
Spiritual Concept of Yoga and Yajna

Dr. Renuka Rathore, Associate Professor in Sanskrit, Department of College Education, Rajasthan, Jaipur

Introduction

Spirituality is a matter of direct experience (aparokshanubhuti) and not of any discursive process, mental or intellectual. As Sri Aurobindo says 'For all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony'. This harmony is not only essential for individual well being but also for society as a whole. Yoga is a method of having that experience of harmony at individual level and yajna is another method of putting that experience into practice at collective level. We can look at the twin disciplines of Yoga and Yajna under a different light as well - -The outer world is a manifestation of our inner world, when there is harmony in the inner world, there is also harmony between the self and nature at the outer level. Similarly, when there is peace and prosperity at the outer level, chances of having inner peace are also high. In this way Yoga and Yajna are complimentary to each other and one without the other is incompetent in solving our problems.

Need for Spirituality: various perspectives

In ancient times, after much contemplation, this holistic and harmonious living system was developed by sages and Rishis in which individual actualization emerged as a result of 'Yoga' and a happy and healthy society was shaped through the concept of 'Yajna'. The solution to most of the problems and conflicts plaguing modern society lies in these two ancient Indian ideologies. The nature of this conflict is visible in modern society in various forms. At a micro level, we witness this within the very nature and temperament of human beings, with a marked rise in stress levels,

growing insensitivity, selfishness, mental depression, greed and a widespread lack of compassion. It also manifest as physical ailments and diseases. From a macro point of view, this intra-personal conflict has produced an alarming ecological imbalance, evident in problems such as global warming, pollution of rivers leading to their contamination and drying, acute deforestation under the garb of urbanisation which has led to a sharp decline in the forest coverage and extinction of several species of flora and fauna. The social implications of the conflict within humans are clearly evident in the dying or strained interpersonal relationships. There is an abrasion in the moral fabric that holds together social institutions such as family and marriage. Haptic interactions between people have sharply declined due to the false comfort offered by technological advancement. Individual and materialistic gains have taken precedence over ties of community and brotherhood. The mankind has tried many solutions for all the above mentioned problems but in vain.

Problems of duality

Human being is one of the most essential and intensive part of nature. Since time immemorial he has been trying hard to explore and understand nature. These attempts made by man to understand nature extend across curiosities of various kinds - theoretical and practical, scientific and technological, artistic and spiritual. As the ancient texts declare, there are innumerable objects of knowledge¹ and hence the methods of acquiring knowledge are also countless. The complexity of physical nature, life-world and the human mind is so excessive that it is futile to follow a single method for comprehending all the aspects of this cosmic world.

In the same breath, there is no need to get perplexed with this evident diversity of nature as in spite of this exterior difference and opposing nature, the core of all elements is one.² Our own nature is not quite alien to the structure of the

1. अनन्ताः वै वेदाः । तैत्तिरीय ब्रा. 3.10.11.46

2. इन्द्रं मित्रं वरुणमग्निमाहुरथो दिव्यः सुपर्णो गरुत्मान् ।

एकं सद्विप्रा बहुधा वदन्त्यग्निं यमं मातरिश्वानमाहुः ॥ ऋक्. 1.164.46

एकं वा इदं विबभूव सर्वम् । ऋक्. 8.58.2

world,³ the elements and forces that are out there in the world are also present in our body-mind complex, enabling us to adjust ourselves to the environment.⁴ It has been proved by modern scientists that not only natural conditions, but also social and psychological formatting has instructive similarities between all the natural forces.

This duality is not the basic characteristic of existence that is created by the dividing nature of the mind. When we want to resolve this conflict between the opposites, we have to rise above the mind and the duality created by it. In fact, as long as our ordinary awareness functions, we continue to move in the duality of mundane life and therefore there is conflict and no harmony. The art of Yoga and Yajna precisely does this job by resolving the duality of object and subject, leaving behind both good and bad, attaining the finer art of living, continuous practice (abhyas) and detachment (vairagya).⁵

Spirituality as a tool

Man is a conscious being, and the essence of spirituality is a transcendental experience in the sphere of consciousness. It is essentially individual, state of awakening, the ultimate method, Supreme Science, absolute truth. Spirituality is not a matter merely of sporadic or of occasional experiences but a matter of vast and authentic possession of knowledge of all that lies beyond limitations of the human mind as also positions of effective power of realization and action. It is on the basis of the yogic knowledge that we can confidently hope to seek enlargement of physical sciences and also to develop the required power of transformation of human limitations, human passions, human ignorance and all the facilities which are found in the human nature.⁶

3. यथा पिण्डे तथा ब्रह्माण्डे ।

4. तदेवाग्निस्तदादित्यस्तद्वायुस्तदु चन्द्रमा ।
तदेव शुक्रं तद् ब्रह्म ता आपः सः प्रजापतिः ॥ यजु. 32.1

5. बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते ।
तस्माद्योगाय युज्यस्व योगः कर्मसु कौशलम् ॥ गीता - 2.50
अभ्यासेन च कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥ गीता - 6.35

6. Glimpses of Vedic Literature by Shri Kireet Joshi ; Page 220

Here it is very important to understand the core of spirituality. A human being works at two levels i.e. mental and intellectual. Mind works at mental level and intellect works at logical level. Intellect is human uniqueness. Whatever comes in the physical domain, ultimately falls in these two categories. Our body, mind and intellect are the objects of knowledge and not the knower. They belong to nature, where the rule of cause and effect operates but soul is free from this rule. This dynamics of physical, mental and intellectual level based on Sanskaras, may vary from person to person but the state of Self- realization is universal, bereft of any pre-condition. Consciousness is absolutely pure and simple.

Twin process

Ancient Indian wisdom regards the terms Yoga and Yajna as capable enough to bring together various elements of cosmic material with a purpose to channelize its energy in a complex grid of interdependent relations.

The Rigveda, therefore, recommends both of them when it says –

यस्मादृते न सिध्यति यज्ञो विपश्चितश्चन।
स धीनां योगमिन्वति। RV 9.18.7

This significant mantra of Pavamana Mandala clearly indicates the methodology of an ideal spiritual process. It says, for the best output a righteous man uses both the tools – Yoga as well as Yajna. Then only his endeavor for immaculate task completes. This mantra, perceived centuries before Christ, illustrates the unparalleled advanced levels of thought systems that existed in the ancient Indian subcontinent at the time, when its concurrent civilizations were still evolving through rudimentary stages of development.

This ideal form of the twin concept where Yoga is guided by yajna, is explained by Gita also. It says-

द्रव्ययज्ञास्तपोयज्ञा योगयज्ञास्तथापरे ।
स्वाध्यायज्ञानयज्ञाश्च यतयः संशितव्रताः ॥ गीता 4.28

This twin thought is the best way to inculcate the concept of spiritualism. It is the device to do away with the projection and restore the psyche exactly to its original

status along with its entire potentiality. Sri Aurobindo rightly calls it the Vedic movement of the ascent and the descent – “The link between the spiritual and the lower planes of the mental being is that which is called in the old Vedantic phraseology the vijnana and which we may term the Truth-plane or the ideal mind or the supermind where the One and Many meet and our being is freely open to the revealing light of the Divine Truth and the inspiration of the Divine Will and Knowledge. If we can breakdown the veil of the intellectual, emotional, sensational mind which our ordinary existence has built between us and the Divine, we can then take up through the Truth-mind all our mental, vital and physical experience and offer it up to the Spiritual – this was the secret or mystic sense of the old Vedic 'Sacrifice' – to be converted into the terms of infinite truth of Sacchidananda, and we can receive the powers and illuminations of the infinite Existence in forms of a Divine knowledge, will and delight to be imposed on our mentality, vitality, physical existence till the lower is transformed into the perfect vessel of the higher. This was the double Vedic movement of the descent and birth of the gods in the human creature and the ascent of the human powers that struggle towards the Divine knowledge, power and delight and climb into the god heads, the result of which was the possession of the One, the infinite, the beatific existence, the union with God the immortality.”⁷

Yoga, as a way of life

This trait of transcendentalism is expressed by terms like Supra-mental, Supra-logical and Supra-material. The ultimate aim, therefore, according to Indian philosophy in general, is to get rid of the triple oriented functioning of the mind (trigunateeta). Yoga system chalks out a practical way of attaining this goal.⁸ Of course, this has to be practiced at individual level.

7. Sri Aurobindo : The Synthesis of Yoga, Vol.20, Centenary Edition pp.399-400

8. त्रैगुण्यविषया वेदा निस्त्रैगुण्यो भवार्जुन ।
निर्द्वन्द्वो नित्यसत्त्वस्थो निर्योगक्षेम आत्मवान् ॥ गीता 2.45

While contemporary times have witnessed an unprecedented growth in the popularity of Yoga at a global level, what has been ignored is the ultimate holistic aim of yoga - a life-style without fickleness of mind. The age old practice of 'Yoga' has taken an entirely different form today, sadly for the worse. It has been degraded to a mere form of physical exercise, with new 'twists and turns' being added to it every other day. What has been forgotten is that the system of Yoga and Yajna, in Indian context were used by Vedic seers to understand the mystery of creation of the universe and the individual at their core.

Yoga is basically a technique, to connect a person's inner and outer being. It is accomplished only by him who is regulated in all his intakes as well as external behaviour, actions, sleep, waking etc.⁹ Also it is a device which helps human being to understand the cosmic psyche in its original form along with its entire potentiality. It is a method to get connected to the universal energies and attain divinity.¹⁰ This understanding includes every bit of action i.e. joining of two tiniest objects to the biggest of universal objects available in the space-time continuum. It maybe outer or the inner world, when one knows its real form then only the truth can be known. Scientists started discovering the outer world and they found the truth behind matter, similarly Yoga is the tool to perceive the inner actuality. Yoga is a divine knowledge and it deals with the consciousness. Thus mind and intellect get subsided and the person becomes a seer (vipaschita).¹¹ It is not a subject of mere faith or belief. It is the practical form of 'Dharma'. It is universal and eternal. It has a method and anyone who follows it, can surely attain it. This method leads one from darkness to enlightenment, from falsehood to truth and from mortality to immortality.

Ancient tradition describes 112 methods to attain this Supreme consciousness.¹² Traces of Yoga can be seen right from Vedic Samhitas to Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharata with special

9. युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु ।

युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥ गीता 6.17

10. युक्तेन मनसा वयं देवस्य सवितुः सवे । स्वर्ग्याय शक्त्या ॥ यजु. 11.2

11. युञ्जते मन उत युञ्जते धियो विप्रा विप्रस्य बृहतो विपश्चितः ॥ यजु. 5.14

12. Vijnana-Bhairav Tantra

reference to Bhagavadgita, Indus civilization, Jaina and Buddhist tradition, Shankaracharya, entire bhakti movement, entire tantra (Sakta, Saiva, Vaisnava, Siddha) tradition, Sufism, all eminent modern philosophers including Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Maharshi Ramana, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo etc. But Patanjali's contribution is most noteworthy. He systematized the entire process and categorized it in eight sections gradually. The Yoga-Sutra is a small-sized work comprising just one hundred and ninety –five aphorisms divided into four padas (chapters). This sutra system was further developed in Hatha-Yoga tradition. Hatha-yoga also consists of yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and Samadhi in the same way as described by Patanjali. What distinguishes it from Patanjali's in particular is certain specific practices meant for redirecting the pranas, life-forces, in the body. Thus, the age-old prana theory, subtly explained by Brahmanas and Aranyakas was elaborated by this medieval phenomenon. For example, Satapatha Brahmana, explains this theory of vital forces:

“Prana is what blows. Though it seems to blow as one, having entered inside the human body it diversifies itself into ten..... The person concerned bears all of these ten forms of prana throughout his life.”¹³

This Hatha-Yoga tradition was also named as Raja-Yoga¹⁴ and it was probably the culmination of Yogic practices through body, vital forces, mind trilogy. Since there are hundreds of techniques to 'get connected',¹⁵ and with time this number will keep increasing, Upanishads have given some indicators to identify whether one is settled in Yoga or not. These are—light body, absence of disease and lust, deep voice, increased natural fragrance of the body, reduced excretion etc.¹⁶

13. अयं वै प्राणो योऽयं पवते । सोऽयं एक इवैव पवते ।
सोऽयं पुरुषेऽन्तः प्रविष्टो दशधा ।
तदस्मिन् दश प्राणान् कृत्स्नमेव सर्वमायुर्दधाति ॥ S.B. 5.2.4.10

14. भ्रान्त्या बहुमतध्वान्ते राजयोगमजानताम् ।
हठप्रदीपिका धत्ते स्वात्मारामः कृपाकरः ॥ Hatha Yoga Pradipika : 1.3

15. सर्वे हठलयोपाया राजयोगस्य सिद्धये ।
राजयोगसमारूढः पुरुषः कालवंचक ॥ ibid : 4.103

16. लघुत्वमारोग्यमलोलुपत्वं वर्णप्रसादं स्वरसौष्टववञ्च ।
गन्धः शुभः मूत्रपुरीषमल्पं योगप्रवृत्तिः प्रथमां वदन्ति ॥ Sv. Up. 2.13

The Concept of Yajna

In our ancient tradition, another key to resolving all conflicts lies in the concept of Yajna or Sacrifice. Tradition says that this entire universe is born out of Yajna process,¹⁷ in other words, Yajna is a technical name for every new creation involving consciousness. Even the, basic elements of creation---Rk, Yajus, Saman are also result of the great universal Yajna.¹⁸ This concept stresses on the importance of the art of giving as opposed to taking. According to the institution of Yajna, everything belongs to nature, which in itself is a divine entity and possessiveness is against the fact, that since as mere humans we do not have the power to create even a single atom, we have no right to claim ownership of any substance that belongs to the divine nature. The use of such substances must be undertaken with a sense of detachment. – this is the essence of Yajna.

Yajna as a concept is comparatively more difficult to clarify as it has normally been confused with soulless rituals. Thus in this regard, the concept of Yajna can be explained in a symbolic way as it has been done by the Aranyakas and the Gita.¹⁹ The sacrificial way of life resolves conflict and opens the door for a tension free life. Historically, all religious traditions and rituals started with the some spirit behind them, however, with passage of time, this spirit has been lost and only the outer superficial form has survived.

Ancient practices such as sacrificing into the fire, had a purpose and logic behind them - their smoke was said to generate rain bringing clouds, which was essential for the growth of crops, on which lived the whole creation (Gita 3/14; Chh up.5.10.5.6). It was a concept, originally conceived with a deep and pervading thought. Dr. Fateh Singh, an eminent Vedic scholar has greatly summarized the Vedic view of Yajna in the following words:

“Conventionally Yajna means a sacrifice or a deity to whom the sacrifice is offered; यज्ञेन यज्ञमयजन्त देवास्तानि धर्माणि प्रथमान्यासन् (AV 7.5.1 cf. RV 1.13.8; cf. Nir

17. यज्ञमाहुर्भुवनस्य नाभिम् । T.S. 7.4.18.2

18. तस्माद्यज्ञात्सर्वहुतः ऋचः सामानि जज्ञिरे ।
छन्दांसि जज्ञिरे तस्माद्यजुस्तस्मादजायत । Rv. 10.90.9

19. सहयज्ञाः प्रजाः सृष्ट्वा पुरोवाच प्रजापतिः ।
अनेन प्रसविष्यध्वमेष वोऽस्त्विष्टकामधुक ॥ । Gita 3.10

3.4.2) But there is another aspect of Yajna which is rather more significant. It explains Yajna as a creative reality in its dynamic aspect. The working of the entire creation can be seen as Yajna, not only on the cosmic level but at the individual level also. On this analogy, besides other cosmic processes even the fertilization of women could be metaphorically described as Yajna (Chh. Up. 5.8.1.2). from another point of view, Purusha itself was a Yajna having offerings, fires, gods etc within itself (K.B. 17.1:G.B. 2.5.4;cf. also K.B. 25.12; 28.9; S.B. 1.3.2;3.5.3.1;T.B. 3.8.2.3.1). As the Purusha of the microcosm is only a copy of that of macrocosm, Brahma or the cosmic Purusha was also conceived as a Yajna (ब्रह्म हि यज्ञः S.B.5.3.2.4; A.3.1;4.15; A.B.7.22,cf. T.S. 5.5.1;S.B.10.2.1.2;3.1.4.2;RV & AV Purusha Sukta) from which originated all this (पुरुषो वै यज्ञस्तेनेदं सर्वमितम् T.S.5.2.5.1). As the creation, in fact, means the evolution of the vak, the creative Yajna was in its essence Vak only (S.B. 1.14.11;1.1.2.2;3.1.3.27;3.2.2.3; A. B. 5.24). In other words, if Purusha was Yajna, Vak was its form, its manifestation (वाग्यज्ञरूपम् S.V. 12.8.2.4), it's the very being of all creatures and gods (S. B.14.3.2.1;8.6.1.10;9.3.7 etc). Therefore, yajna is called Apah (A.B. 2.20;S.B.3.8.5.1;1.1.1.12;K.B. 12.1; T.B. 3.2.4.1), the first and the earliest step of creation (K.B.25.110) and the creation itself (T. B. 3.3.7.5)".²⁰

Spirituality: Core of the concepts

What has been said above makes it clear that Yoga and Yajna are one of the most ideal form of living and to attain this; one has to act not at a mental or an intellectual level but at the spiritual level. This is possible as explained by the Gita in the theory of Karma²¹ and Jnana²² Yoga. It is in this way that a harmonious way of life is possible by reconciling the opposites at an individual level and resolving conflicts at collective level. There cannot perhaps be a more noble aim than achieving harmony at an individual level and peace and prosperity at a collective level. The

20. Vedic Etymology, Dr. Fateh Singh; Chaukhamba Surbharti Prakashan, Varanasi; Reprint : 2008; page 186-187

21. यज्ञार्थात्कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः ।
तदर्थं कर्म कौन्तेय मुक्तसङ्गः समाचर ॥ Gita : 3.9

22. ज्ञानं तेऽहं सविज्ञानमिदं वक्ष्याम्यशेषतः ।
यज्ज्ञात्वा नेह भूयोऽन्यत्ज्ञातव्यमवशिष्यते ॥ ibid 7.2

essence of the principles of Yoga-Yajna lie in the philosophy that Prosperity and sustainable development, are possible only if we deal with nature as something divine.

This also means a harmony between individual freedom and social responsibility. In Indian context the aim of individual life was freedom from all sorts of '**bandhan**' and it was named as '**moksha**' (liberation). To attain the liberation, introversion was the only way which was based on spiritualism. There is a significant mantra in Kathopanishad setting out the direction of the working for this liberation. It says –

पराञ्चि खानि व्यतृणत् स्वयम्भू
स्तस्मात् पराङ् पश्यति नान्तरात्मन ।
कश्चिद्धीरः प्रत्यगात्मानैक्षद्
आवृत्तचक्षुरमृतत्वमिच्छन् ॥K. up. 2.1.1

The self-born creator has carved out the senses, in human body as moving outward. This is why the individual looks outward and not within his inner self. It is only someone rare and wise who looks towards the all-pervading self having stopped his senses from moving outward under the determination to taste the state of immortality.

This mantra seen at so early stage throws a floodlight on the development of 'Yoga and Yajna' in India and clearly presents a sight to perceive the rich heritage of cognition and contemplation. The tendencies of animism and animatism, as anthropologists name it, obtaining throughout the ancient world in regard to religious beliefs are manifestation of the same outgoing nature of human mind. In all civilizations, the conflict has prevailed from thousands of years. Yoga-yajna is the device to do away with the projection and restore the psyche exactly to its original status along with its entire potentiality.