



Yoga Darshana The Unique Contribution of Ancient Indian Philosophy

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Abstract

Broadly speaking, philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom in understanding the fundamental questions concerning knowledge, values, reality, existence with the purpose and meanings in all of them. It involves a systematic, critical and rational enquiry into the core ideas allowing individuals to examine their beliefs, to reflect on their experiences and to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. In such a perennial pursuit, the ancient seekers in India contributed to the world the Vedic wisdom which we call 'Darshan' instead of philosophy. There are six systems of this Vedic philosophy called 'Shada Darshana' such as Nyaya, Baisheshika, Mimamsa, Shankhya, Yoga and Vedanta. Out of these six main school of thoughts it is the Yoga Darshana which is the unique one to practice for perfection in bring the mind body complex into a deep realisation of the fundamental truth, the Unit Source as the divinity within one's own self. There is a wide verity of methods of techniques at one's disposal according to individual propensities and stages in life. These Yogic doctrines are such as Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Raja Yoga/Kriya Yoga, Mantra Yoga, Kundalini Yoga etc. All these doctrines fall into the realm of Yoga Darshana a glimpse of which is provided in this article in view of the fact that this has captured the world attention by a UNESCO declaration to celebrate the International Yoga Day every year on June 21st.

Keywords: *Ancient Indian philosophy, Vedic wisdom, School of thoughts, Yogic doctrines, Universal supreme consciousness, Cosmic intelligence, Ultimate liberation, Primacy of mind, All round wellness.*

Introduction

The Sanskrit word 'Yoga' is derived from its generic verb 'Yuj' which means to link or to connect. The ancient Vedic text Bhagabat Geeta explains this as a process of connecting the individual consciousness to the Universal supreme consciousness. Vedic philosophy holds that there is definitely an all-pervading energy and consciousness with cosmic intelligence as an absolute potentiality which one may call 'Brahman' or God. This is the supreme metaphysical unit source as the possessor and controller of the universal energy, which is un-manifested, undifferentiated potentiality for everything in this phenomenal world including the individual selves. The individual

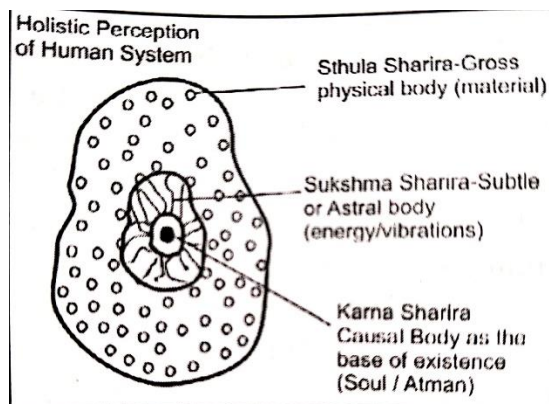


consciousness is a manifestation of this supreme spirit or soul inside the individual body. Shamkshya darsana envisages that on its manifestation in dual form, it is known as Purusha the universal consciousness and 'Prakriti' the universal matter or energy. 'Purusha' becomes bonded being embedded in 'Prakriti' or the material body when it establishes contact with 'Prakriti'. In that sense; the individual soul or conscious being bonded in the material body, needs to be liberated for its realization in its full potentiality as the supreme soul. This can happen when the individual can establish a link with the supreme soul. The purpose of 'Yoga' is to effect this link or to put it in another way to connect the individual being to its ultimate the supreme Brahman'. This is considered as the ultimate goal of human life. Hence 'Yoga' is a divine union not in the sense of merging and becoming one with the Supreme Being in some physical sense. This oneness is spiritual but not physical, which means that without losing the individuality one becomes united with the Supreme Being residing within one's own self in a deep loving relationship with eternal bliss. This is called 'Mokshya' or 'Nirvana', the ultimate liberation from the bondage of the phenomenal world.

In order to understand this so-called bondage and liberation; we may discuss here a holistic perception of the human system and its possible. Subtle evolution according to shamkshya as well as Vedantic traditions. In science, when we talk about human evolution, it refers to morpho-logical changes that occur in a natural process with absolutely no human control. However, it is believed to be possible within human capabilities to accelerate the evolution of certain human attributes like consciousness. This is achievable by adopting some internal technology offered by our ancient saints and seers through spiritual practices including meditative process, what we call 'Yoga'.

The Metaphysical Basis

As human beings, we are made up of body, mind and soul. The physical body consists of flesh and blood of matter. Besides this gross material body (Sthula Sharira), it is believed that there is a subtle or Astral body (Shukshma Sharira) which is simply energy and vibrations that we identify with heart and mind. Finally, there is a third one called the casual body (Karana Sharira) at the center or the base of our existence which we identify with the individual soul or the Atman. The Sthula Sharira or the physical body does not evolve any more in this life after the homeostasis stage had been perfected in the natural evolutionary path lasting over billions of years since the sprouting of life in the past, culminating ultimately in the emergence of human beings on earth. The Karana Sharira or the causal body or soul is also unchanging. So, what really can evolve or transform is the Sukshma Sharira or the subtle body or the mind. In fact, the subtle body consists of four functional parts such as,



- I. Chitta (consciousness)
- II. Manasa (thought)
- III. Buddhi (intellect)
- IV. Ahamkara (ego)

These four works together to make up what we know as mind. Here Chitta or Consciousness is like the canvas of a painter on which the interplay of the other three subtle body components is orchestrated daily. In other words, manasa, buddhi and ahamkara have their existence and action within the field of consciousness. Hence Consciousness does not evolve on its own. It evolves with the help of the other three. If thought evolves into feelings, intellect evolves into wisdom and ego transforms into loving selflessness then only consciousness becomes able to expand from its static narrowness to become dynamic and universal in nature. Such a transformation can be possible, if one can train, control and regulate one's mind. In fact, our mind in general is always restless and disturbed like an ocean in a storm, pulled by wishes and desires, worries and anxieties, fears and apprehensions. It becomes restless and at times turbulent due to various urges and habits in many different directions being scattered in so many different channels. On the other hand, a balanced and regulated mind is well focused to promote wellbeing. The imbalance or restlessness of the mind in general is due to the fact that the three Gunas (innate tendencies or attributes) such as Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, according to Shamkshya, are present ordinarily in different inhomogeneous proportions in all beings. The fundamental nature and psychological disposition of beings is a consequence of the relative proportion of those three gunas. When 'Tamas' overwhelms the other two, it leads to ignorance, delusion, lethargy, destructive behavior. When Rajas predominate, attachment, craving, passion-driven activity and restlessness manifests. But when sattva guna overwhelms the other two, it develops qualities of lucidity, wisdom, constructiveness, harmony and peace of mind. Thus, it is the overwhelming Sattva Guna, if it can be established by some means; which can elevate divinity with purity and perfection. It can make the self no longer confined to the painful limitation of 'I' and 'mine'. This is what is called liberation when



one becomes aware of the true self-the 'Brahman' or the 'Purusha' and realizes Brahman everywhere and in everything. But ordinarily the mind gets scattered under the continuous changing proportions of the Gunas. This Guna theory of Shamkshya in fact underpins the philosophy of mind in Yoga Schools. Accordingly, Yoga Schools of various traditions prescribe various systematic techniques and practices through which one can control and regulate the mind. It is believed that through the systematic techniques of spiritual practices and meditation as well as through the discriminating discernment of correct knowledge and self-awareness, one's mind can be made purer, simpler and lighter in sattvik influence. Then one's individual consciousness or 'Chitta' can naturally evolve so as to be able to dive deeper and deeper levels of one's existence. This would open up more of one's inner potential to become a seer, a divya drusta. This is the divine potential of human existence one can experience to realize the mahavakya 'Aham Brahmasmi'. This is the ultimate goal of human life which can be attainable through proper Yogic method by persistence and practices.

Based on this metaphysical foundation Yoga can be defined in effect as the inhibition (nirodha) of the fluctuation or modification (vritti) of the mind (chitta) which is often stated as "*Yoga as Chitta-Vritti-Nirodha*". Vivekananda says Yoga is restraining the mind stuff (chitta) from taking various forms (vritti). Thus, Yogic practices culminate in attaining a state of consciousness free from all modes of active discursive thought and eventually leading to attain a state where consciousness is unaware of any object external to itself and is only aware of its own nature as pure consciousness which is the self -Ultimate, the 'Brahman'.

Various Yoga Doctrines

Throughout the centuries following the ancient Vedic era; there have been several Yoga doctrines and schools. Bhagabat Geeta literally meaning song of the divine Absolute, has been written around 3000 BC, as a conversation between Arjuna representing a common individual and Sri-Krishna, the God-incarnate representing the supreme being, which took place in the battle field of Mahabharat. Through Arjuna's question and Sri Krishna's Answer; the complete science of Yoga had been revealed in a systematic step-by-step way. It tells one which path of Yoga one should follow and how, depending on one's own innate temperament and individual disposition. This may be considered as the earliest scripture on Yoga that emphasizes mostly three different paths (marga) called Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga. Besides this the other important texts available for the medieval Yoga schools were 'Yoga-Vasistha' written by Maharshi Valmiki and Yoga Yajnyabalka written by sage Yajnyabalka. However, it was sage Patanjali, who compiled the 'Yoga-Sutra' sometimes between 500 BC to 400 BC; synthesizing and organizing all knowledge about Yoga from much older traditions. Yoga - Sutra is held as one of the foundational texts of classical Yoga philosophy and is a



condensation of two different traditions namely Kriya Yoga and Astanga Yoga. This is also called 'Raja Yoga'. Here we would describe mainly these four important Yogas such as (i) Karma Yoga (ii) Bhakti Yoga (iii) Jnana Yoga and (iv) Raja Yoga. There are also several other schools like Mantra Yoga, Tantra Yoga or Kundalini Yoga which would find some mention hereafter.

(i) Karma Yoga:

Karma Yoga is the path of action, performing one's duty with mindfulness as selfless service to others without any expectation for the fruits of action. It is said in Bhagabat Geeta that

***"Karmanyebadhikaraste
Ma phalesu kada-chana
Ma karma-phala-hetur-bhur
Ma te-sango 'styakarmani"***

(Bhagabat Gita 2.47)

which means - *"you have a right to perform your duty prescribed, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities and never be attached to not doing your duty."*

"Karma" is both action and the result of this action in the form of its reaction. So, what we experience today is the result of our 'karma' - both good or bad, created by our previous actions. This chain of cause and effect that we ourselves have created can be snapped by disengaging our ego from the work process. We must realize that so much of our lives run simply in expectations of future results that we do it unconsciously and automatically. But our expectations and desires are unending and at times unappeasable leading us from disappointment to disappointment. Since our motivation is to enlarge our ego, instead of breaking the bonding of karma, we go on forging fresh chains. Breaking this bond is possible through our work dedicated to the higher power, the supreme soul or to a personal God; renouncing the result of action as a spiritual offering rather than hoarding the results for our own self. Since action is inevitable as it is an integral part of being alive, we need to re-orient it into a path of divine realization and by doing so we can stop this chain reaction of cause and effect. Therefore, Sri Krishna in Bhagabat Geeta says to Arjuna-



***"Whatever your action, food or worship,
Whatever the gift you give to another,
Whatever you vow to the work of spirit,
Lay these also as offerings before me."***

Karma Yoga can easily be practiced by any one of any temperament. Just as devotees offer flowers and incense in their loving worship, so can actions and thoughts be offered as divine worship. In fact, karma compels everybody to be active, to work industriously at least for one's own good or for the good of society. According to Vivekananda, one's pre-occupation in doing work for the common goods, sacrificing one's personal interest, is not less important than believing in God or studying philosophy. Vivekananda said - *"Although a man has not studied a single system of philosophy, although he does not believe in any God; and never has believed, although he has not prayed even once in his whole life, if the simple power of good actions has brought him to that state where he is ready to give up his life and all else for others, he has arrived the same point to which the religious man will come through his prayers and the philosopher through his knowledge."*

'Karma' or action here not only means external physical work, it also includes our thoughts, speech, our words and deeds. Karma Yoga says- like fire in a flint, knowledge also exists in the mind, the impressions received from objects and phenomena of the external world are the strikes producing fire. All that we feel and all that we live for - the smiles, the tears, the joy and the grief, pleasure and suffering everything is brought from within us by so many such blows. The result is what we are; all these blows taken together are also called 'Karma'. Every mental and physical blow that is given to the soul, by which, as it were, fire is struck from it, and by which its own power and knowledge are discovered, is karma - the world used in the widest sense. Thus, we are all doing karma all the time. Everything we do, physical or mental is karma which leaves its mark on us.

Religious symbols and rituals are also recognized to be part or aspects of Karma-Yoga. This aspect arises from the premise that any religion consists of three principal parts; philosophy, mythology and ritual. Philosophy is regarded as the essence of religion. Mythology is intended to explain and illustrate religion by means of legendary lives of great men, stories and fables of wonderful things and so on. Ritual is supposed to give to that philosophy a still more concrete form, so that everyone may grasp it. Thus, ritual is also 'Karma' which is in fact concretized philosophy.



These are the principal aspects of Karma Yoga. Having realized that all that is manifested (the whole material world) is only part of one 'Brahman', we have to understand why everything in this world is imperfect. But knowing that everything in this world including ourselves is a derivative of the one, of the integral, of the perfect, we have to understand we are striving towards perfection. The path to perfection lies through our struggles, we call our Karma, which creates fetters for us. Hence the ultimate goal of individual self (soul) is the release, i.e., to become free from the fetters of work. Karma Yoga prescribed to work incessantly, but be not attached to it so as to attain the supreme.

(ii) Bhakti Yoga:

Bhakti Yoga is the path of devotion with all actions as services in the name of the Divine. This includes prayer with offerings as well as chanting the name of the divine with overwhelming spirit of love and submission. Bhagabat Geeta said;

***"Patram Puspam Phalam toyam
Yo me bhaktya prayachati,
Tat aham bhaktyupahritam
Ashnami prayatatmanah."***

(Geeta 9.26)

which means - *"Whoever offers me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or a little water; that so offered devotedly by the pure minded, I accept."*

For those individuals more emotional than intellectual, this path of Bhakti Yoga can be the most natural spiritual path to feel oneness with the Divine. Because in loving spirit, one forgets one's own self devoting one's whole attention to the object of adoration. The ego loosens its grip when one thinks the welfare of one's loved one more than of his own self. Love gives concentration against the will. Thus, in an easy and totally effortless manner, love can create the pre-condition necessary for a spiritual life. One can have a loving devotional attitude towards one's personal God, thinking Him as Father or Mother, Friend or Child or even the beloved; whichever one feels natural to the self to bring him / her closest to God. In fact, from the standpoint of Bhakti Yoga, divinity by any name or form; be it Ishwara or any other personal God, it all refers to the highest possible reading by human mind of 'Brahman' the Absolute, which is too much of an abstraction to be loved and worshiped. As written in the Upanishads, Brahman is the clay or substance out of which an infinite variety of articles are fashioned. As clay, they are all one, but form or manifestation differentiates them. They all existed potentially in the clay before every one of them was made. Hence Ishwara or any personal God for worship is precisely a concretization of the idea of Brahman which



stands as the eternal inexpressible (sphota), the manifest as logos or world. In other words, sphota is the forefather of all ideas, their common basis and even the essence. Swami Vivekananda in his "The complete works, vol. III, P-36" says like this, *"If the peculiarities which distinguish one word from another be removed, then what remains will be the sphota."* Man found the appropriate sound (language) form to express particulars ideas. But what form can express this inexpressible 'Sphota'? If we express it by giving a definition, a sound form, it would be restricted and will cease to be itself. Bhakti Yoga prescribes a most appropriate sound form for this 'sphota' - the sound 'OM'. Here the word (symbol/sound) ॐ/OM is intended as a generalized symbol of all possible sounds. 'Sphota' being the potentiality of all those possibilities is often referred to as 'Nada Brahman' or sound - Brahman. Hence 'OM' stands as the 'Bija-Mantra' in chanting devotional hymns in prayers addressing the divinity in all spiritual activities.

Bhakti-Yoga according to Vivekananda is divided into two stages, the preparatory one (gaunli) and the supreme one (para). The preparatory or the lower form of Bhakti is for those who do not rise above sensuous pleasures of earthly life. They must wait and go through many more births and reincarnations to learn to feel even the faintest necessity for anything higher. But for whom, the eternal interests of the soul are much higher than the fleeting interests of this mundane life, the gratification of the senses is like the thoughtless child-play for them. God and love of God form the highest and the only purpose in human existence. Lower stage of Bhakti at times may lead to fanaticism so that such Bhaktas become incapable of distinguishing between truth and error. Therefore, great significance has been ascribed to mythology and rituals as the auxiliary method in the transition from gaunli-bhakti to para-bhakti. In those systems of religion in which there exist in its spiritual texts rich mythology and ritualism, spiritual masters have been produced to show the light of wisdom. Vivekananda writes that a bhakta must be aware that there are different religions in the world with different methods of worship. Entering upon earthly life, man has to choose an ideal and be loyal to it to the end of his days with a motive to develop a spiritual personality. This requires strict observance of the rules of moral hygiene and purity of mind. Ramanuja said that there are five such rules of moral hygiene such as:

- (i) *Satya* (truthfulness)
- (ii) *Arjava* (sincerity)
- (iii) *Daya* (kindness)
- (iv) *Ahimsa* (non-injury to others by thought or word or deed).
- (v) *Abhidhya* (not coveting other's goods, not thinking vain thoughts, and not brooding over injuries received from others).

Strict observance of these five principles would mean in Vivekananda's view, renunciation or transition to the higher form of worship called para-bhakti. In fact,



preaching of renunciation is found in all types of Yoga in one form or the other, since it is the cornerstone of any spiritual perfection. Karma Yogi's renunciation is in the form of giving up all the fruits of his actions, all attachment to the results of his labor and all expectations for any reward here or hereafter. However, Bhakti Yogi's renunciation is quite natural in the sense that it does not require suppression of anything. It is in fact similar to the presence of intensely strong light for which less intense ones appear dimmer and dimmer till they vanish completely. So, in ascending to the summits of para-bhakti, cravings for sensual pleasures including even the obsession of the intellect grows weaker and finally vanishes altogether.

At this summit stage of para-bhakti names and forms vanish, rituals become meaningless, scriptures are superseded, images, temples, places of worship, religion etc. like little limitations and bondages fall off by their own nature. Nothing remains to bind man or fetter his freedom. The soul or the self becomes free of all bondages and becomes released in the sense of attaining Mokshya or Nirvana.

(iii) Jnana Yoga:

Jnana yoga is the mode of release through knowledge (Jnana). As soon as ignorance (avidya) is destroyed, the human soul (Jibatma) becomes free. Jnana Yoga is also known as Shamkshya Yoga. According to Advaita Vedanta the entire phenomenal world including man himself is a derivative of 'Brahman', the Absolute. Man consists of the same stuff as the Universe, being a Universe himself in miniature. Hence Jnana Yoga proclaims that- *"Know thyself and thou shalt know the basis of all that is."*

Those who are endowed with intensive discriminating intellect motivated by reason could be better suited for the path of Jnana Yoga in striving for perfection through the power of reason. This is the path of knowledge, wisdom, introspection and contemplation. Knowledge here is not in the intellectual sense, but the spiritual knowledge of the Brahman and Atman and the realization of their unity. In Bhakti Yoga, the spiritual aspirant follows the promptings of one's heart, whereas in Jnana Yoga, one uses the power of one's mind to discriminate between the real and the unreal, the eternal and the temporal. There is no need to look outside for the divinity. We ourselves are already divine. This is our real nature as well as the nature of the whole world around us. Realization of this truth involves deep exploration of one's own self by setting aside false identities. We can reasonably set aside those as unreal, which are transitory, imperfect being subjected to change. So also, we can accept those as real in the absolute sense which are eternal, perfect and unchanging. In that sense the universe that we apprehend is unreal. The universe and our perception of it may have only a conditional reality, but not an ultimate one. This is because of our perception



through our senses; our mind and intellect, everything has been conditioned inherently by the very nature of our body-mind complex. Brahman being the all-pervading infinitude by nature, normal human mind and intellect cannot apprehend the fullness of Brahman. Upanishads declare that Brahman is beyond the reach of speech and mind. But yet what we perceive can be nothing other than Brahman. This contradiction can be removed by self-assertion, when we continually affirm what is real about ourselves. Actually, we are not limited to a small physical body with an individual mind. Our existence is spiritual as we were never born, will never die. We are pure, perfect, eternal and free. That is the greatest truth of our being. The philosophy behind this is 'as you think, so you become'. We have programmed through our several lifetimes to think of ourselves as limited, weak and helpless. These wrong thoughts had gone into our mind again and again to create the wrong impression, we call that ignorance. We must reverse the process by right thought about the true nature of our 'self' as the divine pure consciousness. Jnana yoga uses our considerable internal powers to realize that we have always been and we are even now, perfect and immortal, free and infinite as well. In Advaita Vedanta as well as in other Indian Philosophical schools, it is believed that knowledge is not to be acquired from without. Upanishads declare that Brahman Atman holds the key to all knowledge. Therefore, it is the innate nature of the human soul - the Jibatma or the Atman the repository of infinite wisdom. This infinite wisdom potentially remains always the same and is never lost, but man is not ordinarily conscious of this. Swami Vivekananda writes in his **'The Complete Works'**, vol.IV, p-365 that - *"when the individual mind, on the one hand favorable time, place and causation on the other, can act and react upon one another, then highly developed consciousness of knowledge is sure to follow"*. "Consciousness of knowledge", as explained further by Vivekananda can be stated as follows. From the standpoint of Jnana Yogis, man does not receive knowledge from objects and phenomena of the external world. Man, always has knowledge as stated earlier through the innate nature of his 'soul', but it is covered by a veil or hidden like fire in flint. The objects and phenomena of the external world are absolutely necessary in a way to reveal this knowledge. They bring out knowledge from the soul by raising the veil from over knowledge in the same way as the steel strikes fire from a flint. Thus, it appears that knowledge is realized within, not obtained from without. Vivekananda recognizes three states of consciousness as instinct/unconsciousness, reason/consciousness and the super conscious state; all of them belong to the same consciousness. Each state in fact develops into another. Consciousness itself when develops to super-conscious state that is superior to intellect. One can possess knowledge that is superior to intellectual knowledge. In this supreme state the spiritual knowledge of the divinity, purity and perfection of one's own self or soul descends in one's realization. Then one can recognize the same in other beings. No longer feeling confined to the painful



limitations of 'I' and 'Mine', one becomes able to see 'Brahman' everywhere and in everything and thus attains liberation or Mokshya.

(iv) Raja Yoga:

This is the royal path of meditation to maintain control over the vast and varied territory of our mind. It can be practiced by people of all temperaments. It helps in achieving balance and harmony on all levels of human existence-physical, mental and spiritual so as to have the full realization of the inner self. The basic premise of Raja Yoga is that our perception of the divine nature of our inner self is obscured by the fluctuating patterns and disturbances of our mind. If the mind can be made still and pure, the self will automatically and instantaneously shine forth. Bhagabat Geeta proclaims

***"When through the practice of Yoga
The mind ceases its restlessness,
Movements, And becomes still,
The aspirant realizes Atman."***

Raja Yoga is also called Astanga Yoga or eight-fold path, since it enjoins eight steps to be practised systematically and methodically. Then in due course one can realize the orderly process of self-transformation beginning on the level of the physical body and eventually involving the most subtle levels of our existence. Raja Yoga is a scientific discipline that does not impose unquestioning faith. It rather encourages healthy self-examination and scientific verification by experimenting with its methods. Thus, Raja yoga can be considered as the most suitable path for the modern world, where scientific skepticism is so prevalent.

The eight steps of Astanga Yoga are:

- (i) *Yama* (abstinences or ethical practices)
- (ii) *Niyama* (Observances)
- (iii) *Asana* (Physical Postures)
- (iv) *Pranayama* (breath control)
- (v) *Pratyahara* (Withdrawal of senses)
- (vi) *Dharana* (Concentration)
- (vii) *Dhyana* (Meditation)
- (viii) *Samadhi* (Absorption)



The first five steps which are the external preparatory stages constitute what is called 'Hatha Yoga'. The last three stages are internal ones involving mind and consciousness.

The preliminary preparatory stages involving the mind, such as 'Yama' and 'Niyama' constitute ethical vows as moral imperatives or commitments for practicing virtuous habits, behaviours and observances. The five 'Yama' of restraints are;

- (i) *Ahimsa* (non-violence in speech and action.
- (ii) *Satya* (truthfulness)
- (iii) *Asteya* (Non-stealing, honesty)
- (iv) *Brahmacharya* (Chastity, sexual restraints)
- (v) *Aparigraha* (greedless, non-possessiveness)

These five great ethical vows are called 'Mahabratam' which lead to the abandonments of enmity, falsehood, lust and greed and hence a perfection of inner and outer amity with everyone and everything. Practicing of these 'Mahabratas' need not be limited to any class, place, time or circumstances.

Similarly, there are five 'Niyamas' or observations for virtuous habits and behaviors. They are:

- (i) *Saucha* (Purity and cleanliness of body mind and speech).
- (ii) *Santosha* (Contentment, acceptance of others and circumstances, optimism).
- (iii) *Tapas* (Persistence, perseverance, austerity).
- (iv) *Svadhya* (Self-reflection, introspection and Self-study of scriptures).
- (v) *Isvara Pranidhana* (contemplation of the Brahman, the ultimate Supreme Being reality).

The last three 'Niyamas' such as Tapas, Svadhya and Ishwara Pranidhana constitute what is called 'Kriya-Yoga'. Thus, the ten commitments, through the observances of five 'Yamas' and five 'Niyamas' in the yogic tradition, lead to the cultivation of the behavior and attitude necessary in a virtuous individual personality.

The next step in Astanga Yoga involves physical postures in Asanas. There are several types of asanas by different names. The first kind of asanas are practiced to perfect the body making it free from disease by stimulating specific muscles and nerve systems promoting ample physical wellness. The second kind are stable comfortable meditative postures to attain serene breath and calm mind. In general asanas are body



postures that one can hold for a period of time, staying relaxed, steady, comfortable and motionless. Some of the well-known asanas can be named here as for example are:

- (i) *Padmasana*
- (ii) *Bajrasana*
- (iii) *Virasana*
- (iv) *Bhadrasana*
- (v) *Svastikasana*
- (vi) *Dandasana*
- (vii) *Dhanurashana*
- (viii) *Nalashana*
- (ix) *Matchhyasana*
- (x) *Mayurashana*
- (xi) *Shirshasana*
- (xii) *Shabasana*

The correct postures for the respective asana can be learnt through active instructive demonstrations by yoga gurus and should be practiced regularly as per instructions.

The fourth step of Asatanga yoga is pranayama or breath control. Prana here is symbolized as breath and 'ayama' meaning restraining, extending or stretching. In fact, 'prana' by some interpretations means the vital energy that sustains the body and the mind and its grossest manifestation is in the form of breath.

After a desired comfortable posture is achieved pranayama is practiced by consciously regulating breath (inhalation and exhalation). This is done in several ways inhaling and then suspending inhalation for a period; slowing the inhalation and exhalation consciously changing time with one nostril at a time or both, length of the breath (deep, short breathing) etc. These breathing exercises are well known by different processes in different names such as (i) Kapalabhati (ii) Anuloma Biloma (iii) Bhramari or sometimes by the general name Sudarshana Kriya etc. This assertion of 'Prana' being represented by breath and 'Pranayam' as the control of breathing as per many texts on yoga, is considered by several other schools to be an imprecise expression of the category in question. Vivekananda interprets 'Prana' the vital force or everything that we call force as a manifestation of energy. It is 'Prana' that manifests as actions of the body as nerve currents, as thought-force as well. The knowledge and control of the 'Prana' according to Vivekananda is really what is called Pranayama. Pranayama really means controlling the motion of the lungs which is associated with our breath. The Prana in fact moves the lungs and the movement of the lungs draws in the air as breath. So, Pranayama in controlling that muscular power which moves the lungs,



that muscular power which goes out through the nerves to the muscles and from them to the lungs, making them move in a certain manner, is the 'Prana' according to Videkananda. Taking this conception of 'Prana' and of the Pranayama as their basis, Raja Yogis maintains that one can be capable of controlling almost any part of his body, the muscles, the nerves, groups of cells and even individual cells. If that be the case, then all the sickness and misery felt by the body can be eliminated by perfectly controlling the body in this manner. In any case; Pranayama no doubt leads to calmness and concentration, which is essential for the practice of subsequent steps of Astanga Yoga.

Now coming to the fifth step, it is 'Pratyahara' or withdrawal and control of senses. Ordinarily the mind constantly gathers sensations from the external world and reacts to them. One needs to develop the ability to voluntarily remove the distractions of the outer world. So 'Pratyahara' means not to take any input or any information from the sense organs. It is a process of retracting the sensory experience from external objects. It is a process of self-extraction and abstraction, not by consciously closing one's eyes to the sensory world but rather consciously closing one's mind to all that. Pratyahara empowers one to stop being controlled by the external world so as to focus one's attention in seeking knowledge and experience one's inner world with its innate freedom. It marks the transition of yoga experience from outside to inside, from outer space of the body to the inner space of spirit. These first five stages of Astanga yoga called the 'Hatha Yoga' prepare one for the last three internal practices of 'Dharana', 'Dhyana' and finally 'Samadhi'; which focus more directly on the control of the mind and consciousness.

The sixth step 'Dharana' means concentration in which the scattered mind is coordinated and focused on any particular thing like an object one wants to observe, a concept or an idea on which one wants to introspect. The mind can also be fixed on one's breath or navel or the tip of one's nose or a mantra like the simple 'OM'. This requires a conscious effort of the will and continued voluntary attention to fix the mind with one pointed focus without drifting or jumping from one topic to another. Then the mind becomes more powerful, calm and serene to go to the next step 'Dhyana' or Meditation.

Dhyana means contemplation, reflection or profound abstract meditation. It is an uninterrupted train of thought or current of cognition or a flow of awareness on the topic of 'Dharana'. Thus, Dhyana is integrally related to Dharana. Dharana is the state of the mind while Dhyana is the process of the mind by which the one-pointed mind expands beyond its conscious and subconscious levels and finally assumes the flow of the super-consciousness. Adi Shankara states that 'Dhyana' is the Yoga state when there is



only the stream of continuous thought about the object, uninterrupted by other thoughts of a different kind for the same object. On the other hand, Dharana is focused on one object with awareness of its many aspects and ideas about the same object. For example, if in Dhyana state one contemplates on the Sun's orbit alone without being interrupted by its color, brilliance or any other ideas; in 'Dharana' on the morning Sun, one may be aware of its color, brilliance and other related ideas.

Deep and intense mediation prolonged in the 'Dhyana' state leads to climax, the final stage called 'Samadhi', when one experiences oneness with the subject of contemplation. There is then no distinction between the meditator, the act of meditation and the subject of meditation. It is that spiritual state when one's mind is so absorbed in whatever it is contemplating on, the mind loses the sense of its own identity. The thinker, the thought process and thought fuse together with the subject of thought. There is only oneness of the observer and the object along with the process of observation in one's mindspace. One experiences oneness with the higher self, transcending all limitations and imperfection. It is the fourth state of consciousness transcending the three normal states of waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep. This super conscious level is our human essence which is universal. In this state where ecstatic awareness develops, deep intuitive knowledge dawns on the mind. One starts the process of becoming aware of one's true self the 'Purusha' or the Super-consciousness as claimed by Shankshya darshana. It further claims that this awareness is eternal and hence once this awareness is achieved, a person cannot ever cease being aware. This leads to one's ability to discern the difference between Sabda (word) artha (meaning) and pratyaya (understanding), so as to empower one to compassionately comprehend the absolute truth. One masters by that unusual power, intuition, self-knowledge freedom and kaibalya. This is the real goal of Yoga-spiritual emancipation, the mokshya. One must emphasize again that all limbs of Astanga Yoga are necessary foundations to reach this state of self-awareness, freedom and liberation.

(v) Mantra Yoga:

Mantra Yoga can be Said to have its origin in Vedic Science, where all the verses are called mantras. Mantra is defined in Sanskrit as '*Mananat Trayate*' *iti Mantra*', which implies that by chanting or singing of these particular combinations of words in Sanskrit properly, one can achieve the ultimate salvation or union with the supreme consciousness. Hence Mantra Yoga is an easiest way to achieve the difficult states of 'Dhyana, Dharana and 'Pratyahara' in Astanga Yoga, which is required to internalize the sense-oriented mind away from the external world focusing it on the inner consciousness. By chanting mantras in a repetitive manner; one's awareness can be made to revolve around the sound and vibrations generated by that particular



combination of words, syllables or alphabets in the mantra. The repetitive action leads to the awakening of a powerful inner force by which the consciousness or awareness can be made concentrated for the ultimate state of the 'Samadhi' for salvation. Hence 'mantra' is a tool for the mind designed to help the practitioners access a higher power and its true nature. The sound vibration it produces can carry with it the focused mind with all its thoughts, feelings and intentions. Over the time the vibration sinks deeper and deeper into the consciousness, helping one eventually to feel its presence as 'Shakti', a powerful though subtle force working inside each of us that carries into the deeper states of awareness. So, a mantra can generate the creative force and bestow eternal bliss. Each mantra is constructed from a combination of sounds derived from the fifty letters of Sanskrit (Devanagari) alphabets. Sanskrit language is known as the language of consciousness. Sages and seers of ancient India were well aware of the inherent power contained in sound and they utilized proper combination of sounds to set up specific vibrations so that a mantra would function as an encased mystical energy in its specific sound structure. The combined effect of such a sound structure on the physical plane can be observed specifically on the brain via EEG; to find that the brain wave emission patterns get affected by chanting of mantras. The alpha activity of the brain can be observed during mantra chanting. Mantras affect the subconscious mind by influencing the thinking pattern. Negative impressions such as fear, anger, jealousy etc. are removed from the subconscious level while positive impressions are programmed on it. Practice of mantra chanting increases concentration, memory, and logical thinking. Mantra chanting has also soothing effects on the nervous system which helps in relaxing the muscles and reducing stress. Neuro scientists equipped with advanced brain imaging tools are beginning to study and confirm some of the health benefits of this ancient practice such as its ability to free the mind from the background chatter and to calm the nervous system. Researchers have measured the activity of the default mode network region of the brain. This is the region that is active during self-reflection and mind-wandering. An overactive default mode network would mean disturbed mind. However, it has been observed that during mantra meditation, this default mode network activity gets suppressed and the suppression becomes more and more with repetitive mantra chanting and practice.

In Sanskrit texts there are millions of mantras. It is believed that most of these mantras were originally revealed to the sages who achieved self-realization. One of the most universally recited mantras is AUM/OM, considered to be the sound of creation of the universe. This is called the 'Bija-mantra', the 'Nada-Brahman' or 'Pranaba'. It is the supreme symbol of Brahman or the Absolute. It consists of A, U, M and ardha matras like 'nada', 'bindu', kala and shakti. They act directly on Nadis or nerve channels of the subtle body. It is believed to contain every vibration that has ever existed or will exist in future. It has been used as the energetic root of all other mantras like 'Om Namah



Shivaya', 'Om Namah Bhagabate Basudevaya' etc. It has deep roots in every major spiritual tradition. The important mantras triggering the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems are the Gayatri Mantra and the Maha-Mruttunjaya Mantra respectively. Quoting explicitly, they are:

**1. *Om bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ,
tat savitur vareṇyaṁ,
bhargo devasya dhīmahi,
dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt.***

And

**'Om Trayambakam Jajamahe
Sugandheem Pustibardhanam,
Urbarukamiba bandhanat
Mruttyormukshiya mamrutat.'**

There are also puranic or deity mantras which are relatively simple and can be practiced by anybody which help purify emotions of the human mind. These are such as:

**'Om Namah Narayanaya,
'Om Namah Shivaya'
'Hare Krrishna Hare Ram' etc.**

In these mantras, a specific form or image with attributes is visualized along with their repetitive chanting or Japa. Hence such mantras aid the conceptualization process in spiritual aspirants just as do visual symbols like images or bigrahas of deities. Japa is one of the most direct ways of self-realization. Constant practice of continuous chanting called Japa produces in the mind the form of the deity connected with the mantra, since this form becomes the center of one's consciousness to be directly realized. The mantra of the presiding deity is therefore the same as the deity. Japa meditation is therefore a method of channeling one's consciousness from the lowest to the highest level of pure thought. Regardless of any chosen one a mantra can be enlivened through a regular practice over a period of time. It is like rubbing a flint against a stone to strike fire by friction. The focus of bringing oneself back to the sound structure of the mantra again and again and especially the attention one pays to the resonating mantra in one's awareness, eventually opens the energy in the mantra. Then it stops being just mere



words to become a living energy that one feels in lifting the inner state to the higher level. Repeated verbally or mentally, a mantra lifts one into the telepathic state and beyond to the transcendental when name, form and one's own self as a witness are indistinguishable. They unite and a state of bliss prevails. This is the true experience of meditation. Japa meditation had been propagated by Shaivaites and Vaishnavites. Sri Chaitanya of the Bhakti movement exemplifies such practice.

Although mantra yoga is generally considered as the innovation of Hinduism, it has also been adopted and developed by Buddhism, Jainism and other religions.

(vi) Kundalini Yoga:

Kundalini Yoga is an ancient practice followed by many systems of yoga through pranayam, asana, meditation and chanting of mantras. It is based on an important concept of Shaiva tantra according to which kundalini is a form of divine feminine energy believed to be passively located at the base of the spine in the human body. The concept of Kundalini has been mentioned in Upanishads during 9th to 7th century BC. In Shaiva tantra tradition, Kundalini is considered as the innate intelligence of the embodied consciousness or the 'Prana Shakti' which is spread over both the macrocosm (entire universe) as well as the microcosm, the human body. This subtle energy in the body, when cultivated through tantric practice is believed to lead to spiritual liberation. Kundalini is associated with the formless aspects of Goddess Parvati or Adishakti, the supreme divinity in Shaktism and also with Goddesses Bhairavi and Kubjika by other names. This feminine spiritual force signifies its strong connection to bliss and pleasures, both mundane physical pleasure and bliss of spiritual liberation or mokshya, which is identified with the enjoyment of Shiva's creative activity and ultimate union with the Goddess. Tantra Sadbhava-Tantra of 8th Century mentions visualization of shakti in the central channel of the spine and the upward movement of prana associated with Kundalini. This belief along with the practice of Hatha Yoga was adopted in the 9th century by shaivism and since then been taken up by other forms of Hinduism as well as modern spirituality.

According to an esoteric description of the subtle body of human organism; it is believed to consist of energy channels called *nadis*, psychic centers called *chakras*, subtle energy called '*prana*' and drops of essence called '*bindus*'. Kundalini is described as a sleeping dormant potential force coiled up at the base of the spine in the triangular sacrum bone in three and half coils. Hence the name Kundalini resembling a coiled-up serpent (Kundalini in feminine sense coming from the word Kundali which means coil). This is supposed to be the life force of a person, the creative potential of an individual. It travels through the chakras to distribute its energy throughout the body. The main



purpose of Kundalini Yoga is to target the nervous system and create harmony in the body. The yoga consists of breathing exercises like pranayam, body postures like asanas, meditation like dhyana dharana and pratyahara mentioned earlier together with chanting of mantras like *Satnaam*, meaning truth is my identity.

We know that our spinal cord is structured in a peculiar manner. The vertebrae of the spinal column are in the shape of figure eight written horizontally as (∞) and are piled up one on top of the other. The left-hand side is called Ida and the right side, the pingala providing channels for nerve current. The hollow canal running through the centre of the spinal cord is called *Sushumna nadi*. Where the spinal cord ends in some of the lumbar vertebrae, a fine fiber issues downwards with the central canal running through this fiber. This finer canal in a coiled-up form is closed at the lower end which is situated near the sacral plexus. According to modern physiology the sacral plexus is triangular in form. The different plexuses such as the coccygeal, sacral, lumbar, dorsal, cervical, medullar, third eye and sahasrara; that have their centres in the spinal canal can very well stand for different lotuses or chakras of the yogis. At the lower most end of the hollow central canal is what the yogis call, the lotus of Kundalini or the *Muladhara Chakra*.

In fact, according to yogic descriptions chakras are the nerve centers and there are 1,72,000 nadis or channels of metaphysical energy as prana in our body. The nerve centers for these nadis are 109 in number out of which nine centers are important. Again, out of these nine, seven of them have primary significance which are called Chakras. The bottom most chakra located at the base of the spine as mentioned before is called the *Muladhara Chakra* where the Kundalini energy lies dormant in potential form. Just above the Muladhara behind the genitals is the second Chakra called *Svadhista Chakra*. *Manipura Chakra* is the third one situated just above the navel. At the central region of the chest lies the *Anahata Chakra*. Above this around the neck region is the *Visudha Chakra* and in between the eyebrows lies the *Ajna Chakra*, which is called the third-eye. Finally, on the top of the head lies the *Sahasrara Chakra*.

When Kundalini at the Muladhara Chakra lying dormant is awakened, it tries to force a passage through the central hollow canal, the Sushumna nadi inside or outside the spinal and as it rises step by step through the various chakras; layer after layer of the mind becomes open and all different visions with wonderful power come to the yogi. When it reaches the top at Sahasrara Chakra in the brain the yogi feels perfectly detached from the body and the mind and the soul finds itself free or liberated. Thus, the progress of Kundalini through different chakras is believed to promote different levels of awakening leading to mystical experience until it finally reaches the crown chakra-the Sahasrara producing an extremely profound transformation of



consciousness. Swami Sivanananda in his book 'Kundalini Yoga' states that-*"Super sensual visions appear before the mental eye of the aspirant, new worlds with indiscernible wonder and charms unfold themselves before the yogi. Planes after planes reveal their existence and grandeur to the practitioner and the yogi gets divine knowledge, power and bliss in increasing degrees, when Kundalini passes through chakra after chakra, making them to bloom in all their glory."*

To be a little more explicit, it is said that ordinarily when Kundalini is not activated it promotes dullness and inertia with no interest in anything. However, when it is activated in Muladhara Chakra, one experiences enthusiasm. This activated energy then moves upward to the second chakra-Svadhistana behind the genital region to manifest its procreation impulse as sex drive as well as creative activities. Reaching the Manipuram Chakra, the next above in the naval region; it generates four flavours to the emotions as greed and jealousy as well as joy and generosity. From the naval region, this energy moves upward to the heart region, the Anahata Chakra manifesting thereby love, hatred and fear as well with any one of these three emotions taking precedence at a time. Rising up to visuddha chakra at the throat region it manifests as grief and gratitude. We know that the throat chokes in either of these two emotions. When it moves to the centre of the forehead to the Ajna Chakra it manifests as alertness, awareness, knowledge as well as anger. This region is also said to be the mystical third eye which is described as the seat of divine wisdom as well as the seat of anger. Finally, when Kundalini Shakti moves to the Sahasrara Chakra at the top of the head, one experiences bliss only. No longer one feels any duality, any sense of conflict or separation. One feels totally connected and one with everything. This upward as well as downward flow keeps on happening very naturally and spontaneously in life all the time.

Thus, one has an elaborate series of associations, all conveying the central concept of the cosmos as a manifestation of consciousness of pure subjectivity with Kundalini understood as the force or the energy inseparable from consciousness which animates the creation and in its peculiar form in the body, causes liberation through its illusion-shattering upward movement. In order to integrate this spiritual energy, a period of careful purification and strengthening of the body and one's nervous system is very much required beforehand. Without a Guru, it is said that the awakening of Kundalini cannot take any one very far on the path. However, for the spiritual transmission by a Guru called the *Shaktipata* method to be effective, the body and spirit of the disciple must be prepared by yogic austerities such as pranayama, asana, meditation and chanting. The Guru who has already experienced Kundalini can raise Kundalini temporarily in his disciple to give him an experience to use it later as a basis for practice. Kundalini enables one to consciously cross the lower planes to ultimately merge into the universal cosmic power of which it is a part.



Conclusion

In the foregoing sections we have provided a cursory look to the vast literature of ancient Indian Vedic literature with all its ancillaries codifying the Indian Philosophy encompassing all aspects for living a meaningful and righteous life. We have mentioned here the six major schools of Vedic philosophy - Nyaya, Vaisheshika Purva Mimamsa, Shamskhya, Vedanta and Yoga belonging to the so-called orthodox category, which did not question the basic tenets of Vedic Philosophy the hallmark of Indian Spirituality preaching objective idealism. However, since ancient Indian spirit in its maturity of wisdom encouraged free flowing thoughts in all possible angles contributing even to rationalistic philosophy like Nyaya and Vaisheshika as well as materialistic philosophy of Charvak - Lokayat School including the Sramanic Schools like Jaina and Buddhists. These Sramanic Schools and Charvak-Lokayat belong to the un-orthodox schools. But as of now, there would be no denying of the fact that the Ancient Indian Wisdom prescribing a unique mind-body technology through 'Yoga' asserting primacy to mind over body for all round wellness in living a life has now captured the attention of the whole world.

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