YOGA-PATHWAYS TO SELF REALIZATION

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Thesis. Department of Philosophy, University of Calicut, 2001
CHAPTER 4

YOGA - PATHWAYS TO SELF-REALIZATION

The word 'yoga' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'yuj' which means to yoke or join. In the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gītā it is used in the sense of the union of the individual soul with the universal consciousness. Individual soul in its mundane imperfect condition is estranged from the universal consciousness. Human bondage is due to the separation, disunion, and estrangement of individual soul from the universal consciousness. Liberation means spiritual unification, the consciousness of the two in one, or yoga. The term 'yoga' is also used in the sense of practical method - physical and mental - for the attainment of spiritual realization. According to Patañjali, yoga does not mean union, but only the methods of concentration and active striving through disciplined practice for experiencing the Transcendent. For Patañjali, says Radhakrishnan, "yoga is a methodical effort to attain perfection, through the control of the different elements of human nature, physical and psychical." 1 Again it is "the control of thought-waves in the mind" 2 through meditation. For Vivekananda, every soul is potentially divine. Yoga is the systematic methodology for the unfoldment of this inner potential divinity within the consciousness. It is the harnessing of one's own inherent power for the experience of oneness of
existence. The path leading to the realization of the immortality of the soul is also the path of discipline and union. Hence, it is both Philosophy and Science. In his new sense of the word yoga, he embraces both these two meanings in a very comprehensive manner.

Yoga is not something different or divorced from religion. It is an adjunct to religion in India. It is the experimental part of religion, the ways and means to the qualified spiritual aspirants. The constant practice of yoga enables one to increase his power of concentration and to reach a higher level of consciousness through the transformation of the psychic organism by establishing mastery over the vagaries of mind. The illusion of the mind completely disappears immediately with the dawn of yogic consciousness and the soul or atman within the man experiences the state of universality, silence and equilibrium. While yoga succeeds in establishing a state of Self-realization or Samādhi, religion establishes the link between the lower and the Supreme Self. Thus we find that yoga and religion are supplementary in nature.

Traditional religion recommends the three paths of bhakti, jñāna and karma corresponding to the three elements - desire, action and cognition - in human being. The Bhagavad-Gītā prescribes three paths, namely, the Karma-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga and Jñāna-Yoga. The most outstanding exponent of Raja-Yoga is Patañjali, the renowned author of Yoga- Sūtras. The main
object of Patañjali is not metaphysical theorizing, but a practical motive of indicating how self-realization can be attained by disciplined activity. Vivekananda's exposition of the different paths of liberation is based on Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gītā and Yoga-Śūtrās. He laid equal emphasis to all these four kinds of yogas in his Concept of Universal Religion. For him each one of these four yogas is independent and self-sufficient that leads to the same goal of human freedom, freedom from all the bonds of relativity. To quote Vivekananda: "Each one of our Yogas is fitted to make man perfect even without the help of the others, because they have all the same goal in view. The Yogas of work, of wisdom, and of devotion are all capable of serving as direct and independent means for the attainment of Moksha." 3

These different methods of yoga bring about mental purification and intuitively penetrate into the inner super conscious planes through meditation and finally lead to samadhi. Though they are different, their essence is one and the same and is complementary to each other.

According to Vivekananda, human beings differ in their capacities due to the predominance of one or the other of the four elements of the human mind: philosophy, mysticism, emotion and action. The ideal of religion is Man-making, to become harmoniously balanced in all these four directions, which could be attained by the practice of different methods of yoga. In the words of Vivekananda: "This religion is attained by what we, in
India, call Yoga-union. To the worker, it is union between men and the whole of humanity; to the mystic, between his lower and Higher Self; to the lover, union between himself and the God of Love; and to the philosopher, it is union of all existence." All these are different ways for the realization of the same goal.

Jñāna-Yoga is the path suitable for those who are intellectual and possess discriminatory knowledge. A man of reason is capable of discriminating Truth from untruth, Spirit from matter, Knowledge from ignorance and the Eternal from the ephemeral. Karma-Yoga is the path suitable for the men of action. As the disinterested action does not produce its effects, a man of action becomes free from bondage. Again Bhakti-Yoga is the path suitable for men who are emotional by their nature. They establish communion with God through their intense unselfish devotion and unconditional self-surrender to God. Raja-Yoga is the path suitable for the men who possess in them the power of concentration. They realize in themselves the supreme reality through various physical, mental and spiritual practices. Karma-Yoga and Raja-Yoga are nothing but the application of the will in the internal and external world, While the Jñāna-Yoga and Bhakti-Yoga are based on the intellect and emotion respectively. These yogas are really different aspects of Adhyātma yoga, that is, the realization of the Self. A harmonious balance of all these four directions can
be seen in the case of an ideal perfect man who is free from all doubts and misconceptions. Since the man is divine in nature, he is consciously or unconsciously struggling towards the goal of human life, the realization of the immortal nature of the soul in all walks of life. In the realm of spirituality, every one alone has to struggle and proceed further for self-realization. "None can teach you"; says Vivekananda, "none can make a spiritual man of you. You have to teach yourself; your growth must come from inside." 5 The renunciation of desire or attachment is the only way of getting freedom and it is possible through the practice of yoga.

4.1. **Karma-Yoga - the Path of Action**

The word 'Karma' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'kri' which means 'to do'. All action is Karma. It also means the effect of actions. In the Karma Yoga of Vivekananda, it is used in the sense of work. Any work, physical or mental, is called karma or action.

Constant work or action is the sign of life. It is essential till we attain self-realization. It promotes man's physical, mental as well as moral and spiritual well-being. Man always works with attachment to fame, money, power and heaven. Pursuit of unending attachment is the cause of all unhappiness. Work without attachment is the goal of life. A continuous practice of non-attachment in all walks of life enables man to rise above his
lower self, and to have a feeling of oneness with every thing in the universe. All the great men and the sages of the world became great by their work they performed. They lived in the world, but were unattached to the world. They did their work only to set an example in the society, so that others will follow them. Work or activity is also the foundation of the phenomenal universe. The earth is constantly spinning on its axis and rotating around the sun, and so the whole planetary system is in action without rest.

Karma-Yoga is the knowledge of the secret of work. The secret of work lies both in its means and its end. The means are the causes, which produce the effect. If the cause is exact and perfect, the effect automatically will be perfect. The realization of this ideal is the effect. Karma-yoga involves "work without motive" and is unselfish. It is the end in itself. Karma-Yogi is one who knows the secret of work. He performs good works with the sense of duty for the welfare of mankind. By acquiring the secret of work, the ignorance, which creates dualism and multiplicity in him, is completely removed.

Each man has a particular duty to perform in his life. He has to do his duty (svadharma) in conformity with his nature and with little concern for the immediate fruits of his action. The duty of the householder is different from the duty of the sannyasin. But the spirit behind the work is one and the same for all. Therefore, Vivekananda boldly asserts: "Each is great in his
own place, but the duty of the one is not the duty of the other." For him, duty for the sake of duty is equal to worship. Right performance of duties leads to the highest realization of the perfection of the soul.

Each man has to work for work's sake, not for the sake of anything else. Vivekananda insists: "work for work's sake" without any kind of attachment and selfishness. Work for the sake of work is an end in itself. In the words of Vivekananda: "Any work that is done with any the least selfish motive, instead of making us free, forges one more chain for our feet. So the only way is to give up all the fruits of work, to be unattached to them." All actions performed with the desire for its results and with a sense of ego will form what is called the ordinary actions (karma). On the contrary all actions performed desire less and ego less, indifferent to its results is 'Karma-Yoga'. Such an action becomes sacrifice or 'yajña' in the language of the Gita. When action is performed in this higher sense, it has no binding power. This sacrifice of the lower mind to the higher mind is the supreme form of yajña or the 'Cosmic Sacrifice' in the language of the Gita. Karma-Yogi works not for his own selfish motives or to gain anything, but for the sake of the world. He can make the world move according to his will, because his will-power is so great and pure that it is recognized as one with the Universal Cosmic Will. Thus through selfless work one's mind becomes
pure and he is able to identify himself with all. Even an atheist can work without attachment and be a Karma-Yogi.

For Vivekananda, work without attachment is a kind of worship and declares, "Work is worship." Selfless work possesses spiritual merit. It is worship itself because it is an act of complete self-sacrifice, an offering to God in man. The only way to find God is to see Him in His creation. Karma-Yoga is the religion that seeks to see God in the soul of the poor and refers to him as Daridranārāyana, the God of the poor. The act of worshipping Nārāyana in the poor is known as the doctrine of 'daridra-nārāyaṇa-seva'. It implies that everyone should feed a hungry Nārāyana or a lame Nārāyana or a blind Nārāyana and offer him the same worship as he would to Shiva or Vishnu in the temple. Vivekananda emphatically exhorts to "see Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased" Karma-Yoga is the technique to transform any action, sacred or secular, big or small into true worship.

The ideal of Karma-Yoga is not the attainment of pleasure, but freedom through unselfish action. Through unselfish action man can rise above his lower self and can realize oneness with Brahman. According to Vivekananda, slave's action is one of attachment. It involves selfishness. If one allows selfish considerations to control his action, then he will become a slave of his desires. So he asserts to practice "work like a master and not as a slave; work incessantly, but do not do slave's work." It is the assertion of
the sign of true love that is related with the spiritual nature of man, that is freedom.

The ideal of renunciation is a preliminary requisite for the practice of this spiritual discipline. Man cannot renounce action completely by thought, word and deed. But he can renounce attachment and the fruits regarding the action. It is not the action, but the spirit in which it is done that binds us. Self-realization is not a state of escape from the world; it is a state of perfection through selfless service of mankind. The true life of work is indeed a life of renunciation in practice.

Vivekananda does not recommend asceticism, the complete renunciation or withdrawal from the active life. For him, Karma-Yoga is the method of living in the world and practicing disinterested service. To quote his own words: "Do not fly away from the wheel of the world-machine, but stand inside it, and learn the secret of work. Through proper work done inside, it is also possible to come out."¹³ A true Karma-Yogi is a person who possesses unselfishness, love and equality for all. He should live in this world like a lotus leaf that grows in water but is never moistened by it. He should live in this world with his soul to God and his hands to work for the benefit of all mankind. Selfishness or attachment is the root cause of all kinds of sufferings in this world. Every selfish action is an obstacle in the path of self-realization.
Vivekananda advocates spiritual resurgence through Karma-Yoga, especially through the ideal of Nishkāmakarma in the spirit of the Bhagavad-Gītā. The central theme of Gītā is Karma-yoga, the proper performance of action without attachment. It is skill in action, "yogah karmas tu kausalam." A true Karma-Yogi is a 'Sthita-prajña' according to Gītā. A Sthita-prajña is one who has risen above the pairs of opposites such as cold and heat, pleasure and pain, who has subdued his passions like attachment, fear and anger, who treats friend and foe alike, and who is unaffected by honour or dishonour. Vivekananda combines intense activity with eternal calmness, the calmness, which cannot be ruffled, the calmness, which is never disturbed, whatever happens. It is only when the mind is very calm and concentrated that the whole of its energy is spent in doing good work. The man who gives way to anger or hatred or any other passion cannot work. It is the calm, forgiving and well-balanced mind that does the greatest amount of work.

Vivekananda restates the message of Karma-Yoga as a method for binding the individuals together for the benefit of humanity. He recommends ceaseless work without attachment by realizing the fact that it is the key to the well-being of the individual as well as the family. The same ideal is the very foundation of all collective and social life.
The task of this discipline is to bring harmony between the pairs of opposites such as life and death, pleasure and pain, and good and evil etc. Human life is neither good nor evil. Both good and evil action produces bondage. Evil exists in relation to good and it is not possible to separate one from the other. Freedom is a state beyond all relativity, good and evil. Therefore, it is above good and evil. In the words of Vivekananda: "Evil is the iron chain, good is the gold one; both are chains. Be free, and know once for all that there is no chain for you. Lay hold of the golden chain to loosen the hold of the iron one, then throw both away." Equanimity and spiritual progress result only from selfless service. Dedicated selfless work leads to everlasting peace and happiness here and hereafter. The message of Karma-Yoga is universal for its principles can be applied to all without any discrimination.

Karma-Yoga enables everyone to share the fruits of his action with those who need it. Mutual give and take is essential for the maintenance of life. It is the most suitable yoga for the modern man for its principles can be applied to all work, whether secular or sacred. It is suitable for all those who work in different spheres of life. It has empirical as well as spiritual significance. Right action for the good of others leads to the purification of the mind; and when the mind is purified, it gradually reflects the higher knowledge, or wisdom. It leads ultimately to the attainment of complete
freedom from limitations, and the realization of God as one's own Self or Atman. Hence it is as useful as the Bhagavad-Gītā and Upanishads in the present era.

4.2. Bhakti-Yoga — the Path of Devotion

Bhakti-Yoga is the science of supreme love and devotion. It is a genuine search after the Lord; a search beginning, continuing and ending in love and devotion. It is the way of self-realization through ceaseless pure love to God in which the object of love or devotion is not the finite, but the Supreme Reality. For Vivekananda, love or devotion is a natural instinct, which is present in all human beings; but its manifestation is different in different cases. The union with God through intense love is the most natural path to spiritual realization, since purity and self-control come on the way when man begins to love God. It can be more easily practiced by all in every condition of life.

According to Vivekananda "Bhakti-Yoga is the path of systematic devotion for the attainment of union with the Absolute." It is the loving attachment to God, a longing for God for its own sake. The development of the feeling of love creates great change in the individual and he sees nothing but God in everything.
The first stage of Bhakti-Yoga is that of external worship. In this stage, idols, images, Gods and Goddesses, prophet and God men are all objects of devotion and worship. Idol worship is the most popular form of external worship. Here Bhakti, which is used as an instrument of liberation, is really a lower form of worship. The feeling of total dependence on God and inseparability marks the higher form of worship and it is inseparable from the lower form of worship in the later stage.

The second stage consists of prayer and repetition of God's name, chanting religious hymns and singing songs of God's glory with devotion, patience and faith. The first and the second stages are only preparatory to the attainment of Parā-Bhakti. Vivekananda points out: "Prayers, ceremonials, and all other forms of worship are simply kindergartens of meditation." 17 In the third stage of silent meditation, there exists for the devotee nothing but God. The faithful practice provides inner strength and confidence to travel the spiritual path to its conclusion. In the fourth stage the devotee seeks to reduce ego and becomes almost one with the supreme. Devotion begins with the feeling of selfless love, but with constant practice it develops into the feeling of oneness, which ends in the universal love for all beings.

Devotion to one God is absolutely necessary for the beginner in the practice of religious devotion. God is both Personal and Impersonal. The
Personal God worshipped by the Bhakta is not different from the Absolute or Brahman. God is the highest manifestation of the Absolute by the human mind. He argues as follows: "Our minds are like vessels, and each of us tries to arrive at a realization of God. And God is like the water that fills the vessels of different shapes. In each vessel the vision of God takes a different form. Yet he is one; he is God in every case." 18

4.2.1. Pāra-Bhakti or Supreme Devotion

The ideal of religion of love is Para-Bhakti, which is inexpressible in human language. It is the highest and the most unselfish manifestation of love in the world. Divine love transcends all kinds of bondages. It is motiveless. To quote Vivekananda "The Bhakta loves the Lord because He is lovable; there is no other motive originating or directing this divine emotion of the true devotee." 19 The devotee renounces all the finite, perishable, temporary and worldly attachments of wealth, wife, children etc. and surrenders himself voluntarily, unconditionally and completely unto God. He dedicates all the fruits of his actions to God and places all his responsibilities to God.

According to Vivekananda, divine love can be represented as a triangle and each of the angles corresponds to one of its inseparable characteristics. The first angle of the triangle of love is that love knows no
bargaining. It is love for love's sake and does not expect any reward from God in return for love. Prayer for health or wealth is not Bhakti. Real worship does not mean begging for something. It is longing of the soul to seek union with the Divine. True religion begins only when we stop begging. In the words of Vivekananda: "To worship God even for the sake of salvation or any other rewards equally degenerate. Love knows no reward. Love is always for love's sake." Divine love is an end in itself.

The second angle of the triangle of love is that love knows no fear. To worship God from fear of punishment is merely an unrefined form of worship. Divine love conquers all fears, which derive out of selfishness. To quote Vivekananda: "Love knows no fear. It conquers all fear." The fear of God is the beginning of religion but the love of God is the end of religion. All fears, external or internal, rotate round the body. If man succeeds in acquiring detachment for his body, he will be completely free from all kinds of fear. Man cannot love so long as he subjects himself to fear.

The third angle of the triangle of love is that love knows no rival, for in it is embodied the highest ideal which is God. To quote Vivekananda: "The highest ideal of every man is called God. Ignorant or wise, Saint or sinner, man or woman, educated or uneducated, cultivated or uncultivated, to every human being the highest ideal is God." True love is universal, without any limits and bonds.
Renunciation is the stepping-stone to the practice of the parā-bhakti. It results from the unswerving intense devotion to God by controlling and channelizing emotions, passions and feelings in the human heart to a higher and higher direction until they attain the spiritual realization. The essence of this religion is to love and to be loved. It begins with the lower truth but ends with the higher truth that Love, the Lover, and the Beloved are one. Bhakta loves the whole universe by way of loving the Samashti – the universal abstract person. To quote Vivekananda: "God is the samashti, and this visible universe is God differentiated and made manifest. If we love this sum total, we love everything." Bhakta finds God in everyone, every life and every being. He feels the whole universe full of love. Everything is sacred because all things are His manifestations. The whole universe is the manifestation of the Infinite in the language of the finite, and ultimately attains the goal, that is, God-realization. Here we find that bhakti leads one from dualism to Oneness of Existence.

Parā-bhakti is the intense and supreme love to God, which is based on a clear understanding of the individual soul and its relation to God. It is the continuous and constant loving remembrance of God. Vivekananda elucidates different attitudes of the mind of bhaktas, with their different approaches to God. Such approaches are of five kinds: -(1) Shānta-Bhava (2) Dāsya-Bhava (3) Sakhya-Bhava (4) Vātsalya-Bhava (5) Madhura-
Bhava (God as Impersonal, as Master, as Friend, as Child, as Husband). These are the different human representations of the divine ideal of love.

Vivekananda describes the nature of perfect Bhakta as follows: "The perfected Bhakta no more goes to see God in temples and churches; he knows no place where he will not find Him. He finds Him in the temple as well as out of the temples, he finds Him in the saint's saintliness as well as in the wicked man's wickedness, because he has Him already seated in glory in his own heart as the one Almighty in extinguishable Light of Love, which is ever shining and eternally present." 24 Bhakti-yoga is the quest of union through love, devotion and complete self-surrender to God.

4.3. Jñāna-yoga - the Path of Knowledge

Jñāna-Yoga is the science of wisdom or knowledge. It is based on the realization that bondage is due to the ignorance regarding the true nature of self. Since the ignorance overshadowed on the divine nature of man, he fails to distinguish the real from the unreal. This lack of discrimination is due to ignorance. Ignorance in respect of true nature of Self is the root cause of bondage. Knowledge of the Self is liberation or freedom. Jñāna-Yoga enables one to differentiate between one's ego and the true self by developing proper discrimination and right knowledge. The energy of the self is wasted through its bodily activities, through the senses and the motor
organs. It must be detached from them and concentrated in the direction of knowledge. It is very difficult to practice, since it requires perfect purity and self-control.

Renunciation or Vairāgya is the turning point in the practice of Jñana-Yoga. The aim is to unfold the real nature of Self by the renunciation of selfishness and ego. In the Kaṭha Upanisad it is stated: "Know the Self as the lord of the chariot and the body as, verily, the chariot, know the intellect as the charioteer and the mind as, verily, the reins." 25 In other words, the Self is unbound and free, he is not the servant but the master; the senses, the mind and the organs of activity are all mere instruments of the body. Yogi should control his mind by incessant efforts in order to achieve realization.

The real nature of man is Spirit or Self, which can never be destroyed. Vivekananda describes: "This self, weapons cannot pierce, nor fire can burn, water cannot wet, nor air can dry up. Changeless, all-pervading, unmov ing, immovable, eternal is this Self of man." 26 Every soul is infinite and has enormous energy, which must be utilized for the purpose of knowledge, not for the enjoyment of senses. The goal of mankind is knowledge, not pleasure. All knowledge, secular and spiritual, is inherent in the individual soul. According to him, "All human knowledge is but a part of religion." 27 The knowledge of Self will make one free from all doubts. By acquiring the secret of knowledge, the ignorance, which creates dualism
multiplicity, is completely removed. The Gīṭā says: “As the fire which is kindled turns its fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, even so does the fire of wisdom turn to ashes all work.” The offering of the ego in the fire of wisdom is the greatest form of sacrifice. The positive aspiration for knowledge is an essential condition of renunciation.

The word ‘Jñāna’ means both empirical and transcendental knowledge. When it is used in the transcendental sense, it becomes Ātman or Brahman knowledge, which transcends the categories of time, space and causation. Upanishads describe Brahman knowledge as that knowledge by knowing which everything else is known. Empirical knowledge is concerned with the world of the senses and it is limited by time, space and causation.

Jñāna-Yoga can be achieved either through the discipline of renunciation or through the meditation upon the true nature of the self. The nature of the self is all knowing; its knowledge does not depend upon the relation between the knower and the object of knowledge, but it remains unchanged even when all the objects of knowledge have ceased to exist. The Upanishad refers to the self as self-effulgent Sun. As the nature of the sun is to illumine itself as well as other objects, so the light of the self illumines its own nature as also the phenomenal world. The Real Self is neither the body nor the mind. Time, space and causation are in the mind. The Real Self is beyond time, space and causation; and therefore it must be Infinite.
Infinite cannot be two. It appears to be heterogeneous, but is really homogeneous. It is unchangeable and immovable. The apparent man is merely a reflection of the Real Man. He is limited by time, space and causation, and is, therefore, bound. To quote Vivekananda, "The Real Man, therefore, is one and infinite, the omnipresent Spirit. And the apparent man is only a limitation of that Real man." The Real spirit or Soul is one who is not controlled by any one of the bondages. It appears to be bound but really it is free. In the words of Vivekananda, "Freedom, O Freedom! Freedom, O Freedom!" is the song of the soul. It always shines in its own light unaffected by the pairs of opposites experienced by the apparent man, such as birth and death, growth and decay, strength and weakness, virtue and vice, knowledge and ignorance and pleasure and pain. The idea of God is within man. It is the God with in the Self that is impelling one to seek for Him, to realize Him. The search for some thing external is a mistake; it is due to delusion.

Nikhilananda describes Jñānayoga "as a form of spiritual discipline based mainly on philosophical discrimination between the real and the unreal, and the renunciation of the unreal." Jñāna-Yogi realizes the truth about the self that it is already free and perfect. He experiences Brahman and becomes one with Him. He also realizes that the gods and goddesses of different religions are the manifestations of Brahman. The
Bhagavad-Gītā describes the true nature of Jñāna-Yogi as follows: "He who abandons all desires and acts free from longing, without any sense of mineness or egotism, he attains to peace." 32

Human life is a journey towards self-realization. There are two states of realization: Jīvanmukti and the Vidhehamukti. Jīvanmukti is a state of embodied salvation. Jīvanmukta's present life is due to the past habits generated through the accumulated result of karma and is liberated due to the attainment of the discriminatory knowledge. He does work automatically for the welfare of humanity (lokasaṃgraha) without having any credit of doing the same. All his actions are uncontaminated by selfish desire, attachment and egoism and therefore, spontaneously good. Vivekananda's 'real man' is such a person who is different from 'the apparent man'. He describes: "The ideal man is he who, in the midst of the greatest silence and solitude, finds the intensest activity, and in the midst of the intensest activity finds the silence and solitude of the desert." 33 Vidhehamukti is a state of salvation after the dissolution of the body. Vidhehamukta is not reborn, but remains as Brahman.

4.4. Raja-Yoga - the Royal Path of Concentration

Raja yoga is the means for the attainment of concentration. It is the method to conquer the activities of the body and the mind. Human mind is
the cause of ego, attachment and bondage. But it is also the instrument to
freedom. The particular mind is a fragment of the universal mind and it has
the power of continuity of thought with the universal thoughts of the
universal mind. There is no limit to the powers of the mind. It can be
increased through the constant practice of concentration. The more
concentrated it is, the more power is accumulated on one point. The powers
of the mind, if properly guided and controlled reveal innermost secrets of
every mind. In the words of Vivekananda "He who knows and controls his
own mind knows the secret of every mind and has power over every mind."
34 The main difference between man and man lies in the difference in the
power of concentration of the mind. Raja-Yoga is the study of mind by mind
itself. The object is internal, and therefore there is no distinction between the
subject and the object. Raja-Yoga provides the means of controlling the
internal states of the mind. The external world is only the gross form of the
internal, or subtle. The control of the external world can be gained by the
concentration of the powers of the mind. True success in life depends on
the control over the thoughts and activities of the mind.

Raja-Yoga is based on the pre-supposition that our bondage is due to
the distracting activities of the body and the mind. The purpose of Raja-
Yoga is to stop the activities of the body and the mind through the practice
of physical and mental disciplines. Patañjali, in his Yoga-Sūtra, laid the
foundation of Raja-Yoga. It is called Raja-Yoga, the king of all yogas because it is the surest and quickest path for the realization of truth. It is a practical and scientifically worked out method for the realization of freedom. This method includes certain yogic exercises of the psychophysical nature. It requires an immense faith in oneself and also physical and mental strength. It is a religion for the strong, not for the weak. It cannot be practiced unless a man is physically very healthy and free from all worldly attachments. It ensures clear vision, equanimity, fearlessness, courage, cheerfulness, kindliness, endurance and other good qualities, through the practice of the concentration of the mind.

Raja-Yoga prescribes eight-fold path of yogic exercises through which one can control his body and mind. In the final stage, the yogi is able to practice complete concentration leading to the realization of unity with the Universal Consciousness. The eight disciplines are yama, niyama, āsana, prānāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhārana, dhyāna and samādhi. The first five disciplines are external aids (bahiranga sādhana) whereas the last three are internal aids (antaranga sādhana) to the practice of Raja-Yoga. All these practices of Raja-Yoga should be done regularly with spiritual consciousness. Vivekananda says that there are so many obstructions in its practice; hence "there must be perfect chastity in thought, word, and deed; with out it the practice of Raja-Yoga is dangerous, and may lead to insanity."
The state of tranquility and the purity of mind are unavoidable in order to make inner life more perfect, more universal in essence.

Yama means abstention from evil doing. It is the practice of five principles in thought, word and action. They are truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy, non-injury and non-acceptance of gifts from others. It is relevant to practice all these virtues in day-to-day life in order to purify the mind. In addition to this there is devotion to God, which is conceived as a cause of union with the Supreme Self with out any obstacles. One who is devoted to God is always in the state of yoga due to His grace.

Niyama is observance of certain rules of conduct for the cultivation of good habits. They are purification of body and mind, contentment, penance and self-surrender to God. The practices included in Yama are, in a general way, moral and prohibitive, while those in Niyama are disciplined and constructive. The former aims at laying the ethical foundation of the yogic life and the latter at organizing the life of the aspirant for the highly strenuous yogic discipline, which is to follow.

Āsana means posture. It includes the practice of the proper holding of the three parts of the body- the chest, neck and head- in a straight line, which is conducive to meditation. The whole weight of the body is supported by ribs that keep the spinal column free. The various bodily
postures have different effects and have to be learned from a qualified master. They are important since mental concentration cannot be achieved with out the body kept in a comfortable position. It is recognized that there is a definite connection between mind and body; culturing and disciplining the body indirectly will also discipline the mind. Patanjali gives only three sutras regarding the technique of Asanas, but in these he has condensed all the essential knowledge concerning the subject.

Prānāyama is the practice to control prana, the life-principle. It is the energy that helps us to act, to think, and to breath. Vivekananda describes it as follows: "The sum total of all forces in the universe, mental or physical, when resolved back to their original state is called prana." It is the infinite omnipresent manifesting power of this universe. Everything in this universe is but the manifestation of this prana. Prānāyama is not breathing, but regulation of the breathing, that is, controlling the power within the body. These breathing exercises bring about rhythmic action of the prana in the body and thereby lengthen the state of concentration of mind. The Ida, the Pingala and the Sushumna are the three principal nerve currents inside the spinal column. The Ida and Pingala are clusters of nerves. They work through the prana. The Sushumna is a hollow canal and is closed in the case of ordinary man. At the lower end of the hollow canal is the Kundalini. To open this Sushumna is the main aim of the Yogi. Vivekananda states: "The
aim of prānāyāma here is to rouse the coiled-up power in the Muladhara, called the Kundalini." Thus the rousing of the energy from its seat in the Muladhara to the Sahasrara is the only way to attain the super conscious experience, the realization of the Spirit. For Patanjali, the Pranayama consists of three parts: inhalation, exhalation and pause.

Pratyāhāra is the practice to withdraw the five senses and the mind from their external objects. It is the inward orientation of the mind from the external objects to the mind itself. Human mind is the slave of passions, yet it is the only key to the concentration.

With the practice of the withdrawal of the senses the Yogi becomes independent of the external world. From this stage onwards his exclusive field of operation is the inner Reality. This internal progression towards the awareness of the Reality takes place in three different phases namely Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi.

Dhāranā is concentration or attention, fixing the mind steadily on the object of contemplation. It is the restriction of the mind intently towards the centres of spiritual consciousness. In the Yoga-Sūtra, Patañjali defines it as follows: "Concentration (dhāranā) is holding the mind within a centre of spiritual consciousness in the body, or fixing it on some divine form, either within the body or outside it." The mind's field as we know is unlimited; it ranges over all manner of subjects and objects- concrete, abstract and
imaginary. The aim of this step is therefore to narrow down the mind’s field of activity.

Dhyāna is contemplation or meditation. It is the spontaneous and the continuous flow of the process of thought towards the object of concentration. It is the greatest moment in life in which the soul thinks of itself, free from all matter. The nature of the object of concentration is gross. When dhyana reaches its maturity, the gross matter disappears and leaves in its place the subtle infra-atomic constituents, which make up the ultimate elements of matter. The ability to perceive this subtle background of matter depends on the purity of the concentrating mind. The consciousness of the outer world is lost, but it can still be restored by a strong stimulus from without. Unless and until this condition is fulfilled the practice of samadhi cannot begin and the real secret of yoga will remain hidden from the aspirant.

Samādhi means super-consciousness, the final step in the practice of yoga. The purification of both body and mind is essential for the realization of this super-conscious state. In this stage, the individual self merges into or becomes one with the Universal Self which is the object of contemplation. The object alone shines in the mind and all other thought-processes stop. The yogi realizes that he is the Self, the canvas on which the picture of the world is painted by illusion. The distinction between ‘Samādhi’ as the means
and 'Samādhi' as the end has to be noticed. When it is the means, the immediate object of meditation is the focus, whereas in Samādhi as the end, all objects in their real nature can be reveled to the yogi. The individual self (jīvātman) and the Universal self (paramātman) is experienced as a unified whole in the final intuitive experience. In other words, there is a union or undifferentiated identity between the lower self and the Absolute, where in there is total absence of duality.

All these spiritual disciplines are essentially designed for the moral purification, intellectual clarification and spiritual sanctification. No one can deny the fact that there is an urgent need to develop righteous conduct at the physical level, truth in the intellectual level, peace on the emotional level, love at the psychological level and tolerance at the social level. They are especially significant in this age of reason, as the growing intellect of the race demands some proof for the existence of Transcendent Reality within the universe.

The practice of yoga is a real solution both for individual perfection and social harmony. It not only annihilates evil elements in man but also promotes social welfare. It is also a method to alleviate the discord and rivalry that exists between the followers of major religions. The harmonious synthesis of yoga, knowledge, devotion and work is the nearest approach to the realization of Universal Religion.
NOTES


2. Ibid.


5. Ibid., 385.


8. Ibid., 32.


10. Ibid., Vol. V, 245.

11. Ibid., Vol. III, 142.


13. Ibid., 115.


16. Ibid., Vol.VI, 90.

17. Ibid., Vol.IV, 249.

18. Ibid., Selections from the Complete Works, 164


20. Ibid., 88.

21. Ibid., 89.

22. Ibid., 89.

23. Ibid., 82.

24. Ibid., 92-93.

25. Kaṭha Upanisad, 1.3.3.


27. Ibid., Vol.VII, 103.


36. Ibid., 148

37. Ibid., 162

38. Yoga- Sūtrās (III.I)