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Yoga Ethics: Theory and Practice

Sk Amirul Haque

*State Aided College Teacher, Department of Philosophy, Panchmura Mahavidyalaya,
Bankura, West Bengal, India*

Abstract:

The yoga ethics is too much important relevant at the present situation of India as well as the world. It wants to offer a complete package of morality to human being. In Yoga Sutra we find aṣṭāṅga-yoga, i.e. yama, niyama, āsana, prānāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāranā, dhyāna and Samādhi. Yama constitutes with five values, i.e. ahimsā, satya, asteya, brahmacārya, and aparigraha. Niyama also constitutes by five elements, i.e. śouca, saṁtoṣa, tapas, svādhyāya and īśvarapranidhāna.

Yama and niyama of aṣṭāṅga-yoga offer mental training to the people interested to follow the path of yoga. Yama is concerned with mental training and niyama is concerned with physical training. It is said that yama and niyama together constitutes a moral framework of positive aspect of yoga. What to do is the main concerned of these stages. The other elements of aṣṭāṅga-yoga are also important to attain Mokṣa. Āsana is the yogin exercise by which one can attain disassociation from bodily destruction. Prānāyāma is the practice of breathe control. Pratyāhāra indicates the withdrawal of senses from the world. Dhāranā is a long practice of concentration to place the chitta on a single object. Dhyāna is the deep meditation by which one is able to assimilate the object of dhāranā with consciousness. Samādhi is the last stage of aṣṭāṅga-yoga which helps the yogin to have the truth of self and in this way to attained liberation.

So it can be said that yoga ethics does not deal only with theories, rather it offers a practical way of life. A human being has various aspects of life; physical, moral, psychological and spiritual. All these four aspects or dimensions of human life are address properly by the ethics and morality of yoga philosophy. Yama deals with the psychological aspect. Niyama is engaged with the purification of physical aspect. Āsana is purely physical posture. Prānāyāma and Pratyāhāra are related with physical dimension. Dhāranā, Dhyāna and Samādhi are related with the spiritual aspect of human life.

Keywords: yama, niyama, āsana, prānāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāranā, dhyāna and Samādhi, puruṣa, prakṛti, yogaścittavṛttinirodhah, Mokṣa.

One of the most important āstika schools of Indian philosophy is yoga philosophy. The importance of yoga to the present life is remarkable. So, I will follow the theory of yoga

philosophy and try to highlight it in practical terms. At first I will discuss the theory of yoga philosophy. In that case the principle of sāmkhya philosophy is to be talked about. Because sāmkhya and yoga philosophy believing in the same theory. Sāmkhya philosophy is dualistic believer. There are two types of entities they are puruṣa and prakṛti. Puruṣa are essentially unchangeable, inactive, and conscious entities. On the other hand prakṛti are essentially changeable, active, and unconscious. Both are eternal and independent. But creation as we know it comes about by a conjunction of puruṣa and prakṛti. According to the opinion of sāmkhya scholar the basic problem arises from here. Because puruṣa lost his own self-identity, it mixes with nature. So we have to make a difference between puruṣa and prakṛti, then we can able to release from bondage.

We saw sāmkhya has postulated two eternal and primordial elements puruṣa and prakṛti. This prakṛti is usually translated in the English commentaries as matter, but prakṛti is not very precisely mere mater. Matter, of its own self is dead and therefore non-acting. Prakṛti comes from two words; they are ‘pra’ and ‘kṛti’. ‘pra’ means ‘prakāśeṇa’ i.e. intensely and ‘kṛti’ means action¹. While as its name indicates is potentially able to act, in fact all activity is an attribute of prakṛti from amongst the two primordial principle. However, it can do so only in the presence of puruṣa. The word ‘puruṣa’ has usual meaning in common language ‘male person’ or ‘individual’. But sāmkhya term is an elementary primordial principle, which is said to immutable under any circumstance. This, therefore, automatically means that it will not be able to act or do anything of itself. But prakṛti is jada i.e. inert. The activation of prakṛti caused by the mere presence of puruṣa is technically called ‘puruṣa-prakṛti saṃyoga’. The word saṃyoga usually means joining or coupling. But the saṃyoga is a very mysterious and mystical phenomenon, very difficult to explain and understood. However only an account of this saṃyoga the prakṛti is excited and begins to evolve and the whole phenomenon world whether material or psychological, manifested or unmanifested is an evolution of prakṛti. But keep in mind that in this saṃyoga puruṣa and prakṛti stil remain completely unrelated and independent. Anywhere puruṣa at least is not at all ‘involved’ in this evolution and remains throughout unaffected and unchanged. In one way the ultimate achievement after completion of yogic process is the undoing or the end of this saṃyoga, which had really never take place factually. The direct and actual realization of this purity of puruṣa principle in its pristine state is the aim of yoga. Thus yoga is realization of the total separateness of the primordial principle puruṣa and prakṛti, and in this way yoga is not joining together but separating or at least realization of the complete separateness of these two primordial entities. Strangely, in this sense yoga is really viyoga i.e. separation and disunion.

It is generally believed that patañjali’s yoga is closely allied to the sāmkhya darśana. Many scholars even are of the opinion that patañjali’s yoga darśana takes stands on the sāmkhya, so far so, that sāmkhya and yoga are sister philosophies and are almost similar in their metaphysical and philosophical stands point. It is also believed that patañjali has accepted all the principles or ‘tattavas’ of sāmkhya completely, though a clear evidence for this cannot be obtained from the yoga sutra directly. Probable close relationship with

saṃkhya may be postulated from the sutra 11:17 to 23². The main difference from saṃkhya is an explicit inclusion of a new principle – īśvara. It is an account of this that very often yoga i.e. patañjali's yoga darśana is referred to as 'śeśvara saṃkhya'. Another element which is different in patañjali's yoga from saṃkhya is the notion of citta, which is absent in traditional saṃkhya.

Now we will talk about what is called yoga? Patañjali said the second sutra of somādhīpāda – “yogaścittavṛttinirodhah”³ i.e. yoga bringing to complete cessation the functional modification of citta. Many English commentators have translated the word citta English word mind. But this is not precise and correct. Probably the sanskrit and yogic equivalent for mind is 'manas'. Patañjali definitely differentiates between 'citta' and 'manas' as can be seen from the sutras 1:33 and 35⁴. The idea that citta is not the same thing as mind has struck some former commentators also. Therefore, to make a distinction between the two, they have rendered citta by some such expression like “mind-stuff”. But this also is not very satisfactory, particularly as it does not clarify the notion behind the word citta.

The word 'citta' is formed from the verb 'cit' which means to incite, to enlighten, to make aware etc. adding the suffix 'ta' the word citta becomes a past participle adjective used as a noun. The literal meaning of 'citta' would thus be, 'that, which is incited, enlightened, made conscious etc.' citta according to saṃkhya viewpoint is a product of prakṛti. Prakṛti of its own self is jada i.e. unable to act or become conscious. The mere presence of puruṣa, in some mysterious way influences the prakṛti and leads to act and enables it to become conscious. So from the basic meaning, we should understand the sphere of citta to be all that, where consciousness becomes manifested in the human organism⁵.

The word 'vṛtti' is derived from the verb root 'vṛt' which means 'to behave' and also to revolve 'in a circular motion'. With the suffix 'ti' indicative generally of a process or movement, the vṛtti here would mean the behavioral mode of citta. This vṛttis rise in citta one after another like the circular waves moving in the disturbed water and this similarity with the water waves is also often implied in the word vṛtti. In fact some commentators have used a simple of a disturbed water reservoir for the citta having successive vṛttis arising in it. So, also the controlled and tranquillized citta is often compared with undisturbed water of a lake or pond⁶.

The word 'nirodh' has the verb root 'rudh'- to stop by obstruction, the prefix 'ni' may be looked upon as a short form of the word 'niśesa' meaning 'without remainder' i.e. total or complete etc. Thus the word nirodha will mean stopping completely. As said above the verb 'rudh' has a sense of obstructing a process or movement, using an opposite force. But it may be emphasized here that the word nirodha here should not be understood modification or vṛttis of citta is not to be brought about, at least in patañjali's practical yoga system, by any forcible means or method. The nirodha will be spontaneous, brought about automatically by the practical of all aṣṭāṅgas of patañjali's practical yoga system⁷.

But the question is that what is the way to gain this yoga? In this context, patañjali said that the topic of the morality has been discussed as a way to the sādhana pāda i.e. the individual members of the practical path of patañjali's yoga are described in the 2nd pāda, which is therefore, justly named sādhana pada i.e. pāda of sādhana i.e. means of techniques. By the way, he said there are five kleśas among puruṣa- avidya, asmita, rāga, dveṣa, and abhiniveśa. All these kleśas needs to be destroyed. Because to get liberation, it is necessary to eradicate these five kleśas in order to create difference between puruṣa and prakṛti. As a means, patañjali said his sādhana pāda- “yogāṅgānusthānād-aśuddhi-ksayejñānadīptir-āviveka-khyāteh”-11:28⁸

After discussing the basic philosophico-metaphysical back-ground of samkhya-yoga, of which the understanding is necessary as pre-requisite for an efficient and successful of yogāṅgas, patañjali in this sutra open the discussion of the systematic practical path of aṣṭāṅgayoga.

The word anusthāna has a meaning that the practice of a particular technique or routine is to be repeated exactly in the same manner usually from day to day or even many times per day as may be convenient and feasible for the sādhanaka. In this sutra patañjali thus recommends the daily regular practice of all the necessary yogāṅgas.

The broad effect of the practice of yogāṅgas is the gradual diminution and ultimate disappearance of the impurities of all types. These impurities or deficiencies may be of any typed and may be related to any part of the human-body-spirit complex. As the impurities go on reducing, the inner light of knowledge to be gained through the awakening of rāmbhara prajñā goes on getting brighter and brighter and more and more penetrating. Thus, as explained under sutras 1:44, 11:27 etc, successively closer, clearer and more and more correct realization of the reality behind the subject chosen for meditative practices is achieved by yoogasādhaka. This process continues till the viveka-khyāti stage is reached. This is the penultimate stage or the threshold of kaivalya⁹.

Now the question is what he meant by yogāṅgas? In response to this, it can be said that the aṅga of yoga that is called yogāṅgas. That is to say that for the sake of liberation, for the release of the purusa, he has told eight ways to gain pure knowledge that is called yogāṅgas. Patañjali says talking about the eight yogāṅgas-“yama-niyamāsana-prānāyāma-pratyāhāradhāraṇa-dhyāna-samādhayo ṣṭāvaṅgāni”-11:29¹⁰.- yama, niyama, āsana, prānāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇa, dhyāna and samādhi are eight members of the systemic discipline of yoga. If these eight yogāṅgas are properly performed, then any person will be able to be liberation or kaivalya. Among these eight yoga jamah and niyama is the basis of morality. In this context, we discuss the importance of morality. Patañjali says about yama- “ahiṃsā-satyāsteya-brahmacaryāparigrahā yamāh”-11:30 – ahiṃsa, satya, asteya, brahmacarya and aparigraha are the yamas. The designation ‘yama’ is derived from the verb ‘yam’, which means to control or restrain. So these upāṅgas of yama are injunctions for self-restraint. Many commentators have differentiated yamas from niyamas with an explanation that the former are rules of personal behavior. According to the present commentator this is only

partially correct. The observances of yama by a yoga sādḥaka have not the primary objective to produce a good and well-disciplined society. These observances are recommended to produce a comparatively peaceful condition of the mind, which is the first prerequisite for the practice of yoga. The breaking of any of the yamas to be avoided mainly because it produces an adverse effect on the mind leading to its disturbance. From the point of view of yoga ahimsa is not practiced so much for not causing injury to others, but to avoid the evil effect of hiṃsā that is produced on the mind and disturbed it. For this reason not only hiṃsā in act, i.e. actually injury to others, is to be avoided. Indeed thinking of injuring others is as bad as or even worse than actually injuring. Hiṃsā in thought is also hiṃsā, probably the worst part of hiṃsā. The same is true for the rest of the yamas also. The good result of ahimsa observance for the society is from the yoga point a bye-product. Viewed in this way both yamas and niyamas are rules for one's own behavior. If there be a difference, it is that the observance of yamas is for bettering the inner atmosphere while that of the niyamas for external behavior.

The observance of yamas should be on all the three levels viz. kāyika i.e. by body, bācika i.e. speech and mānasika i.e. by mind. Most of the yamas, but particularly ahimsā, satya, asteya and brahmacharya should be observed in all these aspect. Even if one does not cause by some physical action actually some injury or harm to others and yet mentally has an intention or idea to cause such injury or harm to others, one has, from the point of yoga, broken the yama of ahimsa on mental level. So also speech, which may give mental pain to someone, is an act of hiṃsā on verbal plane. Thus an sādḥaka has to be very cautious and keep a watch on his activity so as to avoid any such act of injury or harm in any manner caused by him consciously or even inadvertently.

In the case of satya the term is translated as truthfulness. Truth means the stranger to abide by positive principle. Speak the truth, but let it not unpleasant and speak not any pleasing falsehood- this is eternal religion. It is said that if you speak the truth for twelve year, you will acquire vāk siddhi, whatever you say will come to pass. There will be great power in your speech; you will be able to influence thousands. If you are established in truth, all other virtues will cling to you. Further, the self is truth; it can be realized only by speaking truth and observing truth in thought, word and deed. There are thirteen forms are truth- truthfulness, equal, vision, self-control, absence of envious emulation, forgiveness, modesty, endurance, absence of jealousy, charity, thoughtfulness, disinterested philanthropy, self-possession, and unceasing and compassionate harmlessness. These virtues are attainable only by the unselfish¹¹.

Asteya i.e. non- stealing the third jewel guides our attempts and tendencies to look outward for satisfaction. Often, our dissatisfaction with ourselves and our lives leads us to this outward gaze, with a tendency to steal what is not rightfully ours. Further non-stealing is not limited to actual purloining of things from others which rightly do not belong to one. Even an intention or desire to possess things belonging to others is a mental steya i.e. stealing. Instances of verbal stealing are not unknown. The plagiarism often practiced by writers and speakers is an example of this, considered as a punishable criminal act by the

present day's laws. Now question is that, why does a person steal? Because we want something, when we cannot get it by legitimate means, we steal it. Desire, thirst or *trīṣṇa* is the root cause of stealing.

Brahmacārya is usually translated as continence or abstinence from sex, celibacy, chastity, etc. but the word brahmacarya is made up of two words: brahma i.e. the highest reality (the word Brahman is the vedāntic term for highest reality or principle. But very specific meaning is not there behind the term when used specially by other darśana) and other hand carya i.e. mode of behavior. Thus the basic and broad meaning of brahmacarya is a mode of behavior which will be conducive for reaching the highest goal for the spiritual sādḥaka. So brahmacarya should be understood as life correctly discipline for spiritual progress and ultimate realization. When controlled, the part of human energy which is expressed in sexual union becomes transmuted into a special spiritual energy called ojas śhakti and is stored up in the brain. All great spiritual giants of the world have practiced celibacy and that is the reason why they were able to electrify the whole world through the power of their ojas¹².

Nonpossessiveness, the fifth jewel and last of the guidelines known as the yama, liberates us from greed. It reminds us that clinging to people and material objects only weighs us down and makes life a heavy and disappointing experience. When we practice letting go, we move ourselves towards freedom and an enjoyment of life that is expansive and fresh. Also said that aparigraha is the opposite of parigraha is covetousness or greed. Aparigraha is a mental state in which the sensual craving is dead. Parigraha leads to anxiety to preserve, fear or loss, hatred, anger, untruthfulness, stealing etc. aparigraha puts an end to all these and bestows peace and contentment. It removes at one stroke fear, attachment, disappointment, anxiety, jealousy, anger, lust and depression¹³.

Another importance part of morality is niyama, whose contribution is very important for the liberation. In this context patañjali says – “śouca-santoṣa-tapa-svādhyāyeśvara-pranidhānāni niyamāḥ”^{11:32} i.e. the niyamas are śouca, santoṣa, tapas, and īśvara-pranidhāna. Souca which means cleanliness has been explained by most commentators as purification of body and mind both. But here it seems that the word should be understood primarily as the cleanliness of the body. Though the words ‘śouca’ means sucita or purity etc., derived from the verb root ‘śuc’, meaning to cleanse, to purify, can be used in relation to the purificatory processes pertaining to both the mind and body, the word ‘śouca’ is usually used for cleansing progress more concerned with the body. In fact a usual special meaning of śouca is defecation or evacuation of excreta. And the word here is very probably used in the sense of body – cleansing procedures.

Santoṣa means contentment. Inclusion of this item under niyama seems a little anomalous, because it is mental attitude. Santoṣa or contentment cuts at the root of all desire. It bestows peace, one-pointedness of mind, serenity and satisfaction. It brings success in the practice of yamas. Contentment does not mean satisfaction, but willingness to accept things as they are and to make the best of them.

Tapas or self-discipline, literally means 'heat' and can also be translated as catharsis or austerities i.e. there are innumerable varieties of austerities (tapas) described in Hindu rituals as well as in all of the religions. The sādḥaka can select any one or more suitable to him and of his liking and practice them regularly. It is said that prānāyāma is the supreme tapas (prānāyāmah param tapas). So, a yoga sādḥaka can preferably select this as the form of tapas to be practiced.

The meaning of svādhyāya, usually given by most commentators, mention that the material to be chosen for the practice of svādhyāya should be some sacred and holy book or scripture. The prefix 'sva' has a sense of ownership. The sādḥaka should have a feeling of such ownership towards the material to be read. Therefore, the material to be read, besides being conducive for spiritual development, must be the same from day to day. This will in a way produce sense of ownness about it in the sādḥaka's mind. The word 'adhyāya' which means a chapter also suggests that the material read should be fixed one.

The last item of niyama is Ísvarapranidhāna. This is usually rendered as surrender to God or Ívara. Now the surrender to God is an attitude i.e. a state of mind and not an activity of body. The Ísvarapranidhāna, which is a part of kṛiyāyoga should be an activity to be done by the body. Its interpretation as Ívara pujānādi given by some old commentators is more correct. Under kṛiyayoga the sādḥaka must do some physical activity of the nature yajanā, pujānā, or Hāvānā etc. by the body. How will elaborate this activity should be will depend on the circumstances and the liking of the sādḥaka. Too much elaboration leading to a mechanical routine, without the mental attitude of surrender or devotion, would not be at all desirable. Yet too much contraction or condensation is also not helpful. The mode of ritual and the time required for it should be adequate enough to develop a devotional state of mind leading to the surrender to the Divinity.

Thus through both yama and niyama are rules for regulating behavior, the mental attitude and the essence in the observance of yama and the corresponding outward and physical activity is of minor or very little importance. On the other hand in obeying of niyamas the physical performance has greater importance, whereas the mental attitudes are a desirable accessory an accompaniment.

So, we saw the eight ways of yoga, which are mention in the way of yoga, are very important and one of them yama and niyama play a special role. Because the vṛtti that is raised from external world, makes the citta uninterrupted, so ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya and aparighrah, through observance of these principle it is possible to purify the internal behavior. Similarly, śauca, santosha, tapas, svādhyāya and Ísvarapranidhān, through this rule, it is possible to correct external conduct. Following which the yogi reaches the yoga meditation i.e. gets liberation or mokṣa.

I think yoga is not only for yogins. It is for all. Anyone interested to lead a happy and balanced life an earth can flow the path without any investment. Again I think the application of yoga is confined in personal life, rather there is a aspect of applicability of yoga universally. If each and every person follow the path yoga and can be able to lead a

peaceful life then universal peace will appear an earth. The present world is suffering from various kinds of violations. Yoga philosophy as a theory and practical can be the sole remedy of this suffering.

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