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Narottam sarkar
(Ph.D.Scholar), Jadavpur
University, Jadavpur,Kolkata-
700032, West Bengal

The ancient basis of Patanjala yoga

Narottam sarkar

Abstract

Today most of the people think that, Patanjali is the father or founder of the famous Yoga Sutra. But in the ancient literature, there are some significant yoga evidence revealing that, yoga tradition is much older than Patanjali and its main practices already existed before his time. This ancient yoga was explained in Vedas, Upanisadas, Mahabharata and Puranas.

Key words: ancient, patanjala yoga, Vedas, Puranas

Introduction

The word ‘Yoga’ comes from a Sanskrit root ‘yuj’ (to yoke, to unite), which meaning is ‘to join’. Patanjali in his ‘Yoga-Sutra’, where yoga is defined as the “योगचित्तबृत्तिनिरोधः”^[1], which means stopping of movements of the mind. The purpose of yoga is to lead to a silence of the mind. This silence is the necessity for the mind to be able to accurately reflect objective reality without its own subjective twisting. Yoga is the science and practice of finding liberation (moksha) from the material world. It is a practical path to self-realization, a means of attaining nirvana by purifying the entire being, so that the mind-body can feel the absolute fundamental reality of illusions on everyday life.

A man who attempts this organization is called a yogin or yogi. There are four main division of yoga: Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Raja Yoga. Patanjali, in his Yoga Sutra, defines Raja yoga.

Patanjali explains that upward progress of the Yogen towards the supreme end (मोक्षः) is made up of eight stages. These eight stages are called ‘Astangas’. They are as follows: 1. Yama (moral virtue); 2. Niyama (rules and observances); 3. Asana (bodily postures); 4. Pranayama (control of the life force); 5. Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses far from the external world); 6. Dharana (memory); 7. Dhyana (meditation); 8. Samadhi (total concentration).

Discussion

Yoga Darsana that is connected to the Samkhya system. The Mahabharata says that-

‘यदेव योगा: पश्यन्ति तत्सांख्येरपि दृश्यते ।
एकं सांख्यं च योगं यः पश्यति स तत्त्ववित् II’^[2]

The Patanjali Yoga teaching occurs in the context of a broader Yoga Darsana that includes other streams also. This Yoga Darsana existed long before Patanjali and was taught in many ways. It is the Yoga Darsana originally attributed to Hiranyagarbha and related Vedic teachers.

Before the Patanjali period, most of the yoga was taught in Vedas, Upanisads, Mahabharata, Gita, and Puranas. These are the main ancient literature of yoga. Here Yoga has various meanings and comes in many forms.

- Like, Khathopanisad says about Yoga-

‘तां योगमिति मन्यते स्थिरमिद्रियधारणाम् ।
अप्रमत्स्तदा भवति योगो हि प्रभवाय्यौ II’^[3]

(This they consider Yoga: the steady holding of the senses.)

- Maitri-Upanisad says-

‘तथा तत्प्रयोगकल्पः प्राणायामः प्रत्याहारे ध्यानं धारणा, तर्कं समाधि, षड्ङगा इत्युच्चये योगः।’^[4]

(Yoga is said to be the oneness of breath, mind, and senses, and the abandonment of all states of existence.)

- The Bhagavad Gita says-

“तं विद्यादुःखसंयोगविवेगं योगसंज्ञितम् I
स निश्चयेन योक्तव्यो योगोऽनिर्विष्णवेतसा II”^[5]

(Yoga is known as the disconnection (viyoga) of the connection (samyoga) with suffering.)

- Yoga Sutra says-“योगचित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः.” Which means Yoga is the control of the whirrs of the mind.

In the Indian civilization, Vedas are the foundation of all Indian culture, philosophy and religion. So we can say, the Vedic Samhitas also the origin of present yoga system. Perhaps, the earliest yoga concepts belonged to Hiranyagarbha. Which means “the gold embryo” first, occurs prominently as a Vedic God, generally a form of the Sun God, which has many names involving Hiranya or Gold. There is a special hymn to Hiranyagarbha in the Rig Veda X. 121. This Hiranyagarbha refers to the Supreme Being or Isvara. Hiranyagarbha of the earliest Vedic and Upanisadic lore is spoken of as the first being to reveal yoga “हिरण्यगर्भो योगस्य वेत्ता नान्यः पुरातनः”. It indicates that mental Yoga exercises were known and played a substantial part in the religious and philosophical outlook of the epoch. The philosophy of yoga was ancient and was based on the Upanisads.

In great ancient text in the Mahabharata, Sri Krishna occurs and states:

“सांख्यस्य वक्ता कपिलः परमर्थः स उच्यते I
हिरण्यगर्भो योगस्य वेत्ता नान्यः पुरातनः II ६०
अपान्तरतमाश्रेव वेदाचार्यः स उच्यते I
प्राचीनगर्भं तमृषि प्रवदन्तीह केचन II ६१”^[6]

Kapila the teacher of Samkhya, is said to be the supreme Rishi. Hiranyagarbha is the original knower of yoga. There is no one else more ancient. Repeatedly, in the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna states that-

“इमं विवस्वते योगं प्रोक्तवानहमव्ययम् I
विवस्वान् मनवे प्राह मनुरिक्ष्वाकवेऽन्नवीत् II १
एवं परम्पराप्राप्तिमं राजर्षयो विदुः I
स कालेन हमहा योगो नष्टः परन्तप II २
स एवायं मया तेऽद्य योगः प्रोक्तः पुरातनः I
भक्तोऽसि मे सखा चेति रहस्यं होतदुत्तमम् II ३”^[7]

He taught the original Yoga to Visvasvan, another name of the Sun God, again suggested by Hiranyagarbha. Vivasvan was said to have taught this Yoga to Manu, the original man or first king, making it into the prime Yoga path for all humanity. Here, however, Krishna gains prominence over Vivasvan/Hiranyagarbha as the original teacher of Yoga.

Another yogic text like the Brihadayogi Yajnavalkya smriti XII.5. Similarly explains Hiranyagarbha as the original teacher of yoga, as the Samkhya system. So Samkhya's great

commentator Vijnana Bhikshu in his ‘Yogavartika’ commentary on the first sutra of the ‘Yoga Sutras’. It also explains Hiranyagarbha as the adiguru quoting the yogi Yajnavalkya.^[8]

Besides, Several Upanisads like Katha, Kena, Svetasvatara, are said to be Yoga-Shastras. These Yoga Upanisads also do not emphasize Patanjali and they are not mentioned in Patanjali's any quotation. The Puranas, which are large encyclopedic works of traditional knowledge goes back to medieval and ancient periods, contain many sections on Yoga but do not give importance to Patanjali. When such texts teach Yoga, they often do so with quotes from the older Vedas, as the Svetasvatara Upanishad. This yoga text mentioned;

“प्राणान् प्रीभ्येह संयुक्तचेष्टः
क्षीणे प्राणे नसिकयोच्छवसीति I
दुष्टश्वयुक्तमिव वाहोमेनं
बिद्वान् मनो धारयेताप्रमत्तः II २.९”^[9]

Where fire is churned or produced by rubbing (for sacrifice), which are controlled (by yoga practices), then the mind attains perfection.

The another text in the Katha-Upanisad-

“आत्मनं रथिनं विद्धि शरीरं रथमेव तु I
वुद्धिं तु सारथिं विद्धि मनः प्रग्रहमेव च II १.३.३”^[10]

Yoga is likened to a chariot in which the reasoning consciousness is the driver, and the body is the cart. Mastery of the body thus achieved by control of the senses. At first, this yogic text produced that, the mind and body are not inherently separate but linked.

This means that the Patanjali Yoga Darsana is a later subset of the earlier Vedic, upanishadic and puranic Yoga Darsana. So it is not a new teaching. The Yoga Sutras involved short axioms that required interpretation in the light of the existing more detailed traditions, mainly through authoritative commentaries. The topics addressed in the Yoga Sutras from yamas and niyamas to dhyana and samadhi are already taught extensively in the older literature. In the Mahabharata(Shanti Parva 316.7), the sage Yajnavalkya speaks of an “eightfold yoga taught in the Vedas.”

“बैदेषु चाष्टुपिनं योगमाहुर्मनीषिणः I
सूक्ष्ममष्टुपं प्रहुनेतरं नृपसत्तम II ७
द्विरुणं योगकृत्यं तु योगानां प्राहुरुत्तमम् I
सगुणं निर्गुणं चेव यथाशास्त्रनिर्दर्शनम् II ८
धारणा चेव मनसः प्राणायामश्च पार्थिव I
प्राणायामो हि सगुणो निर्गुणं धारणं मनः II ९
यत्र द्रुयेत मुञ्चव्ये प्राणाम्भेदिलसत्तम I
वाताधिकं भवत्येव तस्माद्दिन समाचरेत् II १०”^[11]

Historical Survey

Yoga has a long history. The very earliest indication of the existence of some form of Yoga practices in India comes from the Harappan culture which can be dated at least as far back as 3000 B.C. A number of seals show a figure seated in a Yoga position that has been used by the Indian Yogis for meditation till the present day. One of the described figures bears signs of divinity worshipped as the Lord of Yoga. At the time of mining at Mohenjodaro, Stuart Piggot wrote: "There can be little doubt that we have the prototype of the great god Shiva as the Lord of the Beast (Pashupati) and prince of Yogis."^[12]

Conclusion

Yoga, as a 'science' of achieving this transformation of finite man into the infinite One, has to be recognized as something intrinsically Indian. Yoga has been called a living fossil. It has and had glorious history. It belongs to the earliest heritage of India's humanity. The Indian traditional teachings, the great Yoga's of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism are clearly represented as an invaluable resource for contemporary mankind.

Karel Wenex has explained in his book- "According to the Indian tradition, the ancient Vedic religion is not a product of the imagination of primitive minds reacting to natural phenomena by personifying, worshipping, and dreading them, but on the contrary, is the creation of exceptional individuals who had reached the fullness of mystical vision, which gave them an understanding of and insight into the problems of life and existence that may have amounted to the final knowledge of the truth itself. And some hymns of the Rig Veda and Atharva Veda, if studied carefully, lead us to admit that only deep experience based on efficient Yoga technique could have produced the profound insights that we find in them."^[13]

L Adams Beck has written: "This subject of Yoga is a high and difficult one. At points there is symbolism that only the instructed can piece and reach the truth behind. Remember also that Yoga is in many respects a key to the highest teachings of the Indian philosophies, including that of the Buddha." He has endorsed Yoga as a gift to the West. We are only beginning to realize what great gifts India brings us, gifts not to be feared but welcomed."

This book's another place, which quoted Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's opinion: "It is good to know that the ancient thinkers required of us to realize the possibilities of the soul in solitude and silence, and to transform the flashing and fading moments of vision into a steady light which could illumine the long years of life."^[14]

Vedic Indians knew how to celebrate life, but they also had a penchant for deep thought, solitary concentration, and penance. Dating from a period of the Aryans in India, Yoga has had an enormous influence on all forms of Indian spirituality, including Hinduism, Buddhist, and Jain and later on the Sufi and Christian. The teaching of Buddhism which arose in India is similar to those of yoga: striving toward nirvana and renouncing the world. Indeed, some kind of meeting between yoga and early Buddhism certainly took place, and one of the Buddhist schools is actually called Yogachara (practice of Yoga). Indian Buddhism spread throughout Asia, some ideas from Yoga were carried into Tibet, Mongolia, China, and from there on into Japan. Indeed, Zen is a specific form of Yoga's dhyana or 'transcendental meditation' and the word Zen (like the Chinese tchan) is a simple phonetic development from Sanskrit dhyana.

So, the original Yoga darshana tradition appears not only as the Patanjali tradition but also the Vedic, Upanishadic and Puranic tradition. Its teachings are found not only in the Yoga Sutras but in the Mahabharata, including the Bhagavad Gita, Moksha Dharma Parva and Anu Gita, which each contain extensive teachings on Yoga. These in turn connect to the Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas, which address Yoga in many forms like mantra, ritual (Karma Yoga), knowledge (Jnana Yoga), devotion (Bhakti Yoga), and so on. The Hiranyagarbha Yoga tradition appears to be the main Vedic Yoga tradition. So the Patanjali Yoga tradition arises as an outgrowth of it or a later expression of it.

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