

Importance of *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* for the Attainment of Liberation in Other Systems of Indian Philosophy

Sukanta Das, PhD

Govt. Approved Part-time teacher, Department of Philosophy, Garbbeta College, Garbbeta, Midnapur (west), West Bengal. Email: das.sukanta007@gmail.com

Abstract

We know that Indian Philosophy leads us to the way of attaining liberation. It is true that only *mokṣa* or liberation is eternal among four *puruṣārthas* by which men can be free from all kinds of sufferings, pains etc. of life permanently. The term '*mokṣa*' is used in different terms in various systems of Indian Philosophy viz. '*nirvāṇa*', '*kaivalya*', '*āpavarga*', '*mukti*', '*niḥśreyasa*', '*Brahmasvarūpatāprāpti*' etc. But, it is also true that all the systems except the Cārvāka admit liberation as the chief goal to every human being and for attaining it they have mentioned various methods as the means in their theories but if we search profoundly their prescribe methods, must find the method of yoga or some parts of yoga (of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*) as potential form using in different terms. Hence, it may be observed here that the *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* is not only effective method as means for attaining liberation in the Yoga Philosophy but also effective method in other systems of Indian Philosophy also. The aim of this paper is to show how the *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* has been admitted as the means for the attainment of liberation in some other systems of Indian Philosophy.

Keywords: Liberation, *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga*, *nirvāṇa*, *āpavarga*, *kaivalya*, Brahman.

Introduction

A profound searching of Indian Philosophy shows us that it is fully related to the highest good for humanity. It is proved that the highest good of humanity is hidden in *mokṣa* or liberation. Naturally, men want pleasure or wellness for themselves behind the various worldly objects what they like and after fulfilling one, another desire is arisen in their minds. In this manner, they run behind the worldly object for acquiring eternal pleasure during whole life but they are failed. The great sages of India were able to discover the source of eternal happiness for men and that is liberation or *mokṣa*. Hence, they assert that '*Ātmā vā are draṣṭavya, śrotavya mantavyo nididhyāsītavya*'; that is to say, if you can know yourself, it is not needed to find the pleasure in worldly object, because, eternal bliss is remained in yourself. Hence, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says in the '*Gītā*': "*Brahmabhūta prasannātmā na śocati na kankṣati*", verse no. 18/54. *Śruti* says that we all are the sons of nectar (*Śṛnvantu viśve amṛtasya putrā*). Hence, the all systems (except the Cārvāka and ancient Mīmāṃsaka) have admitted liberation or *mokṣa* as the highest goal to every human being in their theories. The term '*mokṣa*' has been used in different names viz. *nirvāṇa*, *kaivalya*, *āpavarga*, *niḥśreyasa*, *Brahmaprāpti*, *samādhi*, *mukti* etc.

II

Mokṣa is one of the highest ideal among four *puruṣārthas*. We know that the term '*Puruṣārtha*' consists of two terms '*puruṣa*' and '*artha*'. The term '*puruṣa*' refers to 'conscious self' and '*artha*' refers to 'desirable object'. Hence, the term '*puruṣārtha*' means 'desirable object of conscious self'. We find four *puruṣārthas* in the Indian Philosophy viz. *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (desire or lust) and *mokṣa*. Among the four *puruṣārthas* only *mokṣa* is absolute and eternal; because, we may be freed from all kinds of sufferings of life eternally. If anybody can attain it once, never comes back in the world or does not contact with the birth-death circle. Thus Śruti says, "Na ca punarāvartate"¹. Even, we can attain bliss in the state of *mokṣa*. Hence, it has been stated in the Śruti as '*Bhūmā (nālpe sukhamasti bhūmaiva sukham)*'. Dharmarāja Adhvarindra has mentioned a verse in his '*Vedānta Paribhāṣā*': "Iha khalu dharmārtha-kāma-mokṣakehyeṣu catuvidhaḥ puruṣārtheṣu mokṣa eva parama puruṣārthaḥ"². The other three are initials. *Dharma* is producible and also destructible. We find a verse regarding the non-eternity of *dharma* which is as follows:

"Tad yatbeha karmajito lokah kṣyate evamevāmutra puṇyajito lokah kṣyate"³. *Artha* has no value for itself. *Kāma* has no limitation and as a result, it cannot provide us eternal pleasure. Hence, *artha*, *kāma* and *dharma* cannot be our ultimate goal.

III

Now, here, a brief summary will be noted regarding the yoga and its eight accessories. Patañjali, the founder of the Yoga Philosophy has arranged the yoga systematically at first and we can acquire the knowledge in details regarding yoga from his famous work the '*Yogasūtra*'. The main aim of the Yoga Philosophy is to attain *kaivalya* or *samādhi* through the sincere practice of eight-fold means of yoga (*aṣṭāṅga-yoga*). Though we find various definitions of yoga in different perspectives, yet it is very true that the main aim of all kinds of definitions is to remain of self in itself (*Tadā draṣṭu svarūpebavasthānam*, 'Y.S, verse no. 1/3). Patañjali defines the yoga as the cessation of mental modifications (*Yogaścittavṛttinirodhaḥ*, Y.S. verse no. 1/2). Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the God of yoga, says, "*Tam vidyādduḥkhaḥayogavijogam yogasamjnitam*"⁴. That is to say, yoga is beyond of pain or suffering. It is very clear to us that the state of yoga is that where there will be no suffering. If there is no modification, there will be no desire and suffering etc. The '*Yogasūtra*' of Patañjali is classic exposition of *rājayoga*. Swami Abhedananda says that 'the *rāja-yoga* is regarded as the 'royal road' or the best and the highest method. It teaches the methodical or systematic practices of yoga which lead to the ultimate goal of the human beings'⁵. This yoga is attained through the practice of eight accessories which are- *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyahāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*.

Yama, the first step of yoga is divided into five parts viz. *ahimsā* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-covetousness), *brahmacarya* (celibacy) and *aparigraha* (non-acceptance anything from others).

Niyama is also consists of five parts viz. *śauca* (cleanliness-internal and external), *santoṣa* (contentment), *tapah* (austerity), *svādhyāya* (study of scripture) and *Īśvara pranidhāna* (complete surrender to God).

The third step is *āsana*. Patañjali says, "*Sthirasukhamāsanam*", Y.S. verse no. 2/46. It means a suitable posture in which a yogi can sit comfortably for a long time and meditate.

The next step, *prāṇāyāma* is the power to control of breathing. S. N. Dasgupta points out that ‘*prāṇāyāma* consists in taking breath, keeping it for a while and the giving it up’.⁶

Pratyāhāra is the withdrawal of the senses from taking their own object-forms. It helps us to control ourselves.

Dhāraṇā is the fixation of the mind of a person on any particular object what he likes. Patañjali defines it as: “*Deśabandhaścittasya dhāraṇā*”, Y.S. verse no. 3/1.

Dhyāna is intense mental concentration. It is also called meditation. If *dhāraṇā* is continued like flow of oil on any particular object, it will be called *dhyāna*.

The last step of yoga is *samādhi*. Patañjali defines it as: “*Tadevārtamātranirbhāsam svarūpaśūnyamiva samādhiḥ*”, Y.S. verse no. 3/3. In this state, the mind of a yogi is full of firmness and there is no modification except the concentrating object (*dhyeya*).

According to the Yoga system, *samādhi* is of two types’ viz. *samprajñāta* and *asamprajñāta*. In the step of *samprajñāta*, there remains any kind of seed of object but in the state of *asamprajñāta*, there is no seed of object. Hence, the *samprajñāta* state is called *savija* and *asamprajñāta* is called *nirvija samādhi*.

IV

In this section, we shall try to find out how the method of the yoga has been hidden as potential form as the means for attaining liberation in the other systems of Indian Philosophy like the Bauddha, Nyāya, Sāṃkhya and the Advaita Vedanta.

The main theme of the Buddhist Philosophy is *nirvāṇa* which is the absolute goal of every human being. ‘*Nirvāṇa*’ deals with extinction of lust, desire, anger, passion, etc. forever. The root cause of bondage is ignorance. The form of ignorance is to think non-eternal as eternal, impure as pure etc. The ignorance can be removed by the true knowledge of four-noble truths. Among those four, only last (*aṣṭāṅgika mārga*) leads us to the way of *nirvāṇa* or liberation. These eight fold paths are divided into three parts viz. *śīla*, *samādhi* and *prajñā*. The term ‘*śīla*’ deals with ‘right conduct’. It contains various ethical or religious works viz. non-violence, truth, non-covetousness etc. which make a man scrupulous. He has to practice these ethical works in mind, speech and deed. After attaining or establishing the *śīla*, mendicant will be able to attain *samyak samādhi* which is the last step of eight parts. ‘*Samyak vyayāma*, *samyak smṛti* and *samyak samādhi* are allowed as ‘*samādhi*’. Dharmadīna, a mendicant nun says, “*Samādhi* is one-pointedness of mind”. We can attain *prajñā* through the practising of *śīla* and *samādhi*. ‘*Prajñā*’ is the right knowledge of four noble-truths by which ignorance is removed. Buddhist *śīla* is similar as *yama* of yoga. *Śīla* consists with *samyak vāka* (right speech), *samyak karmānta* (right action) and *samyak ājīva* (right earning) which advises us to hold non-violence, truth, *asteya* and *brahmacarya*.

The second step *niyama* of yoga is found in the Buddhist system. They have mentioned ‘*aśubbakammabhāna*’ or ‘*dhūtaṅgas*’ for both *cittaśuddhi* (cleanliness of mind) and *dehasuddhi* (cleanliness of body). Again, mendicants hold *santoṣa*, *tapah*, *svādhyāya* and *Īśvara pranidhāna*. They worship Buddha and completely surrender themselves to Buddha as God. *Āsana* is a posture of sitting in which a mendicant can meditate and attain *samādhi*. We can say it being seen the image of meditator Buddha that *āsana* has an important role in the Buddhist Philosophy. *Prāṇāyāma* is used in the

Buddhist system as the name of ‘*ānaṇānasati*’. It is noted that a mendicant should fix his mind on the *passāsa* (inhalation) and *āssāsa* (exhaling) of his breath with counting numbers.⁷

Every mendicant of Buddhism must restrain his organs and mind through the practising of *śīla*. It is similar as *pratyāhāra* of yoga. We find there in the ‘*Viśuddhimagga*’ of Buddhaghosa forty objects which have been mentioned for fixing the mind.⁸ Buddha himself was a meditator. We can perceive his image where he is sitting on a lotus posture and his eyes are closed.

The last step of eight –fold path is *samādhi*. In the Buddhism, we find two types of *samādhi* viz. *sopadhiseṣa* and *anupadhiseṣa* which are similar as *samprajñāta* and *asamprajñāta* of yoga. In both the *samprajñāta* and *sopadhiseṣa* there remain any kind of seed of object whereas in the other two states *asamprajñāta* and *anupadhiseṣa* there is no seed of object. Here, a question may be arisen against the system of Yoga- if the period of Buddha is 624 B. C. to 544 B. C. whereas the period of Patañjali, the author of the book ‘*Yogasūtra*’ is 200 B. C.. It clearly proves that Buddha was born before Patañjali. So, how can we say that the *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* is hidden in the *aṣṭāṅgika mārgas* of the Buddhism? In reply, it may be mentioned that the yoga system is oldest among other sciences or philosophical systems. We find the name of Hiraṇyagarva as the founder of the Yoga system.⁹ ‘Hiraṇyagarva’ was the first embodied soul in the universe who was also known as different names viz. Prajāpati, Brahmā etc.¹⁰ Again, we find some other sources regarding the antiquity of yoga system viz. “Yoga, being widely considered as an ‘immortal cultural outcome’ of Indus Saraswati civilization-dating back to 2700 B. C.”. and ‘In the yogic lore, Shiva is seen as the first yogi or Adiyogi, and the first guru or Adiguru’.¹¹

The Nyaya system admits the liberation or *apavarga* as the ultimate goal of every human being. They think that the cause of bondage is the false knowledge and liberation is attained through the right knowledge (knowledge of sixteen kinds of categories). Among those sixteen categories, second kind or *prameya* (object of knowledge) is the direct cause of liberation. The self is first and chief among twelve *prameyas* whose knowledge is the direct cause of *apavarga*. If anybody can attain the self-knowledge, his false knowledge will be removed. But the question is- how can we attain the self-knowledge or liberation? In reply, Maharṣi Gautama says that we can attain self-knowledge or liberation through the practice of *samādhi*.¹² But to attain *samādhi* is not possible without practice of seven previous steps (*yama, niyama, āsana, prāṇāyāma* etc.). Hence, Maharṣi Gautama says in later verse: “*Tadarthaṁ yama-niyamābhyāmātma-saṁskaro yogācādhyātma-vidhyupāyāih*”.¹³ Again, he advises us to practice yoga in various places viz. forest, cave and bank of river where no man lands etc.¹⁴

According to the Sāṁkhya, ignorance is the root cause of bondage. The form of ignorance is the identity knowledge between the *prakṛti* and the *puruṣa*. It is connected with the *jīva* from timeless period. Due to ignorance the conscious, ever-pure, ever-free soul feels itself as doer, knower and enjoyer. Though the *puruṣa* is ever-free, non-relational, neutral etc. yet for the cause of the attachment with the *prakṛti* through the ignorance, it becomes bound. Here, the meaning of the term ‘bondage’ is the attachment of *puruṣa* with the *prakṛti* or three ingredients. As a result, the ever-free soul feels itself as identical with the body, mind, intellect, sense-organs, action organs etc. While the bound *jīva* suffers various pains, grieves etc. in his life, he will try to get rid of bondage.

At that time, according to the Sāṁkhya, his duty will be to study the scriptures of Sāṁkhya through *śrabana, manana* and realize through *nididhyāsana*. But, it is not adequate to know only the theory of the Sāṁkhya he also has to practice *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* for long-days with profound respect. Through the practice of eight parts of yoga he (aspirant) attains *niḥśreyasa*.¹⁵ In this context, a verse

may be quoted from the ‘Yogasūtra’: “*Sa tu dīrghakāla nairantarya satkāraṣevito dṛḍhabhūmi?*”, verse no.1/14.

Hence, it is clear to us that an aspirant must attain ‘*viveka-khyāti*’ (the different knowledge between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*) through the practice of yoga which is called in other word ‘*niḥśreyasa*’. The term ‘*niḥśreyasa*’ means the eternal cessation of suffering or mokṣa or *kaivalya*. This is the main aim of every bound self or *jīva*. After the attainment of *viveka-khyāti* bound self or *jīva* feels itself as ‘*na me, na asmi, nābham* etc.’. It is called the attainment of *mukti* of the *jīva*. In the state of *kaivalya*, *puruṣa* is devoid of three ingredients (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*) and remains in its own essence.

According to the Advaita Vedanta, the self in nature is *sacīdānanda*, ever-pure, ever-free, eternal, etc. but due to ignorance or *māyā* the self becomes bound. The form of ignorance is to think of *jīva* as separate from the Brahman. *Māyā* or illusion has two powers viz. it covers the real essence of the self and distract the *jīva* to other way from the realization of its essence. Due to the power of *māyā*, *puruṣa* forgets its own essence. As a result, it feels itself as doer, knower and enjoyer. It is called bondage of *jīva*. In this manner, when the *jīva* is enjoying its fruits of actions and suffers various pains, he wants to be free from tribulations of life permanently. It is possible then when an aspirant attains Brahman or its own essence. The theory of Advaita Vedanta prescribes us to study the scripture of Vedanta and to practice four steps as the means of attaining Brahman which is called liberation. These four steps are- *nityānityavastuviveka*, *ibāmūtraphalabhogavirāga*, *śamadamādiṣatkasampatti* and *mumukṣuttva*. But, here, the objection is- it is understood that the Advaita Vedanta has admitted liberation and for attaining that an aspirant has to practice four-fold steps mentioned above; but, how can we say that the *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* is hidden in these four steps of Advaita Vedanta? In reply, we may show a comparison between the *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* of the Yoga Philosophy and *sādhana-catustaya* of the Advaita Vedanta which is in the following:

The first two steps of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* (*yama* and *niyama*) lead an aspirant to the way of morality. Similarly, the Vedanta also commands to do *kāmya* and *naimittika karma* for becoming moral. We may show it with an equation:

Yoga	Advaita Vedanta
$Yama + niyama + kriyāyoga =$	$kāmyakarma + naimittikakarma.$

In the second step, we find that both Patañjali and Saṁkarācārya have admitted *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* for keeping the body fit and concentrating the mind. Saṁkarācārya has mentioned in his ‘*Yājñavalkya*’:

“*Āsanāni samabhyasya vāñchitāni yathāvidhi,*
Prāṇāyāmaṁ tato Gārgi jītāsanagatobabhyase?”¹⁶

The fifth step (*pratyāhāra*) of yoga is found or matched with the Advaita Vedanta as the name of *uparati* (withdrawal of senses) of the *ṣatkasampatti*. Here, the equation is:

Yoga	Advaita Vedanta
$pratyāhāra + tapaḥ =$	$uparati + titikṣā.$

Again, both of them have admitted *samādhi* for the attainment of right knowledge. But, the form of right-knowledge is different according to them viz. in view of Patañjali, the aim of *samādhi* is to restrain mental modifications whereas according to the Advaita Vedanta, the aim of *samādhāna* or *samādhi* is to attain Brahman or to remain in its own essence. Here, the equation is given below:

Yoga Advaita Vedanta
samādhi = *samādhāna*.

Here, in the perspective of above mentioned statements it may be stated that though the theory of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* is not admitted in the theory of Advaita Vedanta yet there we find the method of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* as potential form where their using terms are different. In this context, we may quote some statements regarding the similarity of liberation between the Sāṅkhya-Yoga and the Advaita Vedanta. “The means of Advaita Vedanta for attaining Brahman are same as that of the Sāṅkhya-Yoga. Again, we find that both bondage and liberation of the Advaita Vedanta is actually the activity of *māyā* and when it becomes desisted from the pure self, it attains the essence of Brahman. On the other hand, according to the Sāṅkhya-yoga, bondage and liberation are of *prakṛti*, not of *puruṣa*. When a yogi attains *asamprajñāta samādhi*, *prakṛti* becomes desisted from that particular *puruṣa* and at that time it remains in its own essence (*Tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpehavasthānam*, Y.S., Verse no.1/3)”¹⁷

Again, we find that Sadānanda Yogīndra prescribes us to practice eight-fold means of yoga for the attainment of *mukti*.¹⁸ Of course, he has prescribed it as a decisive factor of *nididhyāsana*, because, the term ‘*nididhyāsana*’ is used as *samādhi*.

V

Till now, we saw that liberation is the main goal of every systems of Indian Philosophy. The main cause of bondage is ignorance. Of course, the form of ignorance holds different status according to different systems viz. in Buddhism, ignorance is not to attain the knowledge of four noble-truths, in Nyāya, the absence of sixteen kinds of categories, Sāṅkhya holds that the identity knowledge between *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* and according to Advaita Vedanta, not to attain the identity knowledge between *jīva* and Brahman. Anybody may object that as the forms of ignorance are different according to different systems; their prescribed means and terms are also different. So, how can we say that there we find *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* in every systems of Indian Philosophy as the means of liberation in their theories? In reply, it may be observed that though it is true that all the systems do not mention *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* in words for attaining liberation in their theories, yet if we search profoundly the means prescribed by them, must find that the process for attaining liberation are same as *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* of Yoga Philosophy but they have used different terms. Hence, it may be concluded that the *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* in different terms has been admitted in almost all the systems of Indian Philosophy as the method for attaining liberation.

Notes and references

1. ‘*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*’, verse no. 8/15/1.
2. Adhvarīndra, Dharmarāja, “*Vedanta Paribhāṣā*”, *prathama pariccheda*.
3. ‘*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*’, verse no. 8/1/6.
4. The ‘*Gītā*’, verse no. 6/23.
5. Abhedananda Swami, “*Yoga its Theory and Practice*”, Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Kolkata-6, P. 10.
6. Dasgupta, S. N., “*A History of Indian Philosophy*”, Vol.1, Motilal Banarsidass Pvt. Ltd. Delhi, P. 272.

7. Dasgupta, S. N., “*A History of Indian Philosophy*”, Vol.1, Motilal Banarsidass Pvt. Ltd. Delhi, P. 103.
8. Vidyaranya Swami, “*Bauddhadarsan O Dharmā*”, Paschimvanga Rajya Pustak Parsad, Kolkata, P. 103.
9. “*Hiraṇyagarvo yogasya vaktā nānyaḥ purāṇaḥ*”, “*Tattvavaiśāradi*”, Vācaspati Mīśra, Verse no. 1.
10. “*Hiraṇyagarvo nāma mūrtitrayādanyaḥ prathamo jīvaḥ*”, and
Hiraṇyagarvaḥ samavartadāgre bhūtasya jātaḥ patireka āsit,
Sa dadbhāra pṛthibīm dyamutemām kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhem”, “*Rgveda*”, 10th
Mandal, 121 th *Sukta*.
11. Basavaraddi, Dr. Ishwar V. , “*Yoga: Its Origin, History and Development*”, Ministry of External Affairs, Govt. Of India, <https://www.mea.gov.in/in-focus/article.htm?25096/>.
12. “*Samādhiviśeṣābhyāsāt*”, “*Nyāyasūtra*”, verse no. 4/2/38/448.
13. “*Nyāyasūtra*”, verse no. 4/2/46/456.
14. “*Araṇyaguḥāpulinādiṣu yogābhyāsoḥpadeśaḥ*”, “*Nyāyasūtra*”, verse no. 4/2/42/452.
15. “*Aṣṭāṅgayogānuṣṭānajanitaśca niḥśreyasabetaḥ*”, “*Sāṃkhyatattvakaumudī*” of Bācaspati Mishra, Verse no. 23.
16. Vivekananda Swami, “*Rājayoga*”, Udbodhan Karyalaya, Kolkata, P. 193.
17. Das, Dr. Sukanta, “*Liberation in Yoga and Advaita Vedānta: A Comparative Study*”, “*Philosophy and the Life-world*”, Vol. 18, 2016, ISSN: 0975-8461, Dept. of Philosophy, Vidyasagar University, Midnapur.
18. Yogīndra, Sadananda , “*Vedantasāraḥ*”, verse no. 114-116.