The Mysticism of Yoga and its relation to Psychology and Philosophy

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The uniqueness of yoga and its great value for our time in the fact that it is based on a living tradition that has remained efficient since ancient times it has developed systematic methods for pursuing and reaching its aim; and that these methods can be applied and studied today both on the popular level by people with personal inclinations towards following a spiritual path and on the academic level in various fields such as comparative religion, philosophy, psychology etc. To be sure, there are movements within yoga which also are closed system such as those which can be only by converse to a particular sectarian belief or by followers who have acquired faith in one particular Guru, and there are also traditions in to which a new comer can be initiated only after long preparation. But there is plenty of scope for a critical approach and scientific research in Yoga. Some present day Yogas do not object to scientific experiments being carried out on them when they practice their exercise or meditation. A general trend of current opinion, declares about yoga; ' the union of soul with the supreme being is achieved by relatively unsophisticated practices; one hypnotizes oneself by holding some posture concentrating ones gaze, holding ones breath concentrating on some sacred syllable (AUM); one uses prolonged fasts, solitary living or suffering'

The most important element in Yoga, is its practical concern to prepare the individual for acquiring for a direct experience of reality,

a kind of supra intellectual vision equal to a reliable direct knowledge of truth itself. Philosophy on the other hand, although it also aims at arriving at knowledge of reality, has no means of achieving this aim in direct perception, because it uses concepts as its medium of knowing. It works through reasoning; speculation and conceptual analysis are not in themselves independent means of gaining new knowledge of reality.

Yoga is the conscious and directed activity of an individual aspiring to a supra sensory and supra – intellectual experience which is to him of spiritual value which fully or to some extant transforms or depends his life and his knowledge or understanding of reality and himself. This obviously mean that the aim of Yoga is to bring about a higher or more accomplished state of mind which transcends mans usual every day experience and opens for him a new field of vision and a capacity to grasp this vision.

It is important to enquire into the psychological reason for appearance of Yoga. On this point we can say that there are features in human psyche that suggest that there is also a psychological explanation for yoga. The question then arises whether equivalent or similar developments can be found elsewhere in the world and if so, what is peculiar to Indian Yoga when compared with those other developments. There is obviously a psychological force in man, which compels him to strive for fulfillment through transcending himself. Perhaps this force can be described as manifesting itself predominantly in three forms.

Firstly, there is a longing of the human heart to escape from, or to overcome, its loneliness, man becomes aware of his loneliness when he discovers that he is an individual. Man as a self- conscious individual separated from the environment and facing other individual he knows only from outside, feels extremely lonely and this state of loneliness unbearable to him. Secondly, there are occasional experiences in perhaps everybody's life that might be described as temporality opening a channel in the individual to a wider and deeper dimension of life than the one to which the individual normally has access. Thirdly, there is the incessant and insatiable urge inherent in the human mind to seek more and more

knowledge about the world and about itself which occasionally turns into pursuit of wisdom, of a global view or experience of reality of 'truth as such'. This pursuit may remain a conceptual one as systems of philosophy show, but sometimes it over flows into a burning desire penetrate the whole truthfully, to solve the mystery of existence directly in one's own heart, but at the same time, with a degree validity which could be called universal.

The minutely determined psychological training it prescribes and the psychic state that it brings about have to be scientifically examined. It is the same for the psychological phenomena it produces, for, far from being merely an Intellectual that discipline, yoga is 'a technique of the body[3] as well as of the mind. It is a widespread opinion that there are two kinds of yoga, a spiritual yoga which is real mysticism and a physical yoga which can be reduced to gymnastics. All do not practice the whole yoga; some develop it specially in order to master the mind, others seek by it the development of the body. But the perfect Yogin necessarily combines in his practice both the disciplines, the physical as well as the psychological. The most well known religious text in India, the one in which India commonly finds one of the highest expressions of its mystic thought, the Bhagavatgɛta, insists likewise, in its descriptions of the conditions of Yoga, on the physical posture and respiratory discipline of the Yogin, as on his meditation. Beyond its historic and religious interest the mysticism of Yoga has, therefore, for both physiology and psychology.

In the Indian sense, Yoga as philosophy, its practices are not merely empirical. They achieve psychological experiences not attempted at random but founded on theoretical ideas of Psychology. From the Indian point of view, philosophy, which is an integral knowledge of the world and of the self, is the means for attaining the supreme goal of man, liberation'. The human soul is none other than the universal soul forgetting itself in a phenomenal world which is more or less illusory. When through philosophy, it becomes conscious of this truth, it escapes from its corrupting dream to find itself in its Absolute being.

When we examine the known spiritual or religious movements, we find that there have always been one or more spiritually advanced individuals at the beginning of these movements. It must be said that the admired and no doubt admirable exposition of Yoga by Patañjali gains nothing, on account of its conceptual and systematic form, over the previous yoga sources. When we compare the Buddha's exposition of his Eightfold path with Patañjali's is the more systematic of the two. This probable due to the fact that Patañjali's Yoga Sutras are of the nature of a technical manual, where as the Buddhist exposition is incorporated in live discourses of the Buddha with his disciples. Thus Yoga, in its complete form, consists of a complex mixture of Psychological discipline, physical training, philosophical speculation and religious method.

It may be evident how closely philosophy, religion, psychology and Yoga are related and it is therefore not surprising that confusions as to the nature of Yoga and its relation to psychology and Philosophy, and whether it is actually distinct from them, perpetuated in the minds not only of outsiders, but also of followers of Yoga. When the Vedānta philosophy of Śankara become the most influential doctrine in India, many Yogis were its followers and interpreted their practical Yogic experience in the light of the Vedānta, often highly speculative thinking This tendency still prevails among many Yoga followers in India and has been spread in the west as well as, especially by popular authors on Yoga. It is true that some philosophical elements will always accompany Yoga. Practically all newcomers to yoga take it up because they have certain ideas about reality, a certain preliminary world view or even a theory about the world and life. They hope to acquire more certain and complete knowledge through Yoga.

Yoga in its broad sense has not been confined to India and the equivalents of Yoga have existed in other countries as well, then we may ask why are some men of science and some philosophers and even some prominent personalities of the Christian religions studying Yoga and sometimes trying to experiment with it or to utilize it in a practical way in their respective field? The answer to their question may be summarized as: it appeals to some trends in European philosophical thinking and

besides, it promises to help receive the practically dried up tradition of Christian mysticism or at least of living piety.

Thus philosophy in India has always been concerned with the individual, his existential situation, his destiny and salvation, i.e., with the final solution of the riddle of man's existence , The important and central problems of philosophical investigation is the nature of man and the means of transcending his preset limited situation. This does not mean that Indian philosophy has not been preoccupied with speculations on the nature of the world, but it has never really looked at the world as an objective reality entirely independent or what we call the perceiving subject or as totally devoid of the element of consciousness in its original form. However an important point in the development of Indian mind is the part played by Yoga. Yoga as a practical discipline, a method used individually but accepted universally, has always been used in India on the one hand as means of conformity or testing the results of philosophical investigation and speculation on transcendence and on the other hand Yoga is a source of inspiration and a stimulus of philosophical thinking. Philosophy often became a bridge between following some form of traditional religious practice and the radical adoption of full Yoga practice.

It may well be accepted that man's mind has passed through different stages of conceiving and expressing its experience of life and reality and that present stage can be described as conceptual, intellectual, or perhaps scientific. But any claims that our knowledge and understanding of life and reality are higher, because we conceptualize them, cannot be maintained . But throughout the ages, the living tradition of Yoga as an individual path to and people experience of the transcendent has been handed down from generation to generation till the present day. As far as individuals are concerned, this handing down has been happening though the personal relationship between teachers and their pupil, some of then whom themselves became teachers in turn, thus carrying on the tradition.

On the national level, the tradition has been kept alive by the deep regard for and veneration of Yogis or 'holy men' or spiritual truth- seekers on the part of all classes of Indian people. Besides, the old classical texts

of Yoga have continued to be studied and commented on extensively, and new treatises on Yoga haves been complied from time to time.

Notes

1. Roger Bastide, ' Les Problems de la vie mystigue', 1931, P.32
2. Karel Werner, *Yoga and Indian Philosophy*, P.94
3. M.Manuss, Les Teachiques du Corps, in Journal de Psycologie, 1935, P.271 and foll.
4. C.F. *Jornal Asiatique*, oct – Dec 1936, P. 628

Reference

1. Karl Werner, *Yoga and Indian Philosophy*, Motilal Banarsidas Publishers, Delhi, 1977.
2. Jean Filliozat, *Religion, Philosophy, Yoga*, Motials Banarsidas Publishers,Delhi, 1991
3. Dasgupta, *Yoga Philosophy in Relation to other systems of Indian Thought*, Calcutta, 1930