

Gita's Concept of Yoga: In The New Perspective

Dr. Avijita Das

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy

Kamala Nehru Women's College,

Bhubaneswar, Odisha

E-mail: dasavijita@gmail.com

Abstract

The concept of yoga is found to be significant in use in some of the Upanisads, the Gita, and the Yogasutra of Patanjali. The concept has been used in different ways in different sources. But, the central point found in all these treatises is to realize one's inner essence. In this paper, I want to explore some of the new dimensions of Gita's concept of 'yoga' without committing to any metaphysics. In the article, along with mentioning the differences between the Upanisadic and Patanjali's view of yoga the following aspects of the concept of yoga concerning the Gita have been highlighted. (i)Yoga as an association (yoga and viyoga are complementary, not contrary) (ii)Yoga as Product and Process (iii)Yoga in its core use and peripheral use (iv)Yoga has a descriptive and normative connotation (v)Yoga and Sannyasa as synonyms. It is concluded that yoga as conceived in the Gita is an experiential state, a mental attitude of seeing the unitary spirit in the whole universe; where one can transcend from personal to impersonal, desire to a desireless state of mind.

Keywords: *yoga viyoga, samam pasyanti, yogin, Sannyasa*

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Introduction

In Indian Philosophical tradition, Philosophy (*Darshana*) is accepted as a way of life. Here, philosophy is not a subject of mental and academic exercise. Rather, it is a discipline with which one can develop one's capacity to comprehend one's moral and spiritual essence. The concept of *Yoga* mostly is also found to be developed and used in this way. Some *Upanisads*, the *Gita*, and the *Yogasutra* of Patanjali use this concept in different ways. But, the central point in all these treatises is to realize one's inner essence. In this paper, I want to explore some new dimensions of *Gita's* concept of 'yoga' without resorting to metaphysics.

The *Bhagavad Gita's* concept of *yoga* is different from that of Patanjali's definition of *Yoga*. It is also different in its treatment in the *Upanisads*. We shall reflect on it later. There are eighteen chapters in the *Gita*. All the chapters are suffixed by the word 'Yoga', (like *Karma Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga* and *Buddhi Yoga*, etc.) to mean the intellectual understanding of the universe and man's place in it. Those are the corridors to approach the right understanding of the world and the man in respect of thought and action. In the opening chapter of the text, i.e., 'Arjuna Viseada Yoga', we find a point of view posited by Arjuna, which we may call the *anususruma* point of view as he has used the word 'iti anususruma' while advancing his view. In the rest of the chapters this point of view battles against the point of view of Sri Krsna. Let us call Sri Krsna's point of view an integral point of view, till finding a better substitute. We call it integral in the sense that it takes in its stride many views which are cultivated in different forms of life, like the religious (e.g., *Sanata Sujatiya*); the metaphysical (i.e., *Samkhya*) and the *yogic* (e.g., *Astanga yoga*, *hatha yoga*, etc). These views are not rejected rather sublimated and articulated to give rise to the point of view which we may call 'integral'. Moreover, the colophon at the end of each chapter states that the *Gita* as a whole is *Yoga Āeāstra* or treatises on *Yoga*. This indicates that 'Yoga' is the focal concern of the *Gita*. Here, the word *Yoga* appears to have been used in comprehending many senses, which seem to be unconnected with one another. But, it is not impossible/ very difficult to find the relations between/among different senses.¹

Etymologically, *Yoga* is derived from the root 'yuj' in Sanskrit, which means 'to unite', 'to join' or 'to bind'. In the *Gita*, it is primarily used as an experiential state, which needs both joining and disjoining. We shall reflect on the following points to get a clear idea of the concept.

- (1) *Yoga* as an association (*yoga* and *viyoga* as complementary, not contrary)
- (2) *Yoga* as Product and Process

- (3) *Yoga* in its core use and Peripheral use
- (4) *Yoga* has a descriptive and normative connotation
- (5) *Yoga* and *Sannyasa*
- (6) The differences among *Gita's* concept of *Yoga* and *Patanjali* and the *Upanisads*.

Yoga as Association (Yoga and Viyoga):

The word '*yoga*' is used in the *Gita* in the sense of joining. Joining means contact with something. It also implies disjunction (*viyoga*) from some other thing. For example, *Karma Yoga* means, one has to associate oneself with the obligatoriness of the performance of allotted duties. But, it also implies that one must dissociate oneself from all desires for pleasures and fruits of action. A *niskama karmi* is also called a *yogi*. Here, *yoga* is, in effect, *viyoga*, not an addition but a deletion. So in the *Gita* '*Yoga*' is used to mean a cessation of desires for the fruits of action.² The negative concept of cessation of desires is regarded as *Yoga* because, without renunciation of desires, union with the Ultimate is not possible. So, in the preliminary stage dissociation from the fruits of action is to be supplemented by the performance of duties. There is another definition of *Yoga* as the art of performing one's duties, (*yoga karmsu kausalam*).³ Now, the real art of performing one's duties is to keep oneself detached (dissociated) from the desires for the fruits of action and this state is to be realized (experienced) by the individual and also to be practiced by him.

Yoga as Product and process:

In the *Gita*, *Yoga* has been employed as denoting the highest state. It is also employed in the sense of the means or the process leading to it. *Yoga* is the process for the product of the highest goal of life, that is., unification of oneself with the whole. So, *yoga* is used both in the sense of means and end and in the sense of process and product. In *jnana yoga*, *karma yoga* and *bhakti yoga*, *jnana*, *karma*, and *bhakti* are said to be different means or the ways leading to the state of unification. In this state, the individual soul loses his identity and becomes one with the whole. It is the highest state, where the individual soul undergoes a complete transformation or metamorphosis and becomes the highest self. Let us take the example of *jnana yoga*. It gives us the knowledge of Reality and makes a distinction between *Paraa* and *aparaa vidya*. *Aparaavidya* gives us the knowledge about the world which is necessary to live in this world. *Para vidya* enables one to know the nature of the ultimate reality. It helps one to discriminate between real and unreal, eternal and non-eternal. This state of realization is treated as *yoga*.

Core use and Peripheral use of Yoga

In the core use, 'yoga' is used in the *Gita* to denote the state of unification, which is an experiential state. As a result of the union, *yogin* enjoys supreme bliss and ecstatic joy. He is free from the least touch of sorrow and pain. This absolute freedom from pain is a state of bliss. This state is a result of *yoga* and is also called *yoga*. This state is experienced by the *yogin*. At this state, *yogin* enjoys (experienced) absolute bliss. He transcends all sense-pleasure by his pure reason. Being fixed on God, he forsakes all his desires and controls all his senses by his mind. He tries to regulate his mind. At this stage, anything unpleasant or any sorrow cannot affect him. So, in the *Gita*, *yoga* is understood as the negation of the possibility of all association with pain and sorrows. It says:

*tam vidyaad duhkhasamyogaviyogam
yogasamjnitam (VI:23).*

The experiential state is delineated in the *Gita* in several verses. It is described that when a *yogin* attains the union with themselves or with the whole, he is like the motionless flame of a lamp in a still place. He is undisturbed by all attractions and unbroken by all passions. It has been said:

*yathaa deepo nivaatastho nengate
sopamaa smritaa (VI:19).*

This experiential state is otherwise accepted in the *Gita* as the outlook of equality (*samatvaC Yoga ucyate*).⁴ Here, the *yogin* transcends his lower self and discovers his self. In this stage, the distinction between mine and thine, pain and pleasure, hot and cold ceases. The interest of the individual loses its limitations. It becomes enlarged and universalized. It is identified with the interest of all living beings. This is why in the *Gita* it is said that a perfect *yogi* sees everything with equality, in the image of his self.⁵ This experiential state is a state of harmony and peace. It is a state of supreme *nirvana* and that state is attained by a *yogi*.⁶

The peripheral use or secondary use of the term consists of using it either as a means or the power and qualities obtained as a result of attaining the state. We have already discussed the use of the term as a means or process leading to the ultimate state. In the following two uses of the *Gita*, it seems that the term 'yoga' has been used as miraculous power.

- (i) *Pashya me yogam aishvaram. (IX.5)*
- (ii) *EtaaC vibhatim yogam ca, (X.7)*

Both Sankara and Sridhara interpret 'yoga' as an association (*yukta*) in these cases. They interpret *aisvaram yogam* as 'association of miraculous power'.

The concept of *yoga* in its normative connotation

In the *Gita*, Krsna asked Arjuna to be in '*yogasthah*' that is to fix or establish himself in the intellect. A perfect *Yogi* is said to be one who sees with equality everything (*samam pasyanti*), in the image of his own self, whether in pleasure or in pain.⁷ The equality or stability of mind is equated with *yoga*. And one who possesses he is a *yogin*. Now, this equality of mind is a virtue because one who cultivates it also masters other virtues such as endurance, wisdom and knowledge. He learns to endure pleasure or pain and other experiences which are transitory. It is said that a person of wisdom views pleasure and pain alike. Being in this state, one's action becomes the expression of a stable and abiding character. So, it is said that an ascetic or a *yogin* is satisfied with wisdom and knowledge. He is unchanging and master of his senses. For him, a stone, a piece of gold are the same. He is said to be self-controlled.⁸ *Yoga*, in this sense, is an ethical virtue and has, therefore, a normative connotation. Further, as the ultimate goal, it is a paradigm, an ideal to be cherished and attained. Not only do we describe it as a state, but also it can be attained. So *yoga* is both descriptive and normative in its connotation.⁹

Yoga and Sannyasa

In the *Gita*, the concept of *yoga* and the concept of *sannyasa* or renunciation has been treated synonymously. Several verses emphasize this point. For example:

*yam sannyasamiti praahur
yogam tam viddhi paandava
na hyasannyastasankalpo
yogee bhavati kashchana // VI-2*

The verse has been translated by Radhakrishnan: What they call renunciation, know that to be disciplined activity, O Pandava, for no one becomes a *yogeen* who has not renounced his selfish purpose.¹⁰

Commenting on this above verse Swâmî Chinmayânanda writes, what they call *sannyasa*, the renunciation of the agency is itself *yoga*, the 'renunciation of the fruit-of-action'. *Sannyasa* is the state reached through *yoga*, the practice. The spiritual practice of *yoga* cannot even be thought of without the spirit of *sannyasa* in the bosom. One is the obverse and the other is the reverse of the same coin of spiritual perfection.¹¹

Further, a *sannyasi* and a *yogi* have the same mental attitude of working without seeking fruits.¹² Both *sannyasa* and *yoga* consist in the accomplishment of necessary actions without inward striving for result and that consists in an internal attitude and detachment.

The differences among Gita's concept of Yoga and Patanjali and the Upanisads

The term 'yoga' has not been used in any technical sense in the *Gita* as it is found with Patanjali. Patanjali happens to be the traditional founder of the *Yoga* system and considers that 'yoga' stands for the spiritual effort to attain perfection through control over body, senses, and mind. It aims at the right discrimination between *purusa* and *prakriti*. He has defined *yoga* as *citta-vrtti-nirodha*. It means the cessation of the modifications of *chitta*. *Chitta* refers to three internal organs of intellect (*buddhi*), ego (*ahamkara*) and mind (*manas*). Patanjali's *yoga* consists of eight steps. These are *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dhyana*, *dharana* and *samadhi*. The process of *pranayama* is regarded as necessary in Patanjali's *yoga*.

But, in the *Gita*, there are several understandings given for the term 'yoga'. In the verse, eighth of chapter VIII Arjuna is asked to engage in the practice of *Yoga* (*abhyasena yogayuktena*), so that his thoughts and emotions do not stray. Moreover, no link is found to be there with the process of *pranayama* and the concept of *yoga* in the *Gita*. The *Gita* does not mention *pranayama* explicitly. However, in the fifth chapter (V-27), it is said that all sense-movements and control of life movements are like oblations to the fire of self-control. In the sixth chapter i.e. *dhyanyoga*, the whole chapter is devoted to *yoga* practice and the conduct of a *yogin*. Here *Krsna* emphasizes that meditation is the path by which one can gain tranquillity and equal vision within oneself. So the instruction is given to 'keep the mind single-pointed' (VI.12). In other words, one must fix the mind on the inner self by withdrawing it from everything else. Here the *Gita* advises steadiness of posture and to lead the austere life of a *Brahmacharin*. The word '*samadhi*' is found to be used in the *Gita*, but not in the sense of the definite process as it is used by Patanjali.¹³ In this chapter in all the places it is used as well-established, steadfast or stable in the spirit whereas in XII-9 and XVII-2 it is used to mean "to give", or "to place" (*arpana*).¹⁴

The concept of *yoga* as it is used in the *Gita* is also different from the use found in the *Upanisads*. For example, in the *Katha Upanisad*, 'yoga' is used in the sense of 'sense control. But, sense-control in the *Gita* is only preliminary to *Yoga*. It is not itself *Yoga*.

To sum up, *yoga* as conceived in the *Gita* is an experiential state, a mental attitude of seeing the unitary spirit in the whole universe; where one can transcend from personal to impersonal; desire to the desireless state of mind.

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