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## **Ethics of Samkhya and Yoga**

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So far as the six orthodox systems (*sad darsana*) are concerned Samkhya and Yoga are two distinct systems. Similarly, Nyaya and Vaishesika are also treated as different systems. But so far as their treatment of philosophical issues are concerned the two sets of systems are treated as two twin systems. In case of the twin systems like Nyaya-Vaishesika it is seen that the former is mostly found as emphasized on epistemological issues whereas the later is found to emphasize on ontological issues. That is why one is known as *pramanasastra* and the other as *prameyasastra*. Likewise in case of the Samkhya and Yoga, C.D.Sharma mentions that “Yoga, as the counter part of Samkhya, means action or practice and tells us how the theoretical metaphysical teachings of Samkhya might be realized in actual practice. Thus Sankhya-Yoga forms one complete system, the former being theoretical while the latter bring the practical aspect of same teaching.”<sup>1</sup>

The treatment of metaphysical issues is quite prominent and popular so far as the Samkhya-Yoga system is concerned. In the twin system of Samkhya-Yoga the following questions are seen to be raised and discussed. ‘What we ought to do?’ ‘Why should we do it?’ ‘What is good?’ ‘What should be treated to be right?’ etc. All these questions are fundamental questions of ethics. This shows that the philosophical system of Samkhya-Yoga is not silent about the fundamental questions of ethics. Rather it is seen that not only they have dealt with some moral questions and finding suitable answers for such but also the theory of good recommending the promotion of certain values seems to have been worked out by those thinkers. According to Perrett ‘Samkhya-Yoga ethics’ “includes all the three elements: a set of first order moral percepts, a consequentialist theory of the right, and a theory of the good.”<sup>2</sup>

If we do what we ought to do then obviously it leads to some consequences. It is important to see whether such consequences are good. If what we ought to do in some cases lead to good consequences then we should also know which actions we ought to do to have good consequences. Samkhya-Yoga philosophers aiming at highest good appear to have done consequentialist approach.

Instead of emphasizing on good consequences, some may think we ought to do in order to honour the values or to exemplify values. Here their approach is non-consequentialism. But it is also a theory that complements with the theory of good.

Even though Samkhya is atheistic and Yoga is theistic but in ontological front Samkhya and Yoga has many common agreements and also there is agreement in respect of their *summumbonum*. This is concerning the moksa or mukti to which they call *kaivalya* (radical isolation). It becomes possible when *purusa* becomes aware of his own nature that he is fully different from *prakrti*. Both Samkhya and Yoga accept this step to be the highest one but in respect of the method of achievement of this goal they differ significantly. When Samkhya emphasizes on *vijnana* (the reflective discrimination) in order to get liberation, Yoga emphasizes on supplementing *astanga yoga* (eight stepped meditation) for the purpose of the attainment of the highest state.

The *astangayoga* is treated to be a systematic rationalistic methodology or a rigorous meditative praxis that leads to the state of radical isolation. In the *yoga sutra* (of Patanjali) the emphasis has been attached on the purificatory practices (*parikama*). In the process of the achievement of the *kaivalya* the mind (*citta*) is treated to be quite important. In order to achieve liberation mind has to achieve the one-pointed concentration (*ekagra*) state after which all five functions (*vrutti*) of the mind meet cessation (*nirodha*). The five process of mind are *pramana* (valid knowledge), *viparyaya* (illusion, false knowledge, etc.), *vikalpa* (abstraction, construction, imagination, etc.), *nidra* (sleep where *tamas* tends to predominate) and *smriti* (memory). The mind is always found in the direction of *samsara*. But the same mind also can flow in the direction of *moksa*. The will to be good is there with man as his innate tendency even though he is found to be after enjoyment very often. Samkhya philosophers maintain that when man as the impact of his innate goodness, wants to destroy three kinds of sorrows like *adhyatmika*, *adhibhautika*, and *adhidaivika* he starts his journey in the path of liberation.

The attainment of the state of *kaivalya* is considered as the highest attainment in this framework. For this the agent must build up a sound health and mind. A set of physical practices will keep the body and mind free from sensual attachments and various passions. Certain principles are to be adopted to bring moral perfection. For this they have suggested the eight fold path of discipline or *astanga yoga*. The first two of this *astangayoga* are related with the living style of the agent. It is considered as purificatory practices or *parikarma* of the agent. In order to bring moral perfection two important principles are suggested as the beginning of the *astangayoga* and those are namely, *yama* and *niyama*. The practice of *yama* and *niyama* will make the being morally sound and make his mind steady to proceed towards liberation.

In ancient Indian culture the emphasis on five factors like *ahimsa*, *satya*, *asteya*, *bramacharya* and *aparigraha* are treated to be quite essential to bring moral perfection. The Jains have emphasized on these five factors treating these to be five vows (*Vratas*). For them these are essential for moral perfection. Similarly in Buddhist tradition these five factors are treated as *panchasila* and treated to be essential in order to be morally sound. These five factors collectively constitute *yama* of the *astangayoga*.

The aspirer of liberation should be very much careful not to cause injury to any living being (*ahimsa*), should practice truthfulness strictly (*satya*), and should not go for stealing (*asteya*), should have absolute sexual restraint (*brahmacarya*) and should accept such

which is only absolutely necessary (*aparigraha*). Samkhya-Yoga ethics starts with these five principles, to which they were treating as *yama*, with the consideration that these are ought to be performed if supreme good or moksa is aimed at. So here their approach is very much like the approach of consequentialism. Through *yama* they not only try to bring perfection in the agent but find assurances to have a good society at large. A commitment to *ahimsa* is extremely helpful to bring up a healthy society and environment. The falsehood not only develops a bad character in the agent but also causes harm to other living creatures. If truth is practiced then many disillusionments will be checked in a society. It is very much clear that theft, indulgence in sex activities and greed cause more harm to others in the society along with a nasty character of the agent. The restraint from all these harmful practices not only will bring perfection in an agent but also will make the social environment much better.

Both *yama* and *niyama* constitute a set of moral percepts in the sense they tell us what one should follow or what is to be done in order to achieve certain consequences. Just like *yama* constitute five elements *niyama* also constitute another five practices to bring inside-perfection of the agent. The five *niyama* are namely, *saucha* (cleanliness), *santosa* (contentment), *tapas* (austerity), *svadhyaya* (self-study) and *Isvrapranidhana* (devotion to God). It is emphasized that the agent should have external bodily cleanness and also the purity of mind. He should not possess ill thoughts of any type. He should have contentment of mind in the sense he should not have dissatisfaction in any level, which would divert his thoughts otherwise. If the mind has not attended the state of contentment then it is not free from passions and desires. *Santos* comes only when someone is free from ordinary desires. *Tapas* is understood as self-castigation. The agent should be capable of bearing hunger and thirst, heat and cold climatic conditions without which he cannot proceed for achieving something higher. Similarly, self-study or *svadhyaya* is also important in the sense one should have obtained proper knowledge on moksa by going through the texts. And the last step is *Isvrapranidhana* which is commonly understood as the devotion to God but actually it is meant as offering of all actions to *Isvara* so that one can concentrate on his goal easily.

In addition to *yama* and *niyama* they have also prescribed some more principles. Such as *pratipaksabhavana*, *maitri*, *karuna*, *mudita* and *upeksa* enhance moral aspects of the agent. The *pratipaksabhava* is quite significant for both individual and social good. The selfish motive has to be avoided. They have suggested that the ill motive is to be removed by the replacement of positive good thoughts for the opponent (*pratipaksa*). The positive good thought involves sacrifice which happens to be a very valuable virtue to be cultivated. It is seen that most of the vices and criminal activities arose from the ill feeling and unfriendly attitude. Keeping some one away from such situations is not enough. It is necessary to develop a positive good relation with the fellow beings of the society. The *pratipaksabhavana* is closely related with the other virtue, that is, *maitri*. It leads to the understanding that all beings are friends. There should be no enmity with anyone. Further one should develop the kind feeling for the sufferers. One should not keep himself unconcerned when some one is in sufferings. He must have a feeling of happiness on the good of his fellow beings and neighbors. This is understood as *mudita*. And lastly the agent should not show his concern (*Upeksa*) towards the vices of others. He must not attach importance on other's vices or the vices of the vicious persons. All these practices will bring both individual good as well as the social good.

Thus, as purificatory practices to achieve the moral perfections they have prescribed five practices as *yama* and two other sets of five principles as *niyama*. Further they have recommended six other steps to cultivate yogic *sadhana* (meditation) in order to reach the highest state of moksa. So *astanga yoga* also includes the six other steps of meditation which are namely, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *Samadhi*. *Asana* stands for steady and comfortable posture. *Pranayama* stands for the control over the breath. *Pratyahara* stands for the control over the senses or withdrawing the senses from the attraction of out-world objects. *Dharana* is fixing the mind on the object of meditation. *Dhyana* consists in the undisturbed flow of thought pertaining to the object of meditation. It is nothing but steadfast contemplation without any break. And lastly *Samadhi* refers to that state of mind where the mind is fully concentrated in the object of meditation. Here the relation of mind with the external world is supposed to be broken and one becomes identified with his object of concentration, that is the ideal of *kaivalya* or the absolute free state of *purusa* being free from *prakriti*.

So far as the ethical life is concerned the yogic practices are not essential for common man. It is only for them those who have aimed at *kaivalya*. Everyone should aspire for *kaivalya*. But all cannot achieve this as it involves a rigorous process. But if everyone will take an attempt by following the two initial steps of *yama* and *niyama* a sound moral atmosphere can be created in a society.

At the end it is quite important to point out that the highest goal is the *kaivalya* towards which *Samkhya Yoga* philosophy aimed at. But within this frame there has been an attempt to remove the sufferings of the *samsara* also. This has been very aptly pointed out by Perrett in the following manner. “*Samkhyayoga* (like other Hindu schools, and like Buddhism and Jainism too) affirms liberation from the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*) to be the highest good, since all *samsara* existence is characterized by universal suffering (*duhkha*). Thus the *Samkhyakarika* begins: ‘Because of the torment of the threefold suffering arises the desire to know the means of terminating it (*dukhhatrayabhighatajjijnsatadabhighatakehetau*)’. And Patanjali asserts (II.15): ‘To the discerning all is but suffering (*dukhamevasarvamvivekinah*)’. As we have already seen, the metaphysics of *samkhya-yoga* diagnoses this suffering as caused by a misidentification of the *purusa* that is our real nature with *prakriti*. Correspondingly the yoga path maps out the route to freedom through progressive dephenomenalization of the *yogin* until rediscovery of the true self as pure, countless consciousness is attained. ... For given that all life is suffering (*duhkha*) and that moksa involves freedom from *duhkha*, then moksa is worth pursuing whether or not it brings with it an eternal positive happiness. In other words, since the elimination of sufferings is a basic intrinsic value, then the goal of cessation of suffering ought to be pursued for its own sake. And this seems plausible enough, provided that we accept the thesis about universality of *duhkha*.’<sup>3</sup>

## References

1. Sharma, Chndradhara, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Motilal Banarsidas, 2003, Delhi, p.150.
2. Roy W. Perrett, ‘Samkhya-yoga Ethics’ from *Indian Ethics* Ed: P. Bilimoria, Joseph Prabhu and Renuka Sharma, Oxford University Press, 2008 p.149.
3. *Op-cit*-p.p.153-154