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Means to Liberation by Four Yogas and the Uniqueness of Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy

Amit Kumar Batabyal

State Aided College Teacher, Panskura Banamali College, West Bengal

Abstract

Contemporary Indian philosophy has arisen in awareness of the need to blend the forces of tradition with those of modernity. The contemporary Indian philosophers believe that philosophy is to be treated like an attitude – an attitude towards life. Humanism has always been the most emphatic point for contemporary Indian philosophers. One of the trendsetters on this particular point of humanism is Swami Vivekananda, a stalwart of 19th and 20th-century Indian philosophy. In the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, the concept of Yoga plays a dominant role. In Yoga Philosophy, 'yoga' means the cessation of mental functions or modifications (Cittavrttinirodha). The word 'Yoga' itself is highly ambiguous. In the narrower sense, it means 'union' while in the wider sense it means 'mārga' or 'discipline'. Vivekananda incorporated both these meanings in the word 'Yoga' with a comprehensive outlook. Yoga philosophy prescribes four spiritual paths to attain knowledge of the self: karma-yoga, the path of selfless action; jñāna-yoga, the path of knowledge and discrimination; Bhakti-yoga, the path of devotion; and Rāja-yoga, the path of concentration and meditation. In classical philosophy, it has been said that all the four kinds of yogas are incompatible with each other. But according to Vivekananda, they are all consistent with and complementary to each other. He sought to establish Jñāna-Karma-Bhakti Samuccaya. Each seeker is called upon to decide which yoga best corresponds to his or her natural disposition. Vivekananda gives perfect liberty to the individual for choosing and pursuing the course that he likes best. Karma-yoga is advised for the active, Jñāna-yoga for the rational, Bhakti-yoga for the devotional, and raja-yoga for the strong-willed. The goal of all four Yogas is freedom from the assumed bondage of the soul and realization of our true identity.

Keyword: Jñāna, Karma, Bhakti, Yoga, Mokṣa, Soul

Introduction: Swami Vivekananda opines that the ultimate destiny of all the *Jivas* is the realization of immortality, which is their essential nature. "Immortality" literally means deathlessness-it is only the negative meaning, but it has a deeper positive meaning, and that is freedom from the bondage of the cycle of births and rebirths. Vivekananda believes that the soul survives death and this survival assumes first the form of rebirth and finally the

realization of immortality or complete freedom. Thus there are two aspects of immortality-survival and immortality as such. The ultimate destiny of Jiva is freedom from the state of bondage, true immortality can be attained only when the cycle of birth and rebirth is finally stopped. This view of Swami Vivekananda is like that of the ancient Indian Sages who also believed that the ultimate destiny of the Jivas consists in attaining absolute freedom from bondage, i.e., the realization of immortality as the essence of the soul.

Now, the question is: How can the immortality of the soul be realized? The process of its realization can be described as 'Yoga'. The word "Yoga" has generally two kinds of meaning- it may mean union or it may mean a kind of discipline. According to Vivekananda, 'Yoga' means the path of both discipline and union- it consists of some disciplines that enable the pursuer to have the feeling of the union. Vivekananda says that all these disciplines – the way of cognition, the way of feeling, and the way of action-are themselves different ways of feeling, and the way of action-are themselves different ways for the realization of immortality. They are not inconsistent with one another, but complementary to one another. Vivekananda has such a comprehensive outlook that he includes even "Yoga" in the popular sense, i.e., "Raja-Yoga" as one of the alternative ways of realization. Here a short account of the different kinds of Yoga recognized by Vivekananda as disciplines leading to the realization of the immortality of the soul.¹

Karma Yoga: In Indian philosophy '*karma*' means the performance of sacrifices or particular kind of actions leading to salvation. According to Swami Vivekananda '*karma*' (action) is understood in its proper sense or spirit can be very effectively synthesized with *jñāna* (knowledge), there being no antagonism between the two. According to him, karma means actions which lead to the formation of character, which lead to the rise of a 'Real Man'. Karma itself has no inherent moral quality; it is itself neither good nor bad. It is only due to the purity or impurity of the motive out of which it springs, that karma becomes good or bad, conducive to freedom or obstacle to it. If the motive is entirely or unselfish, the action is good and as such, conducive to spiritual freedom, and if the motive is selfish, the action is bad.

Karma mārga is entirely based on performing our duties. All duties lead to selflessness. Karma Yoga is the way or path by which human will power is expressed through actions for the attainment of spiritual development. A *Karma Yogin* performs his actions being motivated by pure love. In performing his actions he remains completely unattached and seeks no personal rewards. Attachment comes only when we expect a return after acting. Swami Vivekananda adopted the principle of "work for work's sake" from Buddha who, after attaining *Nirvāna*, kept on working throughout his life. Swami Vivekananda was very much inspired by the concept of *Niṣkāma Karma* as told by Gītā.²

Niṣkāma Karma refers to the actions done not motivated by the thought of enjoying the fruits of the work. We have to do good for its own sake, not for the sake of its good results. Either we have to give up all fruits of work by our will power (in case of a person who does not believe in the existence of God) or we have to give up the fruits of work unto God (in

case of a person who believes in the existence of God). Thus the non-attachment emerges. "Attachment is the sense of identification with anything as 'mine'. With the idea of possession comes selfishness, and selfishness brings misery" ³ actually whatever we do possess, we always tend to label it as 'mine'. This type of narrow mentality causes selfishness, bondage and misery. Non-attachment which consists in being unselfish leads to self-abnegation. Self-abnegation makes a man ready to sacrifice himself for others.

Swami Vivekananda says, 'Karma-Yoga, therefore, is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness, and by good works. The Karma-Yogi need not believe in any doctrine whatever. He may not believe even in God, may not ask what his soul, nor think of any metaphysical speculation. He has got his special aim of realization selfishness, and he has to work it out himself. Every moment of his life must be a realization, because he has to solve by mere work, without the help of doctrine or theory, the very same problem to which the *jñāni* applies his reason and inspiration and the *Bhakta* his love.'⁴

JÑĀNA YOGA: *Jñāna Yoga* is the path of knowledge. The darkness of ignorance can only be dispelled by the light of knowledge. Our bondage is due to this ignorance. According to Vivekananda, ignorance occurs due to our inability to distinguish between the real and the unreal. Vivekananda's entire sympathy was with '*Jñāna*'. He says that all our actions are necessary to produce the spark of knowledge. According to *Jñāna Yoga*, knowledge has two aspects – fire and light. The fire burns all the impurities of our mind, and knowledge enlightens our inner consciousness simultaneously. Self-knowledge does not come by itself, it requires renunciation of all desires – both earthly and heavenly. Ignorance can only be eradicated by attaining this self-knowledge. The method of *Jñāna Yoga* is to persuade the seeker that his or her sole identity is the self. Self-knowledge cannot be gained merely through study or listening to lectures by wise teachers. We have to meditate upon the truths that we have learnt. This requires the constant practice of concentration. By hearing about the Self, reading about the Self, thinking about the Self, and meditating on the Self, the mind gradually realizes that the Self is the only reality in this universe and that all else is unreal. Self-knowledge, according to *Jñāna Yoga*, is true liberation.

Like Śaṅkarācārya, the Advaita Vedāntist, Vivekananda says that Brahman is nirguna, i.e., devoid of attributes, but is of the essence of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss (*Sachchidānandasvarupa*). However, Vivekananda suggests something new that is not found in the Advaita Vedānta at all, namely that Brahman is Bliss (*Ānanda*), which is the same as Love (*Prema*). That is the uniqueness of Advaita Vedānta of Vivekananda. ⁵

Again, according to him, *Sat, Cit and Ānanda* are not three different essences of Brahman, but they are three aspects of the very same essence. Brahman cannot be conceived of by the mind or described by speech. So says Vivekananda, "Any imagination, any concept is in vain, *Neti, neti* (not this, not this) is all that can be said, for even to think is to limit and to lose." ⁶

The Vedānta said that we are not bound, we are already free. " I have neither death nor fear, I have neither caste nor creed, I have neither father nor mother nor brother, neither friend nor foe, for I am Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss Absolute; I am the Blissful One, I am the Blissful One. I am not bound either by virtue or vice, by happiness or misery. Pilgrimages and books and ceremonials can never bind me. I have neither hunger nor thirst; the body is not mine, nor am I subject to the superstitions and decay that come to the body, I am Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss Absolute." This 'says the Vedanta', is the only prayer that we should have. This is the only way to reach the goal, to tell ourselves, and to tell everybody else, that we are divine." ⁷

Bhakti Yoga: 'Bhakti Yoga' is the way of realizing God through intense love. *Karma mārga* and *Bhakti mārga* are not opposed to each other. We can have unselfishness only by a love which can make our duties pleasant. "Bhakti Yoga is a real, genuine search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing and ending in love." ⁸

According to Swami Vivekananda, devotion or love is natural to man. So *Bhakti mārga* is the easiest way to realize God. This *mārga* does not require any special capacity or aptitude like other three *mārgas*. Generally, the object of our love is mere worldly things or persons which are transitory, perishable and finally unreal. In this sense, love is not pure love but attachment. Instead of finite and limited love, we should extend our love to the extent of infinitude. This love is the universal love, love for all. Universal love becomes possible only through the love of God. God is the generalized universal whole and all things in the Universe are parts of Him. If we love that total, we love everything. Thus the power to love all comes only to one who loves God first.

Vivekananda mentioned some steps through which a seeker of *bhakti mārga* can realize the Supreme. Because only the Brahman as Absolute is too much of an abstraction for a common person to be loved and worshipped. So the *Bhakta*, the seeker of *bhakti mārga*, chooses the relative aspect of Brahman, that is Īśvara or God as his object of love and worship. In the first stage, we worship certain images or idols of Gods and Goddesses or prophets. In the second stage, prayers of God, chanting hymns, repeating God's name several times, singing the songs glorifying God take a prominent place. In the third stage, the prayer of God becomes transcendental. In the place of chanting hymns, a silent meditation takes place. At this stage, the devotee starts to think about God as the only existent being in his or her world. The fourth stage is the final stage where the distinction between the lover and the beloved, between the worshipper and the worshipped, between the devotee and the God vanishes. At this stage, the devotee becomes almost one with the Supreme. It is a divine and unique feeling of essential oneness.

Bhakti Yoga is divided into two parts – *Gauni* or *Aparā bhakti* or preparatory stage and Para Bhakti or the Supreme stage. *Gauni bhakti* is the devotion of the devotee based on external aids, i.e., symbolical or mythological aids. Rituals, mantras, images, God-men, natural powers like the Sun, the Air, the Sky etc. – all these are the various symbols or *Pratikas* (image) which man worship as the contemplation of the Universal Being, Īśvara. This stage purifies the soul of an individual and prepares the mind of an individual for

renunciation without which attaining *Parā Bhakti* is impossible. *Parā Bhakti* or Supreme Devotion means spontaneous loving devotion of a devotee. When all our lower worldly desires drop off and we start to worship God in a real sense, for the sake of God Himself the stage of *Parā Bhakti* begins. In *Parā Bhakti* man continues to love God irrespective of any response from Him. Devotion takes on its higher forms of expression at this supreme stage. No one can attain the stage of Para Bhakti without renunciation. Renunciation is that *Vairāgya* or non-attachment for all things that are not God. The person endowed with *Parā Bhakti* rises above all forms, rituals and symbols. Between such higher love (*Parā Bhakti*) and higher knowledge (*Jñāna*), there is no difference. In the highest state of *Parā Bhakti*, the lover loses himself in the Beloved and attains to the state of Non-duality. According to Vivekananda, *Parā Bhakti* has three important features which may be termed as the three angles of the triangle of love. Firstly, love knows no bargaining. The true *Bhakta* loves God without expecting or seeking any return. Secondly, love knows no fear. When the devotee completely surrenders himself to God there is no place for fear. Thirdly, love knows no rival, for the devotee learns to love the highest Ideal in itself.⁹

RĀJA YOGA: Swami Vivekananda regarded Rāja Yoga or Patanjali's yoga as a science. The practice of this yoga enables us to realize God and have a direct religious experience. Here the main emphasis is on concentration and meditation. " Rāja Yoga is the way to the realization of immortality by controlling the mind and the body." ¹⁰ It involves certain yogic exercises of the psycho-physical nature. Concentration or meditation which directs us to direct spiritual devotion is the final stage of *Rāja Yoga* But this concentration is not possible for an individual without he has complete control over his mind and body. To control the body and the mind, a direct and forceful method is to be adopted. *Rāja Yoga* indicates this method of physical and mental discipline.

According to Vivekananda, *Rāja Yoga* is the surest and quickest method of attaining salvation. So it is called *Rāja Yoga*, i.e., the king of all yogas. But he was aware that this method is not for the weak people. Raja yoga requires immense faith in oneself as well as huge physical and mental strength. It is the monism alone which gives us immeasurable strength, according to Vivekananda.

Raja yoga is divided into eight steps – *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Āsana*, *Prānāyama*, *Pratyāhāra*, *Dhāranā*, *Dhyāna* and *Samadhi*. The first five steps are the external aids to Yoga (bahiranga sadhana) while the last three disciplines are said to be internal to yoga (antaranga sadhana).

1. The first discipline *Yama* or absolute restraint consists in (a) *ahimsā* (non-killing) or abstention from all kinds of injury to any life, (b) *Satya* or truthfulness in thought and speech, (c) *asteya* or non-stealing, (d) *brahmacharya* or continence or control of the carnal desires and passions, and (e) *aparigraha* or non-acceptance of unnecessary gifts from other people. These are to be practised by all aspirants irrespective of time, place or status. So they are called absolute.

2. The second discipline is *Niyama* or culture or relative restraints. It consists in the cultivation of the following good habits: (a) *Soaucha* or purification of the body by washing

and taking pure food (*bāhya* or external purification), and purification of the mind by cultivating good sentiments and emotions (*abhyantara* or internal purification); (b) *Santosa* or the habit of being content with what comes of itself without undue exertion; (c) *Tapas* or austerity or penance which consists in the habit of enduring cold and heat etc. and observing austere vows; (d) *svādhyāya* or the regular habit of scriptural study and (e) *Īśvarapranidhāna* or meditation of and resignation to God. They are called relative in the sense that according to time, place and circumstance there can be variations in the practices.

3. *Āsana* is a discipline of the body and consists of the adoption of the firm, steady and comfortable postures that are conducive to meditation. If the body is not completely free from diseases and other disturbing influences, it is very difficult to attain concentration.

4. The next step is *Prānāyama* which is the regulation of breath. It consists of inhalation or filling (*Pūraka*), exhalation or emptying (*Rechaka*) and retention of the vital breath (*Kumbhaka*), i.e., suspension of breath without taking in or throwing out air. Hence by practising the control of breath, the yogin can suspend breathing for a long time and thereby prolong the state of concentration.

5. *Pratyāhāra* consists of withdrawing the senses from their respective external objects and keeping them under the control of the mind. When all our organs – five organs of knowledge and five organs of action are under perfect control, one will experience a sense of blessedness.

6. *Dhāraṇa* or attention is a mental discipline which consists of holding or fixing the mind (*citta*) on the desired object. It is the state where the abstracted mind is kept steadily on an object within the body or outside.

7. *Dhyāna* or meditation is the next step. When *Dhāraṇā* becomes steady and the mind does not go to any other object, that state of mind is called *Dhyāna*. It is the steadfast contemplation of the object without any break or disturbance.

8. *Samādhi* or concentration is the final step in the practice of yoga. In it, the mind is so deeply absorbed in the object of contemplation that it loses itself in the object and has no awareness of itself.¹¹

Naturally, his teaching was through the philosophy of Vedānta. It was practically Vivekananda who gave new life and energy to the Philosophy of Vedānta. The orientalist, of course, came in and translated the books of Vedānta, but Vivekananda came and popularized the Vedānta teachings in a language understandable and appealing to ordinary people. He pointed out, as the Vedānta does, that man's nature is Divine. He said frequently line: "Each soul is potentially Divine"¹²

In this connection, it is worth mentioning that Swamiji's contribution to contemporary philosophy claims to have a uniqueness. He was not an academic philosopher. His philosophy started as a reaction to contemporary socio-religious and economic conditions prevalent among the masses of Indian society. The greatest contribution made by Swamiji to modern philosophy was his religious explanations. He tried to define religion with the aid of scientific awareness. He included religion in the realm of science by holding the view

that religion is also a science – science of consciousness. According to him, religion is the spiritual enlightenment or upliftment in human society. The great conception of " Universal Religion" of Swamiji frees religion from the hold of superstition, dogmatism, intolerance and makes religion the pursuit of Supreme Freedom, Supreme Knowledge and Supreme Happiness.

Secondly, Vivekananda's concept of 'potential divinity of the soul' gives a new ennobling concept of man. Such a concept of him prevents the degradation of man from violence and crime of modern society, divinizes human relationships and makes life meaningful as well as worth living. He has laid the foundation of "spiritual humanism" which is now manifesting itself all over the world. He combined humanism with humanitarianism with great ease. He strongly believed that without the spiritual reform of the individual there cannot be any social or political or economic reform of our society.

Thirdly, Swamiji has given a new theory of ethics and a new principle of morality based on the intrinsic purity and oneness of the Atman. The prevalent morality was based on fear – fear of the police, fear of God's punishment, fear of karma, and so on. But Vivekananda has given a new idea that we should be pure because purity is our real nature. We should love and serve our neighbours and all fellow men because we are all one in the Supreme Spirit known as *Paramātman* or Brahman.

Swami Vivekananda's philosophy has unique relevance to the modern world. The practical aspects of his teachings reflect in renunciation and service. His philosophy enhances the spiritual evolution of mankind as well as guides humanity along diverse paths to the attainment of freedom, peace and love.

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