

ETHICAL VALUES REFLECTED IN THE YOGA PHILOSOPHY

Dr Jumli Nath

Abstract

The ultimate goal of *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali is self-realization or freedom. This philosophy teaches us the lesson of love by inculcating ethical values like *ahimsā*, *satya*, *dāna*, *tapa*, *śradhā* etc. It serves as guidelines to the society. The practice of *yoga* includes physical, mental, and emotional purity towards all other living beings. The aim of *yoga* is to manifest the inner consciousness.

Key words

Yoga, yama, niyama, āsana, prāṇāyama, pratyāhāra, dhyāna dhāranā, samādhi etc.

Introduction

The *Yoga* philosophy is a precious gift of the great Indian sage Patañjali, whose contributions turned the moral, ethical, spiritual world of the mankind. Philosophy is the practical necessity of life, for understanding the life as a whole i.e., how the life can be used and how the knowledge of human ends i.e, *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa* can be attained. Though Indian philosophy starts with a pessimistic vision but it builds up an optimistic and positive approach to realize one's values in life. Terms such as knowledge, awakening, humility, modesty etc are often used to characterize the education that got from the Indian philosophical systems. Like all other philosophical systems *Yoga* philosophy also helps to develop the personality of men by inculcating all kinds of ethical and virtuous values. It is a great aid to those people who wish to realize the existence of the spirit as an independent principle, free from all limitations of the body, the senses and mind¹.

The Patañjali system presents an extensive illustration of the nature and forms of *Yoga*, the different steps in *Yoga* practice, and other important things connected with these. Geraldine Coster, a renowned psychiatric practitioner expressed her conviction on the *Yoga* philosophy that “ The ideas on which ‘*Yoga*’ is based are universally true for mankind and that we have in the *Yoga Sūtra* a body of material which we could investigate and use with infinite advantage.”² She further suggested that “*The Yoga Sutra* of Patañjali” do really contain the information that some of the most advanced Psycho-therapists of the present day are ardently seeking”³ Like all other Indian philosophical systems, the *Yoga - Sūtra* of Patañjali also got the place of pride in a very high esteem. This philosophy provides the concept of eightfold means of *yoga*

through which we can train our mind and physic to do everything, even the most ordinary works with equanimity and equability. This philosophy also teaches us the lesson of love by inculcating ethical values like *ahimsā*, *satya*, *dāna*, *tapa*, *śradhā* etc.

Concept of *ahimsā* in Yoga philosophy

The *Yoga - Sūtra* of Patañjali elaborately discusses the concept *ahimsā* also along with all kinds of moral values. It is the first and the foremost ethical value of the *Yamas*. This system appeals each and every *yoga* practitioner to follow the path of *ahimsā* in their entire life. The supreme benefit of *yoga* is that we can coordinate the whole body and also increasing our concentration level which gives us the feeling of peace in our mind. *Yoga Sutra* teaches us that ethical values are needed to be practiced towards ourselves. According to Vyāsa, the most famous commentator of the *Yoga Sutra*, remarks all the *yamas* and *niyamas* (personal observances) have their origin in *ahimsā* and they are meant to achieve it. In the history of Indian thought, there are some philosophers who had interpreted *Ahimsā* as a strong command against all kinds of violent activities.

Cultivating moral values by inculcating eightfold means of *yoga*

There are eight fold means of *yoga*, which are called as *astāṅgayogāṅgas*. These eight fold means of *yoga* helps to purify one's mind along with the body. A man can not realize spiritual truths as long as his mind is infected with impurities and also his intellect will be occupied by evil thoughts. Spiritual insight will immerge in the mind only when all impurities of mind will be throughout by making the mind calm and serene. For the purification and the enlightenment of mind, *Yoga* gives us the eightfold means which consists of the disciplines of (a) *yama* or restraint. (b) *niyama* or culture, (c) *āsana* or posture, (d) *prāṇāyama* (breath-control) (e) *pratyāhāra* or withdrawal of senses. (f) *dhyān* or contemplation (g) *dhāranā* or attention (h) *samādhi* or concentration. These are designed to lead us towards everlasting contentment. So everyone should follow these phenomena step-by-step to bring peace and harmony in their lives.

The Five *Yamas* of *Yoga*

At the beginning of Patañjali's eight-fold path of *yoga*, *yoga* starts with the *Yamas* which signifies the moral, ethical and social guidelines for us. These guidelines are expressed in positive manner, through which one can truly immerse in the final state of emancipation. The *Yamas* are still highly relevant and valued which guides us to lead a conscious, honest and ethical, virtuous life. Patañjali considered the *Yamas* are as the great, mighty and universal vow. He instructs us that *yamas* should be practiced on all levels i.e. in actions, words, thoughts etc. and which are not confined to any class, place and time or any kind of concept of duty. It is stated in the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali, "jātideśakālasamayānavachhinnāḥ sārvaḥaumā mahāvratam."⁴

Centuries ago, Patañjali laid out a kind of map which directs not just doing *āsana* and meditation but also attitudes and behaviors that helps us to live in a very peaceful manner. *Yoga Sūtra* contains essential advice for daily living. Patañjali has given us guidelines, which helps us to enhance our emotional and mental ability. The *Yoga Sutra* is specifically designed to lead a greater happiness and spiritual fulfillment for everybody. The Patañjali's yamas are actually exists to eliminate harmful behaviors like greediness, hatred, delusion etc, and the niyamas are designed to create well-being for ourselves and others. People who practices Yoga, aren't concerned with wrong deeds and actions in true sense. Yoga helps to remove all kinds of behaviors which produce sufferings, difficulties and also herms to other living beings.

The yamas and niyamas helps in promoting inner and outer peace and bliss. They create harmony in our life and help to keep good relationship to our environment. If there is harmony then consciousness will expand. They also provide a mirror in which we reflect our Selves. If we line up our life with ethical values then they will lead us to our highest aspirations viz., peace, truth, harmonious relationships, contentment, purity, self-acceptance, love etc. which are regarded as the essence of happiness.

Yama, the first discipline of Yoga consists of *ahimsā* or abstention, which protects us from all kinds of injury committed to any life. *Ahimsā* is the first and foremost ethical principle discussed in the *Yoga Sūtra*. It is the essential philosophical text that from which modern Yoga is also evolved. The term *ahimsā* literally means “not to kill”. It is the practice of restraint of any violent or negative impulses that could harm another. Hence, *ahimsā* means not only physically harming someone or something else but also hit others or harms the environment, and even not hurting a fly also. In one sense, *Ahimsā* means nothing but the conception of love, love to all living beings. *Ahimsā* can be said as kindness also. While enunciating the eight stages of yoga, Patanjali has mentioned *yama* as the first one and *ahimsā* is one of the five yamas. “Like Jainism, Yoga counts *ahimsā* as one of the moral code, for external conduct and all other virtues are subordinate to it in the sense that *ahimsā* includes them all.”⁵ *Ahimsā* is defined as not having ill-will towards all beings, always and in all manners.⁶

Ahimsā is the absence form of *himsā* which never involves to physical injury and mentally harm to other living beings and as well as other natural tiny creatures.

Four types of *himsā* have been enumerated in the *Yuga Sūtra*⁷, such as-

- (i) From the agency point of view: *kṛta, kārita, anumodita*.
- (ii) From the causal point of view: *born from lobha, krodha and moha*.
- (iii) From the gradation point of view : *mṛdu, madhya, atimātra*.
- (iv) From the consequence pint of view : *duḥkha, jnāna, ananta*.

On the other hand, when *ahimsā* is accomplished to its fullest extent then it gives results in *vairatyāga* and discards all types of ill-will towards all.

Patañjali, the exponent of Yoga philosophy, recommends ten virtues which should be practiced by all persons. The first five are: *Ahimsā* (non-violence), *Satya* (truthfulness), *Brahmacharya* (celibacy in thought, word and deed), *Asteya* (non-stealing) and *Aparigraha* (non-covetousness). These constitute *Yama* or self-restraint. The other five virtues are: *Śauca* (internal and external purity), *Santosha* (contentment), *Tapas* (austerity), *Svādhyāya* (study of scriptures or recitation of Mantra) and *Īśvarapranidhāna* (consecration of the fruits of all works to the Lord). These constitute *Niyama* or religious observance.

Ahimsā : It is of a dynamic peaceful process which prepares our mind to meet all needs with loving sincerity. It suggests of a state of balance that can evolve, that meets each situation in an open and accepting way. *Ahimsā* is really a condition of the strength; it starts right in our thoughts and later on in our actions.

Satya: *Satya* urges us to speak truth at all times. *Satya* should be in thought, speech and deed. Walking in the path of truth is a hard one, especially while respecting Patanjali's first *yama*, *ahimsā*. While practicing *Ahimsā*, we must be careful not to speak such kind of truth which will only cause harm to other. Living in truth only creates integrity to all living creature and also provides the vision to see clearly the higher truths of the yogic path.

Asteya: *Asteya* can be defined as to take nothing which is not freely given. The practice of *Asteya* entails not committing theft physically and or not causing or approving of anyone else doing so in mind, word, or action. *Asteya* never commits to exploitation, social injustice, brutality etc. Practicing *Asteya* encourages to overcome from *Lobha* (greed). Patanjali tells us, "When *Asteya* is firmly established in a yogi, all jewels will become present to him/her," as it is mentioned, "*Asteyapratisthāyām sarvaratnoupasthāpanam*"⁸ in the *Yoga Sutra*. In these present days, *Asteya* is needed to build our nation corruption free.

Brahmacharya: *Brahmacharya* helps to control our physical impulses. When we control over our physical impulses of excess we can get knowledge, vigor, and increased energy. To break the bonds of material attachments, *Brahmacharya* is needed. The people who follow the rules of *Brahmacharya* help to increase their courage, will power, mental stability etc.

Aparigraha : *Aparigraha* urges us to let go of everything that we do not need, possessing only as much as necessary. The yogis tell us that worldly objects cannot be possessed at all, as they are all subject to change and will be ultimately destroyed. When we become greedy and covetous we lose the ability to see our one eternal one, the *Ātman*, our true Self. It is a psychological law that a sound mind resides in a sound body then only a person who is endowed with these kinds of ethical values which surely survives a better life.

The practicing the Yamas eliminates or reduces the growth of bad *karma*. When we practice the Yamas we are striving towards living a healthier, holier and more peaceful life and at the same time we build up our powers of awareness, will and judgment etc. Engaging in these practices is not an easy task, yet by doing so we strengthen our character, improves our relationships with other living beings. According to Yuga Philosophy, the five yamas are the universal great vows not to be restricted by class, place, period or notion of duty.

Patañjali gives essential advice for day to day life. He has offered us guidelines that will allow us to enhance emotional and mental well-being and also builds a more meaningful life. The *Yoga Sutra* is specifically designed to lead for greater happiness and spiritual fulfillment.

Like *yama*, *niyama* also inculcates good postures' which helps a man to do non-violent works in his day to day life. The second discipline is *niyama* or culture. It contains in cultivation of the following good habits (a) *śauca* or purification of the body by washing and taking pure food and purification of the mind by cultivating good emotions and sentiments, such as friendliness, kindness, cheerfulness etc. (b) *santosa* or the habit of being content with what comes of itself without undue effort. (c) *tapas* or penance which consists in the habit of enduring cold and heat etc. observing auspicious vows. (d) *svādhyāya* refers the regular habit of study of religious books, novels etc. (e) *iśvarapranidhāna* refers to the state of meditation and devotion to god. It is mentioned in the *Yoga Sūtra*, “*Śaucasantosaṭapaḥ svādhyāyeswarapranidhānāni niyamaḥ.*”⁹. These all good habits help a person to inculcate the feeling of *ahimsā*.

If we have been practicing *yoga* for a while, we will be familiar with *āsana*, *prāṇāyama*, and *dhyāna*. But we might to know about the first two steps of the path: the five *yamas* and five *niyamas*. These are the ethical and core values of *yoga*. *Āsana* is nothing but a discipline of the body and consists in the adoption of comfortable postures. The discipline of the body is very much necessary in attaining the concentration of the mind. *Yoga* lays down elaborate rules for maintaining the health of the body and making it a fit vehicle for concentrated thought, it prescribes many rules for preserving the vital energy, strengthening and purifying the body as well as mind. *Yoga* helps in creating a healthy mind in a healthy body from which good thoughts, feelings are sprang out. The practice of *Yoga* automatically excludes all kinds of violence, conflict and anger from our mind. *Yoga* makes our mind full of peace, harmony and happiness from which arises the ethica values like compassion, love, kindness, positive talk, positive thinking etc.

Śauca

It is the first of the *niyamas*, the active observances as mentioned above. It involves keeping things clean both in inside and outside. The concept of *śauca* means nothing but both physical and mental hygiene. A mind trained by meditation has more simplicity and compassion to all creatures.

Santoṣa

In the *Sādhanapāda* of *Yoga Sutra* *santoṣa* is interpreted as the greatest happiness, the underlying joy that cannot be shaken by life's tough moments, by injustice, hardship, bad luck etc. It is stated that “*santoṣādnuttamsukhlabhaḥ*”¹⁰.

Tapas (Right Effort)

Tapas is translated as "self-discipline," "effort," or "internal fire," and the *Yoga Sutra* suggests that when *tapas* is in action, will burn away all kinds of impurities and leads to fulfillment of mental peace, hence it is said *kāyeindriyasiddhirsuddhiṣsayāt tapasaḥ*.¹¹ It enhances the willingness to do the work, which means nothing but developing discipline, enthusiasm, and a burning desire to learn. In *Yoga*, it's often seen as a commitment to the practice. It helps to connect ourselves with our own determination and will.

Svādhyāya (Self-Study)

Happiness that lies within each of us, we should try to dedicate ourselves in *svādhyāya*, the art of self-study, through which we can signify ourselves.

The *Yoga Sūtra* suggests that the study of the Self leads us towards the Divine Being. It's a lofty aim, but we can develop *svādhyāya* as we move through everyday life. *Svādhyāya* is a skillful and systematic investigation of how things are. "Self-study leads to union with the desired deity”, “*svāddhyāyadiṣṭadevatāsamprayogaḥ*”¹² Such an individual has no need for external aids to achieve his spiritual purpose.

Īśvara Pranidhāna : (Dedication to the Highest)

Yoga Sūtra states, liberation i.e., the highest happiness comes only from a love and surrender to God. It is declared in the *Yoga Sūtra* as “*samādhisiddhirīśvarapraṇidhānāt*.”¹³

Īśvara Pranidhāna helps to understand what the concept of God is. It's about offering oneself to the divine matrix. It's letting our own holy essence guide our actions and catching the sacred power of life. Surrendering oneself wholly to god leads to perfection of *samādhi*.

The ethics of *Yoga* is not egoistic as because it is not indifferent to the welfare of mankind. Good will, friendship (*maitrī*) for all happy creatures, compassion (*karunā*) , joy (*mudita*) for all virtuous persons and indifference (*upekṣā*) etc.

Yoga Philosophy helps to control both physical and mental condition. But usually, it is easier to control first the body and the senses. Mind can be controlled afterwards. When the mind becomes free from internal

complexes, it starts feeling a sort of ineffable joy during meditation. It is clearly mentioned in the *Yoga Sūtra* “*te pratiprasavaheyāḥ sūkṣmāḥ*.”¹⁴ This kind of tension removal is known as yogic practice. The yogic practice performs constantly as a guard against all the mental impurities like lust, anger, greed etc. This needs to be appreciated in a more holistic sense and as it combines physical, mental health. *Yoga* improves tremendously our all kinds of habits which inculcate a person in the tune of non-violence.

Inculcation of ethical values by the means of āsana and dhyāna

Āsana is a discipline of the body and consists in the adoption of steady and comfortable postures. They are various kinds of *āsana*, such as *padmāsana*, *bhadrānana*, *virāsana* etc. The discipline of body is necessary for the attainment of concentration as that of the mind. If the body is not completely free from diseases and other disturbing influences, it is very difficult to attain concentration. Hence, *Yoga* lays down elaborate rules for maintaining the health of the body and makes it a fit vehicle for concentrated thought. It controls the disturbances of mind. It prescribes many rules for preserving the vital energy, and strengthening and purifying the body and the mind.

Dhyāna or meditation is the next step of *Yoga*. It is the even flow of thought about the object of attention and the steadfast contemplation of the object without any break or disturbance. This gives us a clear and distinct representation of the object as a whole. Thus *dhyāna* reveals the reality of the contemplated object to the yogi's mind.

Visualization of a Universal love and compassion through inculcation of ethical values

Patañjali gives us a universal approach on humanity; a perspective, which is much relevant to the world of today. He clearly states that the above practices are to be practiced without the limitations of social or geographic conditions or any consideration of time and circumstance: These are universal and great vows (*mahā-vrata*). The desire not to harm others is an essential component in cultivating a mental state recognizing the essential unity primarily with all living beings, leading towards ultimate spiritual union, envisaged as the final goal of *yoga*.

The practice of *yoga* and meditation enhances discipline and remove obstacles such as ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life. The practice of *yoga* cultivates the feeling of friendship, compassion, joy, equanimity etc., toward all living creature.

Conclusion

Yoga philosophy serves as guidelines to human conduct and character and its value, utility and significance are inestimable. Moral values refine the different dimensions of our personality which upholds progressively the whole physical and mental setup. The ultimate goal of *yoga* is self-realization, which can also be called

as freedom. The *yama* and *niyama* give us infinite opportunities to truly purify our life. Yogic practice is the prospect to relinquish hostility and irritability which makes space within our consciousness for peace. In that space, anger, separation, and violence resolve themselves. The practice of *yoga* includes physical, mental, and emotional purity towards all other living beings. The goal of *yoga* is to manifest the inner consciousness. Practice of *yoga* is to eliminate all that is negative and evil in man's personality and to develop in him all that is transcendent, good, auspicious and noble. *Yoga* leads to cultivation of positive traits and human values such as purity, truthfulness, nobility, unselfish love, forbearance, absence of anger and greed and lust, spirit of brotherhood, self-sacrifice, integrity, composure of the mind, and restraint of the senses, various disciplines in spiritual life etc.

Foot notes

- 1) Miss G.Coster, *Yoga and Western Psychology*, p 246.
- 2) Geraldine Coster : *Yoga and Western Psychology*, p- 244
- 3) op. cit. p 245
- 4) *Yoga Sutra.*, (Y.S.) 2.31.
- 5) Dasgupta, S.N. *Yoga Philosophy*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi. 1924. p.302
- 6) Vyāsabhāsyā on *Yogasūtra* , 2.30
- 7) *vitarkā himsādayḥ kṛtakāritānumoditā lobhakroddhamohhapurbakā mṛdumadhyādhimātrā dukhājñānānantabhalā- iti pratipkṣabhāvanam / Ibid., 2. 34*
- 8) *Ibid.*, 2.37
- 9) *Ibid.*, 2.32
- 10) *Ibid.*, 2.42
- 11) *Ibid.*, 2.43.
- 12) *Ibid.*, 2.44
- 13) *Yoga Sūtra* 2.45
- 14) *Ibid.*, 2 .10

15) Ibid., 2.35

16) *Mahābhārata.*, *Anusāsanparva*, 116: 38-39

17) Ibid., 2.34

REFERENCES

ORIGINAL WORKS

1. *Vyāśabhāṣya tattva Visāradi* Vācaspati Miśra, Anandasram Poona, 1932
2. *Yoga Sāra Sangraha* Theosophical publishing house, Madras, 1933
2. *Yogasūtra*, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 1989
3. *Yogavārttika* Vijnānabhikṣu Bharatiya Vidya Prakasana, Varanasi 1971.

MODERN WORKS

- 1) Aranya, Swami Hariharananda *Yoga Philosophy of Patañjali with Bhasvati* (5th edition.) Calcutta, 2000
- 2) Feuerstein, Georg *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice: Delhi, 2002.*
- 3) Iyengar, B.K.S. *Light on the Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali* (8th ed.): New Delhi, 2003.
- 4) Jha, Ganganath *The Yogadarsana*, English Translation Theosophical publishing house, Madras, 1934
- 5) Karnatak, Dr. Vimla *A Critical Study of the Patañjali Yoga Sūtra in the Light of its Commentators* (Hindi): Varanasi, 1974.
- 6) Karnatak, Dr. Vimla *Patañjali Yoga Darshanam* (4 vols.): Varanasi, 1999