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Teachings of Yoga Darsana: Assumptions and Practices

Abstract: The present paper aims at explaining the assumptions and practices which Yoga Darsana puts forward. The purpose behind writing this paper is to reveal the realization that Yoga Darsana aims at making our living meaningful to ourselves and to others living with us. It should not be a false claim on our part that we are human beings full of compassion and mindfulness. If there is compassion then the mind must be free from the hurdles of expressing it. Yoga prescribes ways and means to free the mind.

Keywords: Chitta, Chitta-bhumi, Yoga-bhumi

Yoga- Sutras- Patanjali Yoga-sutras begins with the sutra; “Atha Yoganusasanam¹”. Here the prefix ‘anu’ before the word ‘sasanam’ or instruction in Yoga indicates that the instructions on Yoga had been handed from earlier times. Moreover; the sutras are a set of literary text which must have some defining marks or characteristics; namely (a) absence of ambiguity; (b) absence of unnecessary words (c) should be understood from different stand points and (d) absence of flaws. So, yoga sutra aims at the purification of minds by the help of unambiguous, necessary and use of easy comprehensible words by all.

Meaning and Significance of the Word ‘Yoga’: The word yoga comes from the root word ‘yuj’. In the Rig Veda the meaning of the word ‘yuj’ is yoking of a spirited horse. In Kathopnishad it was applied in the sense of the control of the senses and the organs of action. The senses and the organs of actions may be considered as uncontrolled ways of gaining and gathering of knowledge which needs to be harnessed. The physical sense of ‘joining together’; be it in the case of a spirited horse or the harnessing of the senses and organs of action gave way to the spiritual sense which ultimately indicates to samadhi.

The spiritual sense of bringing or joining together

which the word ‘Yoga’ actually points at comes from the Upanishadic teaching of the cause of sin and sorrow due to the separation of the individual soul from the absolute. Patanjali is concerned with the spiritual sense of the word ‘Yoga’ which aims at the bringing together of the individual and the supreme soul or the absolute. This union is possible according to Patanjali by way of ‘Viyoga’ or disjunctions of desires from objects of the world. It is a noticeable fact that Patanjali Yoga sutra aims at Viyoga or detachment but with two different aims. Patanjali aims at overcoming the detachment between the individual self and the absolute while establishing the detachment of human desires from worldly objects. So Patanjali stresses on the sustained effort necessary to get over the separation or Viyoga so that Yoga sets in; where Yogais the sustained effort after the restraintment of the senses and control of the mind. This may thus lead to Samadhi¹. This may be further clarified by the help of three distinct points based on the connotations of the word ‘Yoga’ thus:

- (a) It indicates the process by way of which individual self is brought into contact with the absolute (Yoga)
- (b) It indicates to Samadhi which is the state of joining all mental functions (Yoga)
- (c) It indicates the primary disjunction (Viyoga) of desires from objects.

Yoga claims a higher spiritual life by the amalgamation of the inner impulses with the stream of psycho-vital impulse.

The Basic Assumptions of Yoga Philosophy: Yoga sutras encloses both the Science and Philosophy of the human mind which are but its basic assumptions. The human mind is constantly exposed to the sensory and motor stimuli to which it adjusts. The Science behind the Yoga sutras is to bring about a change in the activities of the human mind to transform the psychic organism and raise the level of his consciousness.

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The Philosophy behind the Yoga sutras is to reveal the fact that man is capable of infinite development since there are limitless possibilities of the human soul. Human beings as psychic organisms are not confined to his sensory experiences. There are other avenues which the human soul may achieve which are actually blind to the external world of objective realities. Yoga believes that the universe is not only what is revealed to our bodily experiences. In fact, the bodily aspect is only that aspect of the human soul which it shares with animals of lower order. The psychic life must be made free from its connections with the physical objects or vishaya.

The Yoga Scheme or Method of Making the Mind Free: The Yoga scheme is to ascend from the plane of daily life to the plane of pure consciousness. This scheme of ascend must be understood by a pre-understanding of the Samkhya scheme of descend.

The Samkhya scheme goes thus:

1. Perception of real object happens which is distinct from illusion or Viparyaya.
2. The perception of real objects happens by way of sense organs
3. The mind or manas reflects on the perception made by the senses. It assimilates and discriminates.
4. The Ahamkara or the empirical ego appropriates this discriminate apprehension of the mind and makes it as a part of the empirical unity of apperception.
5. The Buddhi or the intellect is the will to react to the object perceived.
6. The Purusha or self enjoys the perception of the object. The Purusha is the enjoyer and the cognizer.

The Samkhya scheme of descend considers Manas, Ahamkara and Buddhi as parts of one Antahkarana. Manas achieves nischaya-jnana or definite knowledge of an object which Ahamkara appropriates to itself and produces Abhimāna². The Buddhi then comes in to decide how to react on the piece of knowledge. The Yoga scheme of ascend aims at the purification of the Chitta by defining the conditions of the mind which it naturally tends to rest. The Yoga scheme is thus more direct in its aim. Yoga aims at the normal pattern and states of the Chitta so that it can ultimately point out at the Yoga-bhumi which are congenial to concentration. This pointing out of Yoga-

bhumi out of the Chitta-bhumi was to attain the goal; namely to make the mind empty of its contents of all sensory experience. The Samkhya aim of showing the mind as being the highest or the most subtle form of matter is directly addressed by Yoga by concentrating on the manas itself and its purification.

Chitta-bhumi and Yoga-bhumi: The five patterns or states in which Chitta has a natural tendency to rest are:

1. Kshipta - Here the Chitta is found to be restless and wandering (bhramati) from one object to another.
2. Mûdha - Here the Chitta is found to be absorbed in Vishaya and pleasures and blinded by anger.
3. Vikshipta - Here Chitta is found in a state of distraction which is occasionally broken by a state of concentration. In this state the mind looks forward to the pleasant and avoids the unpleasant.
4. Ekāgra - A focused state of the Chitta at any one object or any one thought of an object.
5. Niruddha - Here the mind stays with only its innate dispositions which is possible due to the inhibition of conflicting functions.

Out of the five patterns in which the mind naturally resides, the last two namely Ekāgra and Niruddha are called the Yoga-bhumi or the state favorable for the practice of concentration. It must be noted that concentration may be possible also in the other three states which are called the Chitta-bhumi. The Chitta-bhumi are states where concentration would break for many a case. It is from the state of Ekāgra that this breaking of the concentration is not there and so Samprajnata Samadhi is possible. The point is the Samadhi attained at the stage of Ekāgra is graduated in the form of a series namely; Vitarka, Vichāra, Ananda and Asmitā². These four levels may be explained thus:

1. Vitarka - Here the object of contemplation may be for instance a figure.
2. Vichāra - Here the concentration is around the thought that the subtle is the cause of the gross.
3. Ananda - It is a stage of contemplation where only a state of blissfulness devoid of object persist. It is a state of objectless blissfulness.
4. Asmitā - It is a stage of contemplation where only a sense of selfhood persists.

It is when this sense of selfhood also ceases to exist at the stage of Niruddha, then Asamprajnata Samadhi sets in. It must be noted that Kshipta, Mûdha, Vikshipta, Ekâgra and Niruddha are all Chitta-bhumi but Ekâgra and Niruddha are in addition of being Chitta-bhumi; are Yoga-bhumi as well. Now though Ekâgra and Niruddha may be considered as favorable stages for the practice of concentration still attainment of Samadhi is not possible all at once. The requirement for the attainment of the stage of Samadhi initiates gradually at the Ekâgra state but nevertheless is fully attained in the Niruddha stage. In fact, the hierarchy of attainment of mindfulness in the Ekâgra stage shows that Yoga aims at slow and gradual attainment of the purification of mind. This also shows the many layers or stages in which the mind may be found to have a natural tendency to persist. The Yoga explanation of the different levels of contemplation at the stage of Ekâgra for the attainment of Samprajnata Samadhi teaches us that the mind in fact has a natural tendency towards the stage of Samadhi as well. Moreover, if the Manas is actually capable of attainment of an objectless stage of contemplation where the sense of selfhood also ceases to exist then it would not be wrong to hold that Manas is the natural instrument or tool for purification. The mind being overloaded by tertiary thoughts tend to malfunction and we tend to nurture a mind clothed with impurities. The Yoga teachings shows the real nature of the mind and helps it to be free of the clutches of matter.

Chittavrittis: Its classes and the five afflictions : Chittavrittis are the process and ways of the working of the Chitta. The possible mental processes are; Pramâna, Viparyaya, Vikalpa, Nidrâ and Smriti². These Vrittis of Chitta are explained by Vyasa as falling under two classes with reference to their effects namely (a) Klishta Vritti and (b) Aklishta Vritti. The Klishta vritti are the mental processes or movements of the mind resulting in Klesha or suffering. Aklishta vritti are the mental processes which leads to bliss. Klishta vritti lead us to Pravritti- marga or way of action while the Aklishta-marga leads us to Nirvritti-marga or the way to the cessation of activities. The Kleshas or afflictions to which Klishta vritti leads are five in number namely; (a) Avidya or ignorance, (b) Asmitâ or sense of individuality, (c) Raga or passion (d) Dvesha or hatred and (e) Abhiniveśa or instinctive clinging to life and to self-preservation.

Practices Leading to Chitta-Vritti Nirodha: In order to accomplish Chitta-vritti Nirodha Yoga talks of two fundamental factors; (1) Abhyasa or practice and (2) Vairagya or freedom from passion or objectivity.

Abhyasa - The aim of Yoga is to inhibit those Vrittis of the mind or those activities of the mind which are dictated by Raja and Tama and thereby to attain a state of equipoise or sthiti under the influence of Sattva guna³. This would lead to the undisturbed flow of the mind. The mind will then attain Prasanta-vahita or a regular and undisturbed flow. The inhibition of activities of the mind under the influence of Raja and Tama does not signify the annihilation of Chitta itself. It is the Nirodha of a few Vrittis of Chitta only. Moreover, Chitta being equal to Buddhi which is an evolute of Prakriti is eternal and hence cannot be annihilated. Now to achieve sthiti under the influence of Sattva guna Prayatna or effort is required. Prayatna or effort implies energy or Virya and Utsaha or enthusiasm. Abhyasa thus must be based on strong determination or dridha-bhumi. The process may be summarized as follows; Atmajnana brings about Ichcha, Ichcha brings Prayatna, Prayatna brings Chesta. Yoga says Abhyasa is a prolonged and continuous cultivation of efforts by way of penance, continence, knowledge of the ultimate truths and devotion.

Vairagya - The prolonged cultivation or Abhyasa of the placid states of mind and inhibition of those states which promotes inertia leads to sthiti which in its turn leads to Vairagya in which the mind acquires the strength to control the impulses for the seen and unseen objects of enjoyment. Hence the mind becomes devoid both of the desire and of the rejection of the vishaya. This is possible because the mind is then capable of perceiving the inadequacy of the objects (vishaya-dosha-darsi) which brings about the mind's being passionless. This passionlessness is achieved in four stages namely; (a) Atmajnana samjna, (b) Vyatireka samjna (c) Ekendriya Samjna (d) Vasikara Samjna.

In the first stage the mind is cleared of all its impurities (mala) which drives the mind towards objects. The second stage is where by elimination it is examined what left over impurities still persists in the mind. The third stage is where even after evacuation of the impurities the Chitta itself remains as a sole sense which may still invite objects of desire. The last and the final stage is the highest stage of vairagya and it is the complete conquest over all passions hence leading to a state of passionlessness. The mind via the three early stages of Vairagya attains the perception of the inadequacy of the objects of desire and the impurities thus acquired. The four stages mentioned here is actually the level or hierarchy named as Aparavairagya⁴. Vasikara samjna is the final stage

of Aparavairagya. At Aparavairagya when the mind is at the state of purity or suddhi; there dawns the awareness of Purusha and out of this stage arises Paravairagya with a sense of self-fulfillment.

Conclusion: Lesson for ordinary practitioners of Yoga Darsana - The preliminary discipline for beginners of Yoga Darsana is mentioned in the Sadhana-pada of the Yoga sutra. Beginners must pursue Kriya yoga. The pre-requisite of Kriya yoga is Tapas, Svadhyaya and Isvara paridhana. Discipline in life and knowing oneself is the first step that ordinary practitioners must first achieve. The explanations of Yoga Darsana on mind, its states and activities would be meaningful to an ordinary person only when he is under some routine and responsibility. Following a discipline is nonetheless a prolonged cultivation of one's patience. If a person can follow his ordinary duties well, he is able to know his strengths and flaws. Knowing oneself through

discipline is thus the first pre-requisite of all teachings of Yoga Darsana. □

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