach their final goal of affluence and power by ignoring ethical principles while adopting their means. The technologically advanced nations of the world are engaged in developing the science of mechanized warfare for mass annihilation of life and property of weaker and less developed nations. Many philosophers and scientists are getting deeply concerned to find the destructive and pernicious effects of mechanized warfare on human beings. In 1955, Einstein and Russel expressed a deep concern over the possibility of a nuclear holocaust. The Russel-Einstein appeal cautioned mankind in the following word, "we appeal as human beings to human beings. Remember your humanity and forget the rest. If you can do so the way lies to a new paradise; if you can not, there lies before you the risk of universal death." It is not suggested here that mankind should completely arrest the development of modern civilization and revive the atmosphere of *yogic sadhana*. It maybe emphasized that the yogic view of life may give a new orientation to the development of human civilization. Human beings may be able to rediscover the deeper significance of human existence if the development of people is regulated by the basic principles of Yoga philosophy. In today's ever-changing, fast moving world with its frenetic pace of life and mental pressure more and more people are turning towards ancient ways to relieve stress and regain balance in their lives and thoughts. Studies have shown that

people practising *yoga* have experienced dramatic increases in lung capacity improved ability to handle stress and reducing the body weight, cholesterol and blood sugar levels.

In conclusion, it can be said that the concept of Yoga philosophy presents a novel, optimistic, exhilarating and ennobling life-view, which may save mankind from its present state of aimlessness. Philosophers like Patanjali and Sri Aurobindo have brought out the spiritual value of Yoga philosophy in the midst of the masses and used it as an effective weapon to fight against several social evils and to bring about communal harmony in the society.

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