

Introduction to Yoga Philosophy

4: Key Doctrines of Yoga (1)

Prof. K. S. Arjunwadkar

We will broadly follow the scheme of presentation of topics in *Yogasutra*, part by part. Numbers in square brackets indicate *sutras*.

The first part (*samadhi pada*) introduces the following topics:

- (1) Opening of the work and definition of Yoga: Yoga is the stopping/halting of the operations of mind. [1-2] Nature of the conscious principle (the observer, *purusha*) in Yoga (*samadhi*) and in normal (non-Yoga) states.[3-4]
- (2) Operational modes of the mind: correct cognition, incorrect cognition, verbal cognition, sleep and memory. [5-11]
- (3) Aids to Yoga: repetition/practice, detachment. [12-16]. Meditation on God. [23]
- (4) God and ways to meditate on him. [24-29]
- (5) Varieties of Yoga: (a) *samprajnata*, *asamprajnata*. [17-18]. (b) Born, acquired. [19-20]
- (6) Obstacles in Yoga. [30-31]. Ways to overcome them. [32-39]. Settled mind. [40]
- (7) Classification of the practitioners of Yoga. [21-22]
- (8) *Samprajnata* (cf. 5), renamed *sabija*, defined and classified: (a) *savitarka*, *nirvitarka*; (b) *savichara*, *nirvichara*. [42-46]
- (9) Successive development of b2 into *asamprajnata* (cf. 5), renamed *nirbija*. [47-51]

This analysis of the contents will help those who wish to read the original text at some later stage. For those who have general interest in the subject, I will make a gist in my own words. The questions before me arising from the contents above are:

- (1) What is the starting point of the inquiry *Yogasutra* has undertaken?
- (2) What is mind and its attributes?
- (3) What is its control at which Yoga aims?
- (4) What is the purpose of such a control?

Vyasa, under 2.15, compares the plan of Yoga to that of medical science: disease, cause of disease, cure, and medicine. The plan of Yoga is: *samsara* (transmigratory existence), cause of *samsara*, release, and means of release. This analysis, supplemented with background information, leads to the questions stated earlier.

Everyone in this world wishes to be happy and free from misery. But the worldly means of happiness are neither certain nor final. The thinking man therefore turns to other possible means which are free from these drawbacks. He eventually discovers that the root cause of his sufferings is his ignorance of his own nature resulting from his mistaken identity with intellect/mind, in other words, the *prakriti*. The root cause resulting in a chain of evils is outlined as fivefold in *Yogasutra* (2.3) under the name *klesha*, suffering: ignorance, ego, attachment, hatred, urge to live. The thinking man thus realises that the only means of getting rid of worldly sufferings is to get divorced from the *prakriti*. But the mistaken identity he carries on his head, age after age, does not allow him easily to take this step; for age-long impressions are extremely difficult to shake off. There is a world of distance between information and experience of a fact. It is then the question of freeing the mind from age-old impressions so that it can concentrate on his real identity. Now the mind is so fickle that it is impossible to concentrate it on a given subject unless its movements towards other objects are blocked. This is where Yoga steps in and offers its solution.

Mind as it functions in its normal state is viewed by *Yogasutra* as operating on five levels: correct cognition, mistaken cognition, verbal cognition, sleep, memory. These functions take place under the influence of the fivefold ignorance, called suffering (*klesha*). It should be noted that *Yogasutra* views sleep as not a total absence of consciousness but as the consciousness of absence; for a man arising from sleep recollects: I slept happily, knew nothing. All recollection is based on an earlier experience. The other notable observation is that every form of life has an urge to live, even under adverse conditions, as an instinct. It is a matter of common experience that this eventually leads to suffering.

It is clear that, unless a way is found to relieve the mind of these outward bound operations, there is no hope to realise the true nature of *purusha* which alone would put a stop to his misery. The basic ways to achieve this object are two: practice (*abhyasa*) and detachment (*vairagya*). This, in other words, means that, despite the force of instincts, man has a wonderful tool, will, which enables him to conquer even the instincts. It is this will, which keeps him endeavouring in spite of failure, and persuades him to forgo worldly pleasures in spite of their attraction. Eventually he reaches a stage when he has no more to do efforts to forgo pleasures. This is total detachment.

What are the subsidiary ways to get the mind inclined to be freed from its outward bound operations? Faith, which in its turn strengthens the mind and enables it to settle down. A calm mind alone is able to see the truth and eventually develop the perfect meditation. Another way to achieve this end is devotion to God. God is defined in *Yogasutra* as a specific variety of the *purusha* principle – free from fivefold suffering, actions (*karma*) and their consequences, omniscient, an eternal source of right knowledge. Considering the relation of Yoga with *Sankhya* and the summary treatment God has received in *Yogasutra*,

it appears that the place of God in Yoga is more utilitarian, rather than fundamental.

Yogasutra elaborates a number of obstacles coming in the way of controlling the mind and the means to overcome them. Here *Yogasutra* finds an occasion for introducing the fourfold attitude of friendship, compassion, delight and indifference towards fellow-beings according as they (fellow-beings) are happy, unhappy, righteous and sinful. Other means are:

- (i) the practice of breath-control
- (ii) relishing of divine sensations as they develop when Yoga progresses,
- (iii) fixation of mind on an adored personality, or even on
- (iv) whatever object can keep the mind exclusively engaged.

Samadhi is a process progressively developing with its object varying from gross to subtle, finally maturing into a state of mind in which awareness of all but the ultimate object disappears. The earlier stages of *samadhi* are marked by verbal elements and continue to store worldly impressions (*vasana*) – hence called *sabija (samprajnata)*. As the practice progresses, a state of mind develops where not only worldly impressions but also the impressions of *samadhi* get dissolved – hence called *nirbija (asamprajnata)*. This is the ultimate in Yoga where *purusha* remains in his own pure form untainted by *prakriti* or its modifications.

© Prof. K. S. Arjunwadkar