

**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S APPROACH TO THE IDEAL OF
KARMA-YOGA – A CRITICAL STUDY**

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S APPROACH TO THE IDEAL OF KARMA-YOGA-A CRITICAL STUDY, being submitted by Smt. A. K. VIJAYALAKSHMI for the award of the Ph.D. in Philosophy is the record of the bonafide research work carried out by the candidate under my supervision. No part of the thesis has been submitted for a degree in any other University.

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I, A. K. VIJAYALAKSHMI, hereby declare that this thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship or other similar Title or Recognition.

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INTRODUCTION

A.K. Vijayalakshmi “Swami Vivekananda's approach to the ideal of karma-yoga - a critical study ” Thesis. Department of Philosophy , University of Calicut, 2000

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy in India is understood to be the philosophic wisdom of the natives. India had a long and rich philosophical tradition of its own. S. Radhakrishnan observed "The Indian Philosophical tradition is man's oldest as well as the longest continuous development of speculation about the nature of reality and man's place therein".¹ During the long course of development over a period of three thousand years, Philosophy in India diversified itself into different schools of thought succeeding one another. Thus different and sometimes contradictory notions prevailed in Indian Philosophy at different periods or at the same time. But underneath all those differences, there is unanimity with regard to the ultimate goal of life and methods of its realization, though thinkers both Indian and Western subscribed to the view that Indian Philosophy is not Philosophy but a mere collection of dogmas and mystification of beliefs.

Ultimately every Philosophy is man-centred and is taken to mean the continuous and relentless pursuit of man after perfection and ultimate realization. Thus Philosophy had taken up live issues of the

time. "Philosophical discipline leads man to develop ultimately, a vision of self-similarity and even one self-identity".² Man's desire to know his Self and the knowledge that his Self is non-different from the Universal Self is central to philosophical thought in India. The Indian Philosophers were not fully satisfied with a mere explanation of the nature of Ultimate Truth but insisted upon the practical application of the knowledge of truth. Hence Philosophy in India is not merely *Darśana* but *Sādhana* as well. It stands for a way of life rather than a mere view of it. "Philosophy in ancient India was, above all, a practical quest for truth or atleast for guidelines pointing to truth, and practical application of those guidelines was paramount".³

Indian Philosophy stands out unique and unparalleled in being very close to human life and its concern for human destiny owing to its relation with *Yoga*. Philosophers had not given a precise definition as to what is Philosophy which in a sense is a stumbling block in our correct understanding of it.

From its early beginning different words were used to denote the discipline of Philosophy. For instance, the vedic seers preferred the word '*Brahmodya*' for the discipline of Philosophy. Philosophy thus came to mean speculative discussion about *Brahman* or the ultimate

reality. In the *Upaniṣads*, Philosophy came to be known as *Ātma-Vidyā* (the knowledge of the self), *Pāra-Vidyā* (Super knowledge) and *Brahma-vidyā* (knowledge of Brahman). It is an enquiry into the nature of truth along with the nature and degrees of Bliss. Supreme Bliss is *Brahman* experience. In the *BhagavadGīta* the central issue is the development of the Self of man and its union with the Divine. It prescribes a code of conduct for man. It lays emphasis on the performance of action in the spirit of disinterestedness. It is an attitude of mind, wherein the superior soul experience intense pain and pleasure without being affected by it. This is *Adhyātmā-Yoga* which make possible divine vision. Accordingly Philosophy is the prayerful quest for the *Dhruva* the eternal, and culminates in the vision of the self obtained through hearing (*Śravaṇa*), meditation (*Manana*) and contemplation (*Nidhidhyāsana*).

In a broad sense Philosophy may be taken as a constant endeavour of the human mind to describe and rationally explain experienced reality in well defined concepts and create an overall and systematic as well as intuitively penetrative picture of the world including man which satisfies man's intellectual curiosity. Thus Philosophy came to be understood as spiritual perception or *Darśana*

revealed not to the ordinary self but to the purified self through the practice of *Yoga*. The divine knowledge is revealed only to those who can discriminate between the eternal and the non-eternal. It is considered as the first and foremost requirement to be satisfied by an aspiring mind. Spiritual Realisation marks the culmination of all earthly pursuits.

Yoga signifies Union with the Ultimate. In the traditional sense "*Yoga* is the conscious and directed activity of the individual, aspiring to a supra-sensory and supra-intellectual experience which is to him of spiritual value and which fully or to some extent transforms or deepens his life and his knowledge or understanding of the reality and of himself".⁴ *Yoga* is the system of practical training or method which requires total involvement and participation of the individual. It prepares the individual to control the senses, mind and self so as to meditate upon the Absolute. The practice of *Yoga* enables the *Yogi* to attain concentration and finally meditation result in supra sensory experience. *Yoga* is thus both a technique of meditation and an experience.

One can attain Spiritual Realisation by the practice of *Yoga* which constitutes an integral part of Indian Philosophy. *Yoga* plays an

important role in the Philosophy and religion of *Vedās, Upaniṣads, BhagavadGīta* and all Systems of Indian Philosophy including the Heterodox systems like Buddhism and Jainism. The wisdom of the Indian seers and saints took the form of self discipline by following which man discovers his innermost Self and realizes the non-difference between his individual Self and the Universal Self.

Indian Philosophy is not a merely an academic discipline but a science of moral and spiritual conduct as well. *Yoga* is understood to be Indian Spiritualism. It is a method prescribed for self realization and the practice of which include different stages. In the *Yoga-Bhāṣya* the four orders of spiritual attainment has been mentioned. "The first is the 'one connected with practice' (*abhyāsīn*), for whom the light is just dawning. The second has (attained to) 'truth bearing' transcendental knowledge. The third is he who has developed means for securing all that has been and is yet to be cultivated (by him) . . . while the fourth who has passed beyond that which may be cultivated, has as his sole aim the resolution (*pratisarga*) of the mind (into the primordial world - ground)".⁵ This finally leads to the ultimate goal of the realisation of the Transcendental Self (*Puruṣa*).

Pātañjali in his *Yoga-Sūtra* define *Yoga* simply as 'the restriction of the whirls of the mind'. 'the seer shines forth' the transcendent self of man. *Yoga* is a method or training of the mind so as to effect the withdrawal from the psycho-mental and bodily aspect. The *Yogi* finally recognizes his authentic existence. Thus *Yoga* is both the theory and practice of training the finite mind for supra-mundane consciousness. It is equally a quest for truth and knowledge, meditation and concentration. It is a training of the mind which can bring about mental modifications and finally penetrates into inner consciousness through contemplation leading to *Samādhi*. The Indian philosophic mind always aspires for divine vision and this is made possible only through the practice of *Yoga*. It is the technique of transformation of consciousness from the lower planes to the highest level of realisation of the Transcendental Reality. In the Vedantic sense, *Yoga* signifies the Union of the experienced self with the Supreme Self.

In due course of development of the theory and practice of *Yoga*, from its early beginning, elaborate schemes began to be added. The theory and practice of *Yoga* greatly differ from system to system. Consequently different types of *Yoga* made its appearance sometimes

with contrasting frame works and goals. Along with the five types of *Yoga*, the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo was added during the modern times. Most of the thinkers of the modern period though remained faithful to the Vedantic tradition were engaged in the mission of re-stating ancient Indian religion to purge it of its orthodoxy and dogmatism. Philosophical interest has shifted rightly or wrongly from God and matter to man.

Swami Vivekananda a fully convinced *Vedantin* treats man as an essentially Spiritual Being. Even while remaining faithful to the Vedantic ideal, he stressed the view that the physical existence of man is equally real as long as man ignorantly believes in it. It must find its fulfilment in spiritual self-realization. Vivekananda's integral approach to the problems of life including religion was brought out by him in one of his conversation when he was asked "What is the use of merely reading the Vedanta? . . . we must prove the truth of pure *Advaitism* in practical life". Further he added "Sankara left this *Advaita* Philosophy in the hills and forests, while I have come to bring it out of those places and scatter it broadcast before the work-a-day world and society".⁶

Of the different types of *Yogas* mentioned in ancient Indian religious scriptures Swami Vivekananda laid special emphasis on

Karma-Yoga of the *Gīta* which signifies the Philosophy of work without attachment. Swami Vivekananda simplified the *Yoga* of the *Gīta* for the benefit of ordinary man. According to him there are many paths leading to the same goal of realisation of Divinity ingrained in man. Of the many paths prescribed Swami Vivekananda approved three great *Yogas*, namely *Karma*, *Bhakti*, *Jñāna* in conformity with the three aspects of God, namely Infinite Existence, Infinite knowledge and Infinite Bliss. He preached '*Triveni*', which stood for the synthesis of the three-fold paths. Over and above these three *Yogas* Vivekananda added the science of *Rāja-Yoga*, which is the motive force of the three *Yogas*. *Yoga* was primarily a matter which relates itself to life. Hence it has to be lived. He was also of the view that aim of life does not lie in leading a life of renunciation but active participation in the divine purpose. Man can realize his divinity by following any religious faith, cult, or doctrine chosen by himself. Man can transcend his present state by his own efforts for 'man is the maker of his own destiny'. Liberation according to him, can be attained in this life by the practice of any one of the *Yogas*.

The present research project is an earnest attempt to study Swami Vivekananda's approach to the ideal of *Karma-Yoga* in all its

details. My aim is to explain the goal of human life and the ultimate truth which will be followed by a detailed description of the different types of *Yogas*. *Karma-Yoga* signifies the path of action. It asserts life is one of action. Inaction, on the contrary is denial of life. Action has to be performed without any regard whatsoever for the fruits thereof. The disinterested performance of action paves the way for self-realization.

The need of the present age is sincere attempts on the part of the individual for spiritual and moral development through performance of action in the spirit of disinterestedness. He treats the life of action far superior to renunciation or *Sannyāsa*. Swami Vivekananda was of the view that "It is impossible to find God outside ourselves. Our own souls contributes all the Divinity that is outside of us".⁷ Swami Vivekananda upholding the primacy of the ideal of *Karma-Yoga* had enlarged the scope of religion so as to include within its scope all those fellow-seekers of truth whom are outside the pale of formal or customary religion.

The first chapter highlights the importance of *Yoga* as an integral component of Indian Philosophy. Indian Philosophy is understood to be out and out spiritual and it considers spiritual realization as the

summum bonum of life. It elaborately explains the nature of Ultimate Reality and the discipline for its realization. *Yoga* in Indian thought was interpreted in various senses. Basically it is understood in the sense of a technique to prepare the mind for the realization of the self. It is a practical quest for the realization of the Supreme Self or *Puruṣa*.

The second chapter analyses the origin, development, and typology of *Yoga* mainly on the basis of the main tenants of the three canonical works namely Pātañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*, *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gīta* and *Yoga-Vasiṣṭha*. Pātañjali had given detailed instructions regarding the control of the senses, mind and self for the practice of meditation for final release.

The third chapter gives an account of Swami Vivekananda's interpretation of the four types of *Yoga* namely *Karma-Yoga*, *Jñāna-Yoga*, *Bhakti-Yoga* and *Rāja-Yoga*. He picked up the Philosophy of *Yoga* from the ancient religious scriptures namely the *Upanisads*, the *Bhagavad-Gīta* and the Pātañjali's *Yoga-Sūtra*. He had interpreted the different *Yogas* in accordance with the basic tenets of his Philosophy. The keynote of his teaching is understood to be Activism, rather than withdrawal from the realities of life. Thus the aim of human life is not

one of escape but active participation in the divine purpose. According to Swami Vivekananda *Yoga* is an intricate science and therefore it has to be handled with utmost care. He said "That cannot be taught in lectures, for it is life, and life can only convey life ...".⁸

The fourth chapter is primarily designed to highlight the basic tenets of *Bhagavad-Gīta* namely *Karma-Yoga*. *Bhagavad-Gīta* is believed to be a treatise on *Karma-Yoga*. It is the path of action leading to the realisation of the Identity of the Self with the Supreme Self. It is an ethical discipline pursued for the attainment of *Mokṣa*. *Karma-Yoga* laid emphasis on the performance of action in a spirit of detachment. It assigns special emphasis on leading a life of detachment even while living in this world. Detachment is the most fundamental tenet of *Karma-Yoga*. Freedom from the world and union with the infinite are the ultimate goals of human endeavour. In the final state the self realises everlasting unity with the Absolute.

The fifth chapter is concerned with an exposition of Swami Vivekananda's Ideal of *Karma-Yoga*. Swami Vivekananda followed the *Gīta* Ideal of disinterested service to mankind but differed in matters metaphysical. The practice of *Karma-Yoga*, according to him do not require the support of any religion or God. According to him even an

atheist can secure freedom by the performance of ethical deeds in the spirit of detachment. An individual by his own effort can attain final release without any reference to the will of God.

The last chapter constitutes the concluding part of the thesis. This part highlights the relevance of the ideal of *Karma-Yoga* during the contemporary period. Swami Vivekananda with his ethico-religious message succeeded in infusing a new hope in man. His ideal of Universal Religion unlike the general philosophical approach of Indian seers and sages emphasised the importance of removing the ills of human life rather than the discussion of abstract metaphysical truths. Swami Vivekananda often said "If you want to find God, serve man"⁹ whereby he had broadened the scope of religion by including the humanistic trend within its fold. The ideal of *Karma-Yoga* preached and practised by Swami Vivekananda laid the emphasis on Love, Service and Unity which binds men all over the globe.

As regards the method of enquiry, it may be said that we have relied on analytic and synthetic approaches. It analyses the scriptural texts and synthesis of them. The *Daśanas* analyse the problem of Reality for a comprehensive understanding of it. Whereas *Bhagavad-Gīta* is predominantly synthetic in character co-ordinating the views of

the *Upaniṣads* and the other systems of Indian Philosophy. Swami Vivekananda's ideal of *Karma-Yoga* presented a balanced view beneficial both to the individual and society. It aimed at a synthesis between Spiritualism and Humanism which resulted in a healthy relation between men of various faiths and cults finally culminating in the spiritual integration of mankind.

NOTES

1. S. Radhakrishnan, *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, Ed.s S. Radhakrishnan and Charles. A. Moore, Princeton, New Jersey Princeton University Press. 1973. Introduction.
2. Sukhlalji,(trans: K.K. Dixit) *Indian Philosophy*, Ahmedbad: 1977. P.110.
3. Karl Werner, *Yoga and Indian Philosophy*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi: 1977. Introduction.
4. *Ibid*, p.93.
5. *Yoga-Bhāṣya*. III. 51.
6. Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works*. Vol. VII. Calcutta Advaita Ashrama. 1972.P.162
7. Swami Vivekanada, *Complete Works*. Vol. III Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1964.P.191-193.
8. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda and the Univerisal Gospel*. Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta,1960.P23
9. *Ibid*, p.11.

YOGA-ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT AND TYPOLOGY

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CHAPTER II

YOGA-ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT AND TYPOLOGY

India is believed to be the land of the origin of *Yoga*. *Yoga* has been an integral part of the Philosophy in India. The ultimate goal of Indian Philosophy is Union with God. *Yoga* is the method used to attain the goal of spiritual (self) realisation. One can attain liberation by the practice of the method of renunciation of desires, which is made possible by the practice of *Yoga*. Thus *Yoga* is a part of man's activities directed towards the goal of spiritual realisation.

Philosophy in India is a practical quest for the Ultimate. It is a method or discipline to be followed by the seekers of Truth aspiring for supra-sensory and supra-intellectual experience. Though the goal is one and the same the method of attaining it may vary from system to system. Thus there is not one single *Yoga*, but a multitude of *Yogic* paths, which into a great extent differ in content and practice. *Yoga* in one form or other plays an important role in almost all Philosophical Systems including the Heterodox systems of Buddhism and Jainism.

Traditionally *Yoga* is understood to be a Divine Science, i.e., a spiritual science of Being and Becoming. As such it aims at bringing about mental transformation of the highest order which transcends the ordinary everyday experience. It is a technique by following which one can attain complete control over bodily organs and thereby prepare the mind to mediate upon the Absolute Reality. Thus *Yoga* is a term that signifies the method of concentration by which one can attain unity with the eternal.

Yoga in India became a practical discipline of moral and spiritual conduct. "All forms of *Yoga* are ways to one and the same centre and all enable one to acquire the emancipating knowledge of the self (*Ātman* or *Puruṣa*)". "It (*Yoga*) is indeed the theory and practice of the transformation of the finite mind into the supra-mundane and supra-personal all-pervading consciousness".¹

Etymologically the word '*Yoga*' is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj* which meant 'to bind together'. In this sense, *Yoga* signifies 'yoke' or the union of the Individual self with the Supreme Self. It is a state of Supreme Realisation. *Yoga* is also used in the sense of 'method' or 'path' or practical discipline which leads to the final release. Thus *Yoga* meant realisation and

the path leading to it. Accordingly *Yoga* stands for both the practical discipline and the final realisation.

“aikhyam jivatimananor ahur *Yogam Yoga - visaradah*”²

When an Individual become on with God, he realises the state of *Yoga* or Union. Thus *Yoga* meant both the realisation as well as the path leading to it.

Yoga was also been used in the narrow restricted sense of the practice of controlling one's own mind. It is defined by Patanjali, as “the restraints of the modes of the mind” (*chitta-vritti-nirodha*). It means that “*Yoga* is the science that teaches us to bring the *chitta* under control from the state of changes. The *chitta* is the stuff from which our minds are made and which is being constantly churned into waves by external and internal influences. *Yoga* teaches us to control the mind so that it is not thrown out of balance into wave forms ...”³. There are several passages in the *Yoga* sutra in which the *Yogi* is more concerned with casual process rather than with metaphysics. Metaphysics was given only a secondary consideration in Patanjali's teaching.

The relation between matter and mind is of utmost importance and form the basis of metaphysical teaching. This idea has been brought out by Pātañjali as follows:

“The conjunction of the Perceives and perceivable is the cause of the ‘Avoidable’ -”⁴

“The restriction of this is by means of practice and dispassion”⁵.

“Their restraint comes from practice and non-attachment”⁶.

The final aim of *Yoga* is to integrate the personality by cancelling the ego by the process of eight limbed steps (*Aṣṭāṅga-Yoga*).

In the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, *Yoga* was understood in the sense of ‘mental balance’ (*samatva*).

“Fixed in *Yoga*, do thy work, O winner of wealth (Arjuna abandoning attachment with an even mind in success and failure, for evenness of mind is called *Yoga*”⁷. A general description of what it means to be a *Yogi* is given in the sixth chapter of *Bhagavad-Gītā* in which Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that a *Yogi* is a man who renounces all desires and ceases to regard himself as the

doer in respect of action and enjoyer of sense-objects.

“He, O Arjuna, who sees with equality everything in the image of his own self, whether in pleasure or in pain, he is considered a perfect *Yogi*”⁸. In another place it is said that the *Yogi* is a devotee who has conquered mind, body and senses and has acquired perfect serenity, recognising his own self as the supreme self.

In *Bhagavad-Gīta*, *Yoga* is also defined as ‘skill in action’.

“One who has yoked his intelligence (with the Divine)(or is established in his intelligence) casts away even here both good and evil. Therefore strive for *Yoga*, *Yoga* is ‘skill in action’⁹.

Thus defined, *Yoga* is not a religion. It was primarily concerned with those practices adhered to and experimented in the personal rather than on the supra-mundane realm. This idea has been well brought out in the following passage. “From its beginnings, *Yoga* has been a reaction against metaphysical speculations and empty ritualism, from its origins, it has represented a tendency towards the concrete, towards the

experience of the sacred. This reaction against ritualism and scholastic speculation has always remained one of the major features of *Yoga*. *Yoga* has been a technique by which a *Yogi* unites with the Infinite. It has been understood as a possibility based on psychological facts. It is this mental force which completes the individual to strive for ultimate perfection by transcending himself. *Yoga* thus began to manifest itself in three forms namely as the longing for human heart to overcome loneliness, or as certain experience which opens up channels to a deeper vision of life, and also as the incessant and insatiable urge towards the attainment of Perfect Wisdom. Thus in *Yoga* we can find a unique synthesis of spiritual disciplines, ethics and psychology. *Yoga* is therefore understood as the discipline for art of healthy living harmoniously integrating the physical, the mental and the spiritual. The integration of all these become evident in a *Yogi* who is approaching the stage of *samādhi*.

The practice of *Yoga* is not confined to India alone. Indian *Yoga* is not affiliated to any specific Philosophy or religion. It is an independent method of enquiry and practice. The origin of *Yoga* practice in India dates back to the distant past. During the

early period, the practice of *Yoga* was confined only to a few sages who had transmitted it to devote pupils and through them to the successive generation. The exact date of the origin of *Yoga* has not been established beyond dispute. But scholars of Indology and Comparative Religion are of the opinion that the practice developed during the vedic and post-vedic period as a combined result of primitive religious orthodoxy and ritualism. The early literary evidence on the origin of the practice of *Yoga* were found in the *Vedas*.

The following passages from the *Vedas* illustrates the traces of *Yoga* in them.

“He who supports within Himself the heavenly bodies, the earth and all that it contains; He who is the embodiment of happiness and release, free from all pain; He who protects all; He who controls the movement of the atoms and of the solar systems; may we, with devotion and purpose, offer adoration to that most desirable one, that we may attain union with Him”¹⁰

“O Self illumined Lord, Thou hast created all effulgent

objects such as the sun, moon and stars! Thou art the only Master of Universe! O consciousness supreme, Those wert the one Lord and one Existence before creation. Now Thou dost give support to Thy creations - the suns and the planets Grant that we may ever engage in the practices of *Yoga* to please Thee, and may we ever be devoted to Thee"¹¹

"Grant, O Lord! that I may have no fear of my friends or of my enemies or of any object known or unknown! Grant that I may pass my nights and days without fear! May the four directions and all who dwell in them be my friends"¹²

What later come to be known as *Yogic* practice can also be traced back to the ancient Vedic worship and magic practices. The gradual development of the *Yogic* practice in India culminated in the *Yoga* system of Pātañjali.

After *Vedas*, there approved a number of treatises known as the *Upaniṣhads*, wherein the seers had summarised their spiritual vision and mystical experience. The *Upaniṣads* teach neither pure

Philosophy nor pure theology, on the contrary they are mere compilations relating to the various aspects of Reality ranging from Metaphysics to Ethics. They also offer practical guidance on the observance of ritual sacrifices. The central message of the *Upanishad* is that consciousness which underline human nature is non-different from Universal Self or *Brahman*. Śvetāswara Upanishad describe the nature of the Supreme Reality as follows:

“*Brahman* supports the universe which is a combination of the manifest and the un-manifest, the perishable and the imperishable. The individual soul is not the rules as it is limited by self-improved conditions of an enjoyer. It is freed from all limitations when it knows the nature of the supreme Rules’. By meditating upon *Brahman* and transcending every relation with the world, a person obtain Brahma realisation”.¹³

“This *Brahman* should be meditated upon as external, as dwelling in one’s own soul as its essence. Besides *Brahman* there is nothing else to be known. It is the enjoyer (the individual soul), the objects of enjoyment and the arbiter of the destiny of all brings (Īśvara) He who knows *Brahman* in these terms achieves

liberation".¹⁴ In another place in *Śvetaswara-Upanishad* the realisation of the Absolute Reality is explained as follows:

'It is by pressing the sesamum seed that its oil is extracted. It is by churning milk curds that butter is formed. It is by digging a well that subterranean water can be induced to gush forth. It is by rubbing two pieces of wood together that fire is dawn out of them. Similarly *Brahman*, the Absolute Self, is cognised within one's own soul by practising a life of trught and self discipline' (*tapas*)".¹⁵

"When the *Yogi* is absorbed in full concentration , he sees in his own self, like a light, the true nature of *Brahman*, who is external and free from all changes and modification. Then he goes beyond the effects of ignorance and having known *Brahman* as his self, is released from all bonds".¹⁶

Among the various *Upanishads*, the *Kāṭha-Upanishad* is considered as the oldest *Upanishad* which deals explicitly with *Yoga*. The doctrine propounded in this scripture is called

Adhyātma-Yoga or *Yoga* of self-absorption. Its target is the Supreme Being which is difficult to be seen and hidden in the care of heart.

“Beyond the senses are the sense objects; beyond the sense objects is the mind; beyond the mind is the wisdom-faculty (*Buddhi*); beyond the wisdom faculty is the great self (*Mahātman*)”.¹⁷

“Beyond the great self in the un-manifest (*avyakta*); beyond the un-manifest is the self (*puruṣa*); beyond the self there is nothing; it is the summit, it is the supreme goal”.¹⁸

The second chapter of the *Katha-Upaniṣad*, which appears to be completely self-contained unit, contains the standard definition of the term *Yoga*. Here *Yoga* is the steady binding of the senses (*sthīram-indriya-dharanam*).

“Beyond the senses is the mind. Above the mind is the Sattva (*buddhi*); beyond the sattva is the great self; above the great (self) is the un-manifest”.¹⁹

“Beyond the un-manifest is the self (*puruṣa*), pervasive and without sign knowing it a being is emancipated and

approaches immortality".²⁰

After the *Upanishads* there appeared in India the two vast Epic poems known as *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhāratha*. *Rāmāyana* give little instruction on the technicalities involved in the practice of *Yoga*. But another work based on Sri. Rama, namely *Yoga-Vasiṣṭha* imparts invaluable instructions regarding the practice of *Yoga*. In *Yoga-Vasiṣṭha* the sage Vasiṣṭha instructs his pupil, Rama as follows: "This world is composed of reality and unreality and bears the stamp of the Almighty; it is made up of unity and duality and is yet free from either". *Brahman* is in all; He is perfect peace, without a second and in also without comparison. *Brahman* is infinite and stretches. Himself in three different directions; viz., creation, preservation, and dissolution. For the realisation of such an absolute, firstly, our intellect has to be cleared from illusion because they delude our mind. This can be done only by the practice of *Yoga*. With boundless patience, courage and service, carry on your meditation and self-study, and worship God in holy *Yoga*".²¹ Accordingly the soul which considers itself superior to other souls will not see God. Now the sage imparts instruction as to the method of worship of God, "...In all forms of worship you

must cease to think of your body, and separate your mind from your personality. You must then apply your mind diligently, under the guidance of your teacher, thinking of the pure and bodiless spirit, which witness the operation of the body from within". Further again "True worship consists in onward meditation alone, and in no other form of worship, therefore apply your mind to the adoration of the Universal spirit by mediating within yourself".²²

The most famous and important part of the Epic *Mahabharata* is the *Bhagavad-Gīta*. *Srimad Bhagavad-Gita* is the science of the Absolute or *Brahma - Vidya* has been described by its composer Vyasa. *Gīta* gives elaborate instruction as to how one can attain salvation or Moksa. Lord Krishna, the Divine Teacher imparts the great message of the *Bhagavad-Gīta*. The answer of the Teacher proceeds upon two different lines, first, a brief reply founded upon the highest ideas of the general Aryan culture in which Arjuna has been educated, secondly, the view founded on a more Infinite knowledge opening into deeper truths of One Being, which is the real starting point of the teaching of the *Gīta*. In despondency the individual turns to the living teacher for help.

Then the Supreme Teacher instructs his discipline to discard all guilt about the worldly attachment and asked us to do our duty without any motive for the results of action. This detailed knowledge is referred to in the *Gīta* as *Samkhaya Yoga*. The *Gīta* says “you have a right to action never to its fruits, let not the fruits of your work be your motive, neither let there be in you any attachment to inaction”²³. “Fixed in *Yoga* do your work O Arjuna, having abandoned attachment, having become equal in failure and success equally is called *Yoga*”²⁴. Thus *Yogi* is a devotee who has conquered his mind, body and senses and has acquired perfect serenity, recognising his own self as the Supreme Self. Thus “*Yoga* is the restraining of the modification of the thinking principle”.²⁵

Pātañjali's in his *Yoga Sūtra* gave detailed instruction to the practice of *Yoga*. The control of mind (*citta*) is the definition of *Yoga*. Patanjali after a thorough going examination of the nature of *citta* outlined the method for controlling it. The out flowing of the *citta* has to be controlled. It is known as *Chitta-vṛitti-nirodha* (the control of the mind). The mind may assume the form of the

instruments of valid knowledge namely perception, inference and scriptural testimony. The mind gets modified into the forms of wrong knowledge (*Viparyāsa*) such as error, illusion, doubt and uncertain cognition. It sometimes represents verbal ideas having no corresponding facts in reality (*Vikalpa*) may also take the form of memory (*smṛti*).

So long as the *citta* flows out and assumes the shape of the object man is condemned to experience sorrows of life (*kleśas*). The *kleśas* which bound human life are *Avidya*, *Asmita*, *Raga*, *Dveṣa* and *Abhiniveśa*. Man is always in bondage (*samsāra*) so long as the mind is wandering. The practice of *Yoga* according to Pātañjali involves a necessary sound ethical life. A sound moral life is an essential pre-requisite for the practice of *Yoga*. The minds of men are not alike. There are many types such as those whose mind is distracted. There are other one's known as *mūḍha* (torpid mind) in which *tamoguna* predominates. The *vikṣipta*, whose mind is unsteady. The fourth is *ekāgra* is an alternative disposition capable of concentration and lastly the *niruddha* of these the *ekāgra* and *niruddha* alone are fit for the practice of *Yoga*.

The two fold method was suggested to the control of the modifications of *citta* include the practice of *Yoga (abyāsa)* the cultivation of non-attachment (*vairāgya*). Pātañjali had given detailed instructions to the practice of meditation. "The essential moral requirements for the practice of *Yoga* are truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, friendliness and compassion. The aim of *Yoga* is liberation or the union of the soul with the object of mediation i.e., God. Mediation is identical with worshipping God exclusively and uninterruptedly in order that beatitude is obtained".²⁶ There are eight ways mentioned in the practice of meditation. It has to be followed by the four steps meant for the attainment of final salvation. Patanjali's eight fold path (*Astāṅga-Yoga*) is as follows:

1. *Yama* - It meant 'abstinence'. It represents the conscious endeavour on the part of the individual to abstain from doing things in the struggle for existence. Although this concept seems to be negative, its contents are positive. They are five in number.

- i. *Ahimsa* means non-violence, abstaining from killing and hurting others.

- ii. *Satya*: it is truthfulness and implies abstaining from telling lies and falseness of any kind.
 - iii. *Asteya*: it is abstaining from stealing.
 - iv. *Brahmaçarya*: it is 'divine faring' which means living in accordance with the standards of the goal of *Yoga*. *Brahmacarya* became synonymous with charity or celibacy.
 - v. *Aparigraha*: it may be interpreted as 'abstaining from appropriating'. It is an attitude of mind that does not consider anything to be one's own.
2. *Niyama* - Both *yama* and *niyama* are derived from the same root '*yam*' which means 'to control'. *Niyama* can be interpreted as 'observance' and it represents the *Yogi's* progressive effort to observe certain principles that prepare him for achievements of a high order. They are five in number.
- i. *Śauca*: it means 'purity' and it refers both external and internal. The *Yogi* has to strive for pure thinking, speaking and acting to keep his body clean, see to the purity of his food, act from pure motives and cleans his mind of sensuality and usage.

- ii. *Santoṣa*: it is contentment. It expresses the willingness of the *Yogi* to accept and face reality as it is without being elated or depressed by it. He should have equanimity of mind.
 - iii. *Tapas*: it means 'austerity'. It introduces forbearance, fasts and other ascetic practices that help to reduce the *Yogi's* dependence on things and increases his self-control.
 - iv. *Svādhyāya*: it is self development or self education and points to the necessity of continuous study, constant learning and development of one's intelligence and higher mental faculties.
 - v. *Īsvara-praṇidhāna*: it may be interpreted as 'constant thought of the Divine' or 'surrender to the Lord'.
3. *Āsana* - '*Āsana*' means 'position' or 'posture'. For efficient *Yogic* practice, a stable and agreeable position of the body is necessary to free the mind from bodily influence.
 4. *Prāṇāyāma* - it is the 'control of breathing'. It is usually done in the position chosen for *Yoga* practice. It regulates breathing and its rhythm.

5. *Pratyāhāra* – means 'withdrawal'. It is the first purely mental step in *Yoga* aiming to prepare the mind for spiritual vision.
6. *Dhāraṇa* – it means 'concentration' and aims to bring about 'one-pointedness' (*ekāgrata*) of the mind which can then stay focussed on one particular object of its (internal) experience.
7. *Dhyāna* – may be translated as 'contemplation' or 'absorption'. This stage is reached when concentration becomes spontaneous. This technique enables the mind to approach reality as such 'from inside' which is supra-sensory, supra-intellectual-and direct way of cognition.
8. *Samādhi* – *Samādhi* is 'unification'. It is the crown of *Yogic* endeavour in Pātañjali's system. It is the fully conscious and 'factual' unification of the *Yogi's* vision or cognitive capacity of mind with the heart of reality in its wholeness.

A systematic and comprehensive account of *Yoga* practice is seen even in heterodox systems such as in Buddhism and Jainism. Buddhism was an ethic^o-philosophical movement arose as a protest against extreme religious orthodoxy and ritualism. Gouthama, the Buddha had given the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism (*Arya-*

satya) which formed the central teaching of Buddhist Philosophy. They are suffering (*Duḥka*), its causes (*Duḥka kāraṇa*), its suppression (*Duḥka nirōdha*), the way by which the cause can be removed (*Nirōdha marga*). Ignorance is believed to be the cause of suffering and bondage. Buddha had accepted suffering as a fact of life. He had also shown the way out of suffering. The eight fold path (*Ārya Aṣṭāṅga-mārga*) which forms the oral code of self discipline has been considered as the very essence of Buddhism'. The eight fold path consists of:

1. *Samyag-drṣṭi* - means 'right vision' ie, the realisation of the transience of conditional existence.
2. *Samyag-sankalpa* - 'right resolve', the three fold decision to renounce what is ephemeral, to practice benevolence and not to hurt any being.
3. *Samyag-vāk* - 'right speech', the abstention from idle and false talk.
4. *Samyag-karmānta*- 'right behaviour', the proper moral conduct.

5. *Samyag-ajīva* - 'right livelihood', the lay followers duty to pursue an occupation which does not demand the harming of being.
6. *Samyag-vyāyama* - 'right exertion', the wandering off of unwholesome mental activity, chiefly by means of controlling the emotive reactions to external stimuli.
7. *Samyag-smṛti* - 'right mindfulness', the cultivation of awareness of the psychosomatic processes.
8. *Samyag-samādhī* - 'right unification', the practice of certain techniques for the internalisation of consciousness.

The first five steps are headed under the code of conduct to be observed by the individuals. The remaining steps of the ethical discipline are classed under the *Yogic* practice.

Thus Buddhism had given a comprehensive account of the practice of *Yoga*. Buddha himself was a dedicated *Yogin* who had a passion for total meditative absorption. The Buddhist eight fold path is a method for training the mind and whole man for the realisation of the vision of Reality. It was devised with a view to transcend the finite self.

Jainism, a socio-religious movement arose in India was founded by Mahāvīra. The Jaina religion basically dealt with the elaborate steps which paves the way for emancipation which is defined in terms of freedom from the impact of the Law of moral causation.

The Jaina code of discipline comprises of fourteen stages.

1. *Mithyatva-guṇa-sthāna* - on this level an animate being is completely enlightened.
2. *Sasvasadana-guṇa-sthāna* - there is dim understanding of the true and the false with long relapses into ignorance.
3. *Misra-guṇa-sthāna* - an entity oscillates between truth and untruth.
4. *Avirati-saṁyag-dṛṣṭi* - on this stage control over emotion is acquired.
5. *Desavirati* - importance of proper moral conduct is realised.
6. *Pramatta* - there is complete cessation of anger, pride, delusion and greed.

7. *Apramatta* - through purification of the mind the ascetic acquires the power for concentration and absorption.
8. *Niyati-badara* - the ascetic gains greater power over his mind.
9. *Aniyati-badara* - at this stage complete control of sexual and emotional forces.
10. *Sukṣma-samparaya* - worldly interest is completely eradicated.
11. *Upasanta-moha* - the self begins to yield to the awareness of universal consciousness.
12. *Ksina-moha* - attains full gnosis.
13. *Samyogi-kevali* - the ascetic becomes a *tirthanka* or path makes.
14. *Ayogi-kevali* - complete isolation from the world of appearance and identifies with *moksa*.

The greatest single figure in the history of *Yoga* was Sri. Sankaracharya. His doctrines were later worked out in detail by many scholars including Padmapāda and Sureśwara (pupils of

Sankaracharya) and Madhusudhana Saraswathi of Banaras. During the middle ages, a number of saints notably Kabirdas, Surdas and Tulasidas, produced a lot of devotional literature. The tradition of teaching *Yoga* through the medium of devotional poetry had continued upto modern times through the teachings of Swami Nirbhayananda and Swami Rama Tirtha.

During the 19th century the evolutionalistic thinkers attempted at developing an evolutionary view of the origin of *Yoga*. According to their view, the human mind had developed from the primitive stages of understanding. Thus the mythological and magical stages developed into more complex and realistic stages of knowledge based on conceptual understanding.

One of the mainspring of contemporary *Yoga* tradition is the saint Sree Ramakrishan Pramahansa. He was a direct follower of Vaisnavism and initiated into Trantrism early on his spiritual career. He had tested the different approaches in Hinduism and realised the Ultimate Reality as one in all of them. Besides he had extended his spiritual enquiry into the realm of other religions and he strongly established the fact that the God is one even though

the path for attaining it may differ. Thus he established the unity of religions and true brotherhood of man.

Swami Vivekananda, the famous disciple of Sri Ramakrishan Paramahansa, spread the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna throughout the entire world. As an excellent orator and a profile writer, Vivekananda done much to popularise *Vedānta* in the Western countries.

Another great figure in the realm of spiritual life of modern India was Ramana Maharsi who lived in the second half of the 18th century. His spontaneous spiritual experience started at the age of seventeen and he lead a life of an ascetic throughout his life.

Contemporary history of *Yoga* is marked by the personality of Śivananda, the founder of the famous school of Rīṣhikesh. He renounced the world at the age of thirty seven. Many of the active teachers of *Yoga* in India belong to his school.

In South India, Sri Aurobindo a brilliant exponent of ancient Indian wisdom had done his best to revive *Yoga* for spiritual seekers from all parts of the world during the 19th century. He had described *Yoga* in detail and said, "*Yoga* means union with the

Divine, a union either transcendental (above the universe) or cosmic (universal) or individual, or as in our *Yoga*, all three together"²⁷. He called his *Yoga* integral which is nothing but a process of widening, heightening and of integration. It also marks the goal of evolution namely the attainment of Divine life. He sets down his ideal as "Unity for human race by an inner oneness and not only by an external association of interests; the resurgence of man out of merely animal or economic life, or the merely intellectual and aesthetic, into the glories of spiritual existence; the pouring of the power of the spirit into the physical mould and the mental instrument so that man may develop his manhood into that super man hood which shall exceed our present state as such as this exceeds the animal state from which science tells us that we have issued, these three are really one; for man's unity and man's self transcendence can come only by living in the spirit"²⁸.

One of the impressive personalities in contemporary *Yoga* is Anandamayi Ma, who like : Ramana Mah^atsi reached the peak of spirit experience without the aid of a teacher.
↑

The practice of *Yoga* dispels illusions of the ego and of the mind. The notion of the finite soul disappears totally. To the man

who has conquered his mind by the self, his self is verify a friend; but to him who is not the master of the kingdom of his mind and senses, his self is like an enemy. "The devotee who has conquered his mind, body and senses, who has acquired perfect serenity, whose finite self has recognised the supreme self to be his self - he is undisturbed by heat and cold pleasure and pain, honour and dishonour."²⁹ The *Yogi* absorbed in mediation experience Freedom and one news with the Divine. Divine realisation during one's own life time came to be known as *Jīvanmukti*. *Jīvanmukti* is a state of Freedom. It is a state in which attains *mukti* in one's own life time. It is a state in which one realises union with the Absolute while remaining tied up with the body. With the cessation of the inherited *Karmas* the body ceases to function. *Jīvanmukti* proceeds to the final state of Supreme Bliss. In *Videhamukti* there is complete identity between the individual self and the Absolute Self which is Truth, Consciousness and Bliss (*Sat-Chit-Ānanda*). The soul gets liberated from the body and unites with the Absolute self.

Yoga is a path which leads to ultimate realisation. There were various *Yogic* paths elaborately described in the various systems of Indian thought. With the usual three types of *Yoga*

prescribed in the *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad-Gīta* and *Pātañjali Yoga-Sūtra* namely *Jñāna-Yoga*, *Karma-Yoga* and *Bhakti-Yoga* Swami Vivekananda added a fourth one namely *Rāja-Yoga*. *Karma-Yoga* meant the way through which one realises his own Divinity through the disinterested performance of duty with out any regard whatsoever for the fruits of the action. Where as *Bhakti-Yoga* is the realisation of the divinity through devotion and love of the Personnel God. *Rāja-Yoga* aims at the realisation of the Absolute through the control of the mind and that of *Jñāna-Yoga* through knowledge. All these different types of *Yogic* practices were but different roads converging to the same end. Each type of *Yoga* independently of the other is sure to make man perfect. The *Yogas* of work, of wisdom, and of devotion are all capable of serving as direct and independent means for the attainment of *Mokṣa*. Swami Vivekananda tried to reconcile the different paths of liberation. He attached equal importance to all the four kinds of *Yogas* in his concept of Universal Religion. Different paths are required by different kinds of men, but they all lead to the same goal of self-realisation.

TYOLOGY

1. *Bhakti-Yoga*:

The term '*Bhakti*', derived from the Sanskrit root 'Bhaj' meant 'devotion', 'love'. *Bhakti-Yoga* or the *Yoga* of love signifies 'total dedication to the Divine'. Sāndilya, the author of the *Bhakti-Sūtra* defines *Bhakti* as 'supreme attachment to the Lord'.

Generally speaking, *Yoga* has to do only with the meditative aspect of religion. As such *Bhakti-Yoga* is taken to mean the path of devotion to God for salvation or rather the path of systematised devotion for the attainment of union with the Absolute. It is considered as the easiest and surest path to spiritual self-realisation. It requires love of God to achieve the supreme identity. It is love in Divine Union, which leads to the Identity.

Bhakti-Yoga, at the initial stages, recommends to sing God's glory or advises to hear devotional songs in praise of God or to take part in worship and prayer. Thus prayer and practice are the first means of growth. Repeating the names of God has wonderful power, Mantras or sacred text or even names of God can be chosen for repeated recitation, concentrating one's attention on a

personal God. After prayer and practice comes meditation and reflection upon God.

In *Bhakti-Yoga* there are two stages; viz., the preparatory and the higher (*Pārā-Bhakti*). The former is a stepping stone to the latter. The first stage is the purificatory stage and therefore it is necessary to observe certain disciplines as follows: purity in food (discrimination or *Viveka*), freedom from desires (*vimoha*), performance of religious practices (*Abhyāsa*), Doing good to others (*kṛiya*). Truthfulness in thought, speech and behaviour and lastly cheerfulness.

Spiritual knowledge has to be imparted to the individuals through a *Guru* (spiritual teacher). The teacher has to be one who has undergone the disciplines of *Yoga* and has attained mastery over his own self. He has to be sincere, sinless and pure in heart. A man without a proper *Guru* always remain in the dark. It is through the *Guru* that a devotee receives knowledge and access to Divine life.

The Ultimate Realisation of God is achieved step by step. According to the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, *Bhakti-Yoga* consists of the

following nine stages namely,

- 1) *Śravaṇa* - 'listening' to the names of the Divine;
- 2) *Kīrthana* - 'chanting' praise songs in honour of God;
- 3) *Smaraṇa* - 'meditation' of God;
- 4) *Pāda-sevana* - 'service at the feet' of the Lord;
- 5) *Arcana* - 'ritual devotion';
- 6) *Vandana* - 'prustration' before image of the Lord;
- 7) *Dāsya* - 'slavish devotion' to God;
- 8) *Sakhya* - 'friendship' - the Divine raises the humble devotee to the status of a friend;
- 9) *Ātma-nivedana* - 'self-offering' through which the worshiper enters into the immortal body of God.

As a result the devotee cultivates passion (*rati*) for God which breaks down all the obstacles which lies between the Divine and himself. As the passion for God increases the devotee sees the pervadence of God in everywhere and in everything. The ultimate stage of the union between the Divine and the finite self is

described as *Pāra-Bhakti*, or Supreme Love. In the *Bhakti-Sūtra* of Nārada, a distinction was drawn between primary and secondary type of devotion. The latter is a stepping stone to the former. The secondary type of devotion is tinged by personal considerations which are of three different kinds according to the predominance of one of the three gunas (*sattva, rajas and thamas*). Primary devotion on the other hand is total surrender to God without any reference to the personal self.

Bhakti seems to have originated in the *Śvetāswara Upaniṣad*.

Later *Bhakti-Yoga* is extolled in various places in the *Bhāgavad-Gīta*. Sri Krishna, Arjuna's divine teacher, explains the importance of *Bhakti*.

“Neither by (know of) the Vedas, nor by austerities, nor by charity, nor by sacrifices can I be seen in this form in which you have beheld Me. Through unswerving devotion, however, I can be seen thus, O Arjuna, and be known in essence and even entered into, O tormentor of the foe”.³⁰

In the classical literature *Bhakti* is regarded as the easiest and common way to emancipation through intense devotion as love to one’s chosen deity or *Īśvara*. In *Bhakti-Yoga* the devotee is finally taken to the supreme state of *samādhi* where loving devotion to Lord is purposeless (*nirhetuka*). Sankara admitted *Bhakti* as the surest way leading to final liberation. Narada in his *Bhakti-Sūtra* described the nature of a true *Bhakta*. “The true *Bhakta* or devotee sees nothing but love, hears only about love, speaks only of love and thinks of love alone”.³¹ Speaking about devotion, Sri Krishna restates its importance. “By devotion one knows Me in reality, what I am and who I am, then having known Me in truth, he forthwith enters into me. Having found refuge in me, he reaches, by My grace, the eternal indestructible state (*mokṣa*)... Therefore, mentally surrendering all actions to Me, fix thy thoughts on Me, thou shalt surmount every difficulty by My

grace".³² "Fly to Me for shelter with all thy soul. O Bharatha, by My grace shalt thou gain supreme peace and everlasting abode".³³

1. *Jñāna-Yoga*

Jñāna-Yoga is the path of knowledge. The word '*Jñāna*' signifies 'knowledge' or 'insight'. It is '*Yoga* of Gnostic knowledge'. It is the realisation of man's identity with the Absolute through knowledge. It is a spiritual discipline based on discrimination between the real and the unreal. It is through this path that the individual becomes aware of the true nature of the Absolute Reality. *Jñāna-Yoga*, thus is wed in the sense of an intuitive philosophical search for the Absolute discernment (*viveka*) of the Absolute. Such a person is one who is intellectual and contemplative. He is a man of reason, and therefore disbelieves in dogmas and superstitions and forsake all worldly desires. Ultimately he meditates on *Brahman* who is Absolute Existence, Knowledge and Bliss.

Jñāna-Yoga involves two steps. At first, there is a total withdrawal from everything worldly followed by meditation on the real nature of the self. With discriminative knowledge, the soul

realises its union with the Infinite. He realises that *Brahman* alone is real and the world is unreal and also that the individual soul and *Brahman* are identical.

Thus *Jñāna-Yoga* involves deep study, knowledge and meditation on the sacred texts. In *Jñāna-Yoga* knowledge is used as a means of getting beyond worldly knowledge. Consequently the apparent distinction drawn between the knower and the known is found to be illusory. The *Bhagavad-Gīta* describes a *Jñāna-yogi* as one "who abandons all desires and acts free from longing without any senses of mineness or egotism, he attains to peace".³⁴

Jñāna-Yoga involves the following seven steps:

- 1) *Vivekā* - metaphysical 'discernment' between the real and the unreal, the eternal and the finite, the human personality and the Supra-personal Self;
- 2) *Varirāgya* - 'renunciation' of all worldly and heavenly objects;
- 3) *Tapas* - 'austerity' which is composed of the 'six treasures' (ṣaṭ-saṁpatti) which are:

- a) *Śāma* - tranquillity;
- b) *Dāma* - 'self restraint';
- c) *Uparati* - 'mind-control';
- d) *Titikṣā* - 'endurance';
- e) *Śamdhana* - 'contemplation';
- f) *Śradhā* - 'faith';
- g) *Mumkṣutva* - 'longing-for-emancipation';
- h) *Śrvaṇa* - 'listening' to the sacred love and the teachings of the guru;
- i) *Manana* - 'reflection' on what has been heard;
- j) *Nididhyāsana* - 'meditation' on the doctrines revealed by the teachers or the scriptures, ending in entasy (samadhi).

The same seven-fold path found expression later in San kara's Commentary on the Brahma-~~S~~ūtras.

The further description of the seven stages were seen in the *Vedānta-Siddhānta-Darsana* which describes seven stages of

knowledge of these the first stage of knowledge is designated as 'good will' (*subha-iccha*); the second is 'reflection' (*vicarna*); the third is 'subtlety of mind' (*tanu-mānasa*); the fourth is the 'attainment of lucidity' (*sattva-apatti*); the fifth is 'non-attachment' (*anāsakti*); the sixth is the disappearance of all objects (*pada-~~artha~~-abhavani*); the seventh is the entering into the fourth (i.e., the ultimate reality).

Jñāna-Yoga stands out unique in the history of the theory and practice of *Yoga* in India. It is a discipline to be observed for the realisation of God understood as identical with one's own self. God is not taken in the sense of an object of worship. God is understood as identical with one's own self. Hence *Jñāna-Yoga* is otherwise described as *Ātma-Upāsana*, the worship of God as oneself.

The term '*Jñāna*' is used in the *Bhagavad-Gīta* in a much wider sense. It signifies a number of ethical and intellectual virtues; "absence of conceit, pride, steadfastness, self-control, dispassion for sensual objects, renunciation, absence of egoism, knowledge of the transient nature of man's life, unflinching devotion to the Lord, love of solitude and love of scriptures".³⁵

In non-dual identity, consciousness marks the climax of mystic realisation. It represents the ultimate goal or the path of knowledge. The individual realises freedom and subdues all fear, anxiety, doubt and despair. The individual having realised the absolute lives a life of supreme indifference. The great Indian poet Raveendranath Tagore said "Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight".³⁶

2. *Karma-Yoga*

Karma-Yoga signifies the path of action. The word '*karma*' is derived from the root '*kr*' (to do) has been used in many senses namely action, 'work', 'deed', 'product', and 'effect'. The term *Karma-Yoga* has been translated as '*Yoga of unselfish action*'.

Karma-Yoga signifies the manner in which a man realises his divinity through work and duty. It is an ethical discipline perceived for the attainment of salvation. According to the doctrine of *Karma-Yoga*, the performance of ethical acts directly leads to self-realisation. In transcendental realisation is attained not by a meditative withdrawal from the world but by an active

participation in life. It prescribes the path to attain salvation through the performance of actions done in the spirit of detachment. It is the discipline of practising detachment while performing duty. In the *Bhagavad-Gīta Karma-Yoga* is extolled as superior to renunciation (*sannyāsa*).

The fundamental principles of *Karma-Yoga* are expressed in the following verses of the *Bhagavad-Gīta*. "Not by abstention from actions does a man enjoy actionlessness (*naiṣkarmya*), nor by renunciation alone does he approaches perfection".³⁷

"For, not even for a moment can anyone remain with out performing action. Every (being) is unwittingly made to act by the primary constituents (*guṇa*) born of the world-ground".³⁸

"This world is action-bound, save when this action (is intended) as sacrifice. With that purpose (in mind), O son-of-kunti, engage in actin devoid of attachment".³⁹

"Therefore always perform unattached the right (*kārya*) deed, for the man who performs action without attachment obtains the supreme".⁴⁰

The motive that actuates the *Karma-Yogi* is the 'Love of God', i.e., *Īśvarapriti*. The *Karma-Yogi* requires both 'devotion' and 'surrender' to God. Without a complete knowledge of the ultimate truth and love of god it is impossible to cultivate detachment from the fruits of action.

Another scripture which expounds *Karma-Yoga* is the *Yoga-vaśiṣṭha* of Vatmiki. It gives a detailed and positive affirmation of worldly existence than the *Gīta*. The *Yogi* is allowed fully to participate in the social affairs without being affected by his actions. A prominent view that it upholds is that of emancipation which is capable of attainment by a harmonious development of both Ultimate knowledge and action.

There are two types of action namely *Pravṛtti* and *Nivṛtti*. All those actions that bind us with the object is called pravritti. For instance pursuit of worldly pleasures, power, name and fame. Consequently it leads to attachment and bondage. On the contrary those actions which leads one to detachment from empirical self is called *nivṛtti*. Such actions are always religious and ethical. "Nivṛtti" is the theory of non-attachment, to be attached to

nothing while doing our work of life." Know that you are separated entirely from the world, but that you are in the world and that whatever you may be doing in it, you are not doing that for your own sake".⁴¹

A *Karma-Yogi* enjoys the worldly pleasures but remains unaffected by it; True happiness consists in killing selfishness. By performing such acts of self-negation one can realise freedom. It amounts to one's own self-purification. Finally we forget our finite self and realise Eternal Bliss.

Rāja-Yoga

The term '*Rāja-Yoga*' means '*Royal-Yoga*'. It consists in the restriction of the whirls of mind (*citta-vṛtti-nirodha*). It is concerned with the different psycho-mental states as the main source of suffering and bondage. The practice of *Rāja-Yoga* endeavours to achieve complete cessation of all the mental functions. The control of the psychic flux is a pre-requisite for the practice of *Rāja-Yoga*. Finally it leads to the realisation of the self. It recommends the methods of bodily postures (*Āsana*) and breath

control (*prāṇāyāma*) which are necessary for mental calmness, balance and equilibrium. It recommends two means for the elimination of mental flux namely 'practice' (*Abhyāsa*) and 'dispassion' (*Vairāgya*). 'Practice' is defined in the *Yoga-sūtra* as the effort of acquiring stability in the state of restriction which gains solid ground only by constant, unceasing, devoted application in the correct way. 'Dispassion', on the other hand, is the consciousness of mastery of someone who is free from the thirst after earthly, or, as is always stressed, 'heavenly' objects and pleasures.

The practice of *Rāja-Yoga* pre-supposes spiritual foundation. It recommends an ethico-religious training before undertaking the practice of bodily posture and breath control. The ethico-religious training recommended in *Rāja-Yoga* consists of two steps namely moral discipline (*yama*) and religious observances (*Niyama*). The moral discipline (*yama*) includes the practice of non-violence (*Ahiṃsa*), truthfulness (*satya*), non-stealing (*Asteya*) the control of sexual impulse (*Bramacharya*) and abstinence from greed

(*aparigraha*). On the other hand the observance of religious training (*Niyama*) include the practice of internal and external purity (*śauca*). Contentment (*Santoṣa*), endurance of hardships (*tapas*), devoted study of spiritually ennobling books (*swādhyāya*) and self-surrender to the divine (*Īśvarapraṇidhāna*).

Notes:

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31. Narada, *Bhakti-Sūtra*.
32. Sri Sankaracharya, *Bhagavad- Gīta* - Trans. by Mahadeva Sastri. Samata Books, 1961, XVIII. 55.
33. *Ibid*, XVIII.56.
34. *Ibid*, XIII.7-12.
35. *Ibid*, IV.41.
36. Rabindranath Tagore: *Gītanjali*, p: 68.
37. Radhakrishnan. S. *Bhagavad-Gīta* - London George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1961, III.4.
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39. *Ibid*, III. 9.
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SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S INTERPRETATION OF THE FOUR YOGAS

A.K. Vijayalakshmi “Swami Vivekananda's approach to the ideal of karma-yoga - a critical study ” Thesis. Department of Philosophy , University of Calicut, 2000

CHAPTER III

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S INTERPRETATION OF THE FOUR *YOGAS*

Swami Vivekananda stands out unique and unparalleled in the history of Indian thought and culture. He was a man who had no less an aim than the total regeneration of man in all walks of life. His concern for man is so great that it remained the central theme of his thought and action. He was a man with a vision and a definite programme of action. His message was not only meant for the people of India but for the whole human race. He had travelled the length and breadth of India and in course of his pilgrimage he ".... obtained first hand experience of the glory and greatness that was India in the past, saw with his own eyes the degrading conditions of India sunk in ignorance, poverty and disease, and chalked out a programme of regenerating, uplifting and improving the condition of the masses for glorious future of India"¹.

After completing his successful journey in the west he had returned to India. He established himself in the Indian soil and was attracted towards the Monastic order which he had set up after his

master, Sri Ramakrishna with the main aim of what he had preached ".....by making the monks devote themselves to an active life of service for the masses and thus to make the monastic organisation a potent instrument for social and national regeneration, by spreading education among the illiterate, helping them fight against poverty and disease, removing the social evils and inequalities and raising them to a higher level of morality".²

Swami Vivekananda was greatly influenced by the ancient Indian Philosophy and Religion. He reminded *Vedāntic* at the core. He had interpreted *Advaita Vedānta* in his own way with the main aim of making *Vedānta* practical through and through. The three main parts of *Vedānta* namely *Dvaita*, *Viśiṣṭādvaita* and *Advaita*, he considered as the different stages in the spiritual growth of man. At the outset he recognized God as totally distinct from him. In the second stage with the realization that he is non-different from God and in the final stage he recognized the non-duality between Man and God-the central theme of *Advaita*. The philosophy of *Vedānta* according to him has a universal appeal for it formed the basis of all the major Religions of the world.

From the experiences gained there from his extensive tours and religious discourses he came to the realization that man is also part of God. He preached and practiced Vedantic Religion in the true sense of the term. He was modern in outlook with humanistic and spiritual approach to the problem of religion. So long as one does not perceive God in others one cannot love others. The communion with God according to him found its fullest expression in the service of humanity. It was correctly observed by Jawaharlal Nehru "Rooted in the past and full of pride in India's heritage, Vivekananda was yet modern in his approach to life's problems and was a kind of bridge between the past of India and her present."³

In one of his letters from America, Swami Vivekananda wrote "No religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism, and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism"⁴. Hence his main attempt was to humanise the old religion of Hinduism. He called his religion as Universal Religion which is nothing but the quintessence of all the major religions of the world. Remaining a *Vedāntin* in the field of Religion he preached and

practiced *Advaita*. To him all religions are nothing but different roads leading to the same goal. Religion understood in the correct sense consists in doing good to others. "The secret of religion lies not in theories but in practice. To be good and to do good-that is the whole of religion"⁵. True religion is the realization of divinity inherent in man. Service to man is the service to God.

Swami Vivekananda exhorts us to worship eliminate 'therefore' the living God, for every being bears the stamp of God. His religion is the Universal Religion of man. He believed in the unity of all religions. Love, Respect and Mutual tolerance are the cardinal aspects of his religion. Realization can not be attained by serving an abstract God but by loving Service to Humanity. By loving every man as one's own self calls for Universal self-hood. Our motto is Universal self-hood and not universal brother-hood. This idea formed the central theme of his Universal religion.

The primary question is how can the soul be freed from *Samsara*, the cycle of births and deaths. According to Vivekananda the only way for obtaining soul's freedom is by renunciation of desires and renunciation is made possible only through *Yoga*. What is required is to have complete control over body, mind and the

senses. Swami Vivekananda preached and practised four *Yogas* for the realization of soul's freedom. According to him "Religion is the greatest motive power for realising that infinite energy which is the birth right and nature of every man."⁶

Swami Vivekananda considered *Yoga* in the most comprehensive sense which includes philosophical, religious spiritual and moral endeavours. *Yoga* hence is a spiritual discipline or *Sādhana* prescribed for the realization of the self. This is made possible by attaining complete control over one's passions and desires. According to him the goal of religion as well of human life is nothing but the realization of the divinity inherent in man or what amounts to the re-union with God. "Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man"⁷.

Yoga is thus the path which leads to ultimate self-realization. There are many expressions of *Yogic* paths elaborately described in the different systems of Indian Thought and Philosophy. As against the usual three *Yogas* mentioned in the *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad-Gīta* and *Pātañjali Yoga-sūtra* namely *Jñāna-Yoga*, *Karma-Yoga* and *Bhakti-Yoga*, Swami Vivekananda formulated a fourth one namely *Rāja-Yoga*. These different *Yogas* are suggested to suit the different

temperaments of men. According to Swami Vivekananda each one of these four *Yogas* are considered as an independent means for spiritual realization. In every *Yoga* there are various steps to be adhered to which helps the *Sādhak* to move towards self-realization through stages. The seeker after perfection passing through these different stages proceeds to the control of the mind and thereby to the ultimate goal. Hence the object of *Yoga* is that "the real higher self may shine forth, to lessen the frittering away of energies on the lower plane of existence, so that the soul may manifest itself on the higher ones".⁸

Vivekananda recommends four *Yogas*, namely *Karma-Yoga*, *Jñāna-Yoga*, *Bhakti-Yoga* and *Rāja-Yoga* for spiritual self-realization. *Karma-Yoga* signifies the realisation of Divinity through the performance of one's own duties. *Bhakti-Yoga* is the realisation of Divinity through devotion and love of a personal God. *Rāja-Yoga* aims at the realisation through the control of the mind and *Jñāna-Yoga* through knowledge. All these four *Yogas* are but different roads leading to the same goal.

I. BHAKTI-YOGA

Generally speaking, *Yoga* has to do only with the meditative aspect of religion. As such *Bhakti-Yoga* is taken to mean the path of devotion to God for salvation or rather "the path of systematised devotion for attainment of union with the Absolute"⁹. It is considered as the easiest and surest path to spiritual self-realisation. It requires love of God to attain supreme identity. It is Love in Divine Union, which leads to this identity. So according to Vivekananda "*Bhakti-Yoga* is real, genuine search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing and ending in Love"¹⁰. The term "*Bhakti*" in the words of Narada is intense love to God, and man having *Bhakti* loves all and never hate anyone.

In *Bhakti -Yoga* there are two stages; viz. the preparatory (*Gauni*) and the supreme (*Pāra*).

a) *Gauni* or Preparatory Stage

This is a stepping stone to the supreme stage of *Bhakti*. In this stage man require the help of many mythological aids. Being a preparatory stage it is necessary to observe certain disciplines for

self-purification. Swami Vivekananda is full agreement with the views of theistic *Dvaita* of Ramanuja which prescribe certain preliminary conditions to be observed by a person adopting *Bhakti-Yoga*. Ramanuja in his commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtras* said that the attaining of this stage come through discrimination, controlling the passion, practice and excessive joy. Thus in this stage Vivekanada mentions seven steps.

i) Viveka or Discrimination

The first stage being a purificatory stage it is necessary to cleanse the body and mind. For it was believed that God inhabits in the human body if only purification of the body and purity of food were strictly adhered to. It was considered as a necessary pre-condition in the preparatory stage of *Bhakti*. *Viveka* or discrimination means the ability to discriminate pure food from the impure. Food or *Āhara* is contaminated by impurities such as dirt, hair etc or by its own nature as in the case of garlic. Ramanuja quotes from *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* "When the food is pure, the *Sattva*, element gets purified,⁴ and the memory becomes unwearing"¹¹. According^{to} Saṅkhyā Philosophy, *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Thamas* are the constitutes of the human form and the *Sattvik*

material is believed to be absolutely necessary for spiritual development. The food we take largely determines our mental constitution too. The more purer the food we take, the better the development of *Sattva śuddhi*, the purity of our being. But Vivekananda to a great extent differ from the views of Ramanuja concerning the purity of food.

ii) *Vimoka* or Freedom from Desire

It means freedom from desires except the one for God. It involves the prevention and control of sense organs from going towards its natural objects. A *Bhakta* is required to cultivate renunciation and non-attachment from the disturbing conditions of sense objects.

iii) *Abhyāsa* or practice

It includes the performance of religious practices. It is the effort to make the mind and the sense to be directed towards Godward instead of being engaged in worldly thoughts and pursuits. It recommends to sing and hear devotional songs in praise of God or to take part in worship and prayers. It is clearly mentioned in the complete works of Vivekananda that prayer and praise are the first

means to God. Repeating the names of God has wonderful powers. Mantras or Sacred Texts or even names of God can be chosen for repeated recitation- concentrating one's attention on a personal God. After prayer and praise comes meditation and reflection on God.

iv) *Kriya* or Sacrificial work

It means discharge of sacrificial duties. It involves the five great sacrifices (*Panchamaha yajna*). They include discharge of man's duties to the Gods by worshipping them, to sages by study of scriptures, to the manes by offering *Tarpana* or prayer for their welfare, to man by works of service and offering of food, to lower creatures by practice of kindness towards them.

v) *Kalyāṇa* or Purity

It lays the basic foundation for *Bhakti*. Mere external purity alone is not enough. Internal purity too is a necessary pre-requisite for *Bhakti*. The qualities essential for internal purity are *Satya* (truthfulness), *Ārjava* (sincerity), *Daya* (doing good to others without any self-gain), *Ahimsa* (non-injury by thought, word or

deed), *Anabhidhya* (not coveting others goods), not thinking vain thoughts and not brooding over injuries received from another.

vi) *Anavasda* or Strength

This is another virtue that help the development of *Bhakti*. 'This *Atman* is not attained by the weak' says *Śruti*. It is a virtue meant for those who are mentally and physically strong. So a *Bhakta* must be strong and healthy both in mind and body. He must also be a cheerful person for cheerfulness is an index of perservance.

vii) *Anuddharṣha* or Avoiding Excessive Mirth

Avoidance of excessive merriment and sadness is another requirement of *Bhakti*. Excessive mirth makes one unfit for serious thought. It also makes man mentally weak. Realisation is possible only by those whose mind is steady, peaceful and retains perfect equilibrium through and through. The above said seven stages prepares the ground for the love of God. Vivekananda stresses the view that spiritual knowledge has to be imparted through a *Guru* or spiritual teacher. *Guru* is one who has undergone all the disciplines of *Yoga*. A man without a proper *Guru* always remains

in the dark. It is through the *Guru* that a devotee receives knowledge and thereby to self realization. For very often books are inadequate media to quicken the spiritual growth. The spiritual Teacher should remain sincere, sinless and pure in heart. The teacher who had undergone the moral and spiritual disciplines qualifies himself for *Brahma-Jñāna*. The *Guru* transmits this *Jñāna* to his trusted disciples who had approached him with respect, devotion and spirit of service to acquire the Supreme *Jñāna*.

(b) *Pāra-Bhakti* or Supreme Devotion

After passing through preparatory *Bhakti* (*Gāunī*), one steps into the next stage of *Pāra-Bhakti* or supreme devotion. It no longer requires any external aids. "Idols or temples or churches or books are only the supports, the helps, of his spiritual childhood; but on and on the progress"¹². "The perfected *bhakta* no more goes to see God in temples and churches, he knows no place where he will not find him. He finds Him outside the temple as well as in the temple..... because he has Him already seated in his own heart as one almighty, in extinguishable light of love, which is ever shining

and eternally present"¹³. God is thus the all-pervasive and the inner indwelling essence of all that exists.

In this supreme state of devotion the devotee transcends religions, dogmas and scriptures. There is nothing that binds him because all these are loosened by his love of God. His soul becomes detached and free. "Nothing remains to bind him or fetter his freedom. Divine grace loosens the binding bolts of soul, and it becomes free"¹⁴. The *Bhakta* has to undergo certain preliminary preparations to gratify himself for the practice of *Pāra-Bhakt*. These preparations are primarily meant for purification of the soul. It involves Renunciation, Universal Love and Self-Surrender. Of these renunciation plays an important role in the practice of all forms of *Yogas*.

Renunciation is understood as both natural and non-violent. It no longer belittle the importance of feelings and passions but are subordinated to the supreme love of God. Love for finite worldly objects are transitory and ephemeral. This knowledge comes to one who has developed sincere devotion to God. One experience ineffable joys in the love of God. The lower ie, emotional love has to be raised to higher planes.

"*Bhakti Yoga* is the science of higher love. It shows us how to direct it; it shows how to control it, how to manage it, how it give it a new aim, as it were, and from it obtain the highest and most glorious results, that is how it lead to spiritual blessedness. *Bhakti-Yoga* does not say 'give up'; it only says, 'Love, Love is the Highest'. And everything low naturally falls from him, the object of whose love is the Highest."¹⁵ When one loves the higher values of life renunciation of sensual pleasures becomes quite natural. The infinite love of God takes the place of the love for worldly objects. The devotee's attachment with God is Renunciation. "*Bhakti* fills his heart with divine waters of the ocean of love, which is God Himself; there is no place there, for little loves. That it to say, the Bhakta's renunciation is that *Vairāgya* or non-attachment for all things that are not God, which results from *anurāga* or great attachment to God."¹⁶

For such a devotee everything including his life belongs to God. To him God is the manifestation of Himself in everything. The more he develops such love for God, the more universal will be his love. To him, all are creation of one and the same God. "knowing

that Hari, the Lord is in every being, the wise have thus to manifest unswerving love towards all beings."¹⁷

A devotee completely surrenders himself to God. He gives everything to God. His love of God is limitless, boundless and absolute. He is unaffected by Heat or cold, love or hatred, pleasure or pain. He has no earthly bondage. His love becomes all absorbing. He feels completely free and dedicates himself for the service of God. The love towards God is of five types. It is calm, peaceful and gentle (*Śānta-Bhakti*). The devotee's love is somewhat relative when he loves God as Master. Such *Bhakti* as a servant is known as *Dāsya Bhakti* (ie, servant ship). It comes when a man thinks he is the servant of God. This can very well be characterised as the attachment of a faithful servant to his master. The third type of love is in the form of friendship or *Sakhya* where in God is considered as one's friend to whom one can share all his feelings. God is considered as co-equal with him. The fourth form of *Bhakti* is known as *Vātsalya*, loving God as child. It is a discipline which enables one to detach all ideas of power from the concept of God. The idea of loving God as a child is the prime concern of those religious sects which believe in the incarnation of God (*Avathāra*).

The highest stage of love of God is that of *Madhura* or sweet *Bhakti* where God is loved as beloved, the highest and most strongest of all other representations. It is the strongest form of Love known to man "What love shakes the whole nature of man, what love runs through every atom of his being, makes him mad, makes him forget his own nature, transforms him, makes him either a God or a demon the love between man and women".¹⁸ God is the only goal of his love. Being in live with God, the *Bhakta* cannot attend to anything else. "Where Rama is there is no room for any desire, like light and darkness they are never together."¹⁹

Finally, the devotee realises union with God. The devotee feels oneness with God. In the religion of love dualism persists very often because the devotee wants to remain separate in order to have that infinite joy and to enjoy to beautiful vision of God. In this highest stage of *Bhakti*, the devotee realises everlasting freedom and eternal Bliss. In the ultimate stage of love of God, the lover and the Beloved becomes one; and *Bhakti* no longer remains dualistic but leads to *Advaitism*. He experience everything as unreal and God alone as real. He is completely absorbed in God "when love to God is revealed and is all this world appears like a drop".²⁰

Bhakti is not blind love of God. *Bhakti* requires *Jñāna*. Vivekananda holds the view that without knowledge of *Brahman* real *Bhakti* is not possible. *Bhakti* is not emotion but it is the true and ultimate knowledge of Reality. *Bhakti* becomes complete only so long as it is tempered by *Jnana*.

(II) JÑĀNA-YOGA

It is the path of wisdom or knowledge. It is the realization of man's identity with the Absolute through knowledge. As such *Jñāna Yoga* is a spiritual discipline culminating in the knowledge of and union with *Brahman*. It is a spiritual discipline of a highest order which is of a Philosophical nature. It is mainly based on discriminative knowledge. It makes a discrimination between the real and the unreal and the final renouncing of the illusory world of appearance.

Jñāna-Yoga is considered as one of the most difficult paths prescribed for the realization of the Absolute for "It is really very difficult to live truly a life of Philosophy"²¹. It is a method meant for a select few who are mentally brave having full control over body, mind and the senses. *Jñāna-Yoga* is capable of destroying the

cobwebs of ignorance and thereby reveals the real nature of the Absolute. "It is verily through the touch of ignorance that thou who art the supreme self findest thyself under the bondage of non-self where along proceed the rounds of births and deaths. The fire of knowledge, kindled by the discrimination between these two burns up and the effects of ignorance together with their roots."²² Such a person alone is fit to receive the knowledge of the Absolute. He is above cults, dogmas, superstition and the like. He had completely renounced the world of change and mutation. With his mind always fixed on the Absolute he meditates on *Brahman* who is Absolute Existence (*sat*) Knowledge (*chit*) and Bliss (*Ānanda*).

Jñāna - Yoga suggests a two-fold path for the realization of the ultimate. The first stage is renunciation i.e. total withdrawal of the mind from everything worldly. The second stage is of meditation wherein one meditates on the real nature of the self. With discriminative knowledge the soul realises its non-difference from the Absolute. He realizes that *Brahman* alone is real and that the world is unreal and finally culminating in the knowledge of the identity between the individual soul and the Absolute. As Vivekananda observed." The true rationalist must go on and

fearlessly follow his reason to its farthest limit. When we begin to deny, all must go until we reach what can not be thrown away or denied, which is the real"²³. Brahman is all that there is. We are neither the body nor the self separated. We are self Absolute and infinite. According to Vivekananda, " there is no beliefs, no scared words, no heaven, no hell, no creed, no church, there is only *Atman*"²⁴.

The realization of the true nature of man is the result of the cultivation of renunciation. It is conceived as the first pre-requisite for the practice of *Jñāna-Yoga*. Renunciation of desires enables one to concentrate on *Brahman*. Renunciation in the negative sense implies the getting ride of all worldly desires. In the positive sense it is the continuous longing of the mind to know Reality. The Bhagavad Gita had described a *jnana-yogi* as one " who abandons all desires and acts free from longing without any senses of mineness or egotism, he attains to peace"²⁵. Through perfect knowledge all ignorance disappears and the individual realizes his identity with the whole of God's creation.

The practice of renunciation is a difficult task because the mind very often runs after the moving senses. It carries away the

capacity of the mind to understand, just as a wind carries away a ship on the water. But by constant practice one succeeds in controlling the senses and the mind. By continuous meditation one realizes that he is himself *Brahman* and that everything else in the world is but a manifestation of *Brahman*. "All the universe was in *Brahman* and it was, as it were, projected out of him, and has been moving on, to go back to the source from which it was projected... The same is the case with soul projected from *Brahman*, it passed through all sorts of vegetable and animal forms, and at last it is in man, and man is the nearest approach to *Brahman*. To get back to *Brahman* from which we have been projected is the great struggle of life".²⁶

A fourfold discipline has been laid down for the seeker along with the practice of renunciation of worldly desires. The seeker must practice restraint and cultivates an attitude of indifference to worldly objects. He must also develop a rational understanding that *Brahman* alone is real and the world unreal (*Brahma Satyam Jagatmithya*). Further there must be on the part of the seeker a sincere longing for salvation. He must have the firm conviction that "I am not the individual soul, but supreme *Brahman*. Eliminating,

thus, all that is not self, do away with the superimposition which has come through the momentum of desires:"²⁷

Vivekandanda's conception of salvation and *Jñāna Yoga* as a spiritual discipline resembles the traditional treatment of it is found in the *Advaita-Vedanta* and *Bhagavad-Gīta*. He was also of the view that with the dawn of perfect knowledge ignorance disappears and the identity between the individual self and the universal self becomes as clear as a crystal.

Unlike Sri Aurobindo, Tagore and Gandhi Swami Vivekanada accepts *Māyavāda* (World as illusion) without any change. The path suggested to be followed is strenuous and requires severe discipline on the part of the individual. It is primarily the individual's own concern to realize freedom, renunciation and detachment. It can be practised only by those who are meditative with intense longing for salvation.

Salvation according to Swami Vivekanada is a state of eternal identification with the Absolute. It is the establishing of oneness of the soul with God. The soul first dissociates itself from body, mind and life and gets united with Pure Consciousness. Salvation means

stoppage of the cycle of births and deaths forever. The soul's union with *Brahman* is considered as the highest aim of *Yoga*. Vivekananda in full agreement with *Advaita-Vedānta* says that in “*Yogic* consciousness Idols, temples, Gods, deities, mind, life, body and cosmos disappear as illusions. There is no trace of them in the experience of the mystic vision. All disappear into nothingness”.²⁸ In the highest stage of union with God everything appears to be the body of God's being.

The union of the individual soul with the absolute through discriminative knowledge serves a practical purpose. Real happiness according to Swami Vivekananda is the happiness of the spirit and not of the senses. With the realisation of this unity, man can no longer remain selfish and narrow minded which forms the root cause of all miseries in the world. In this context Swami Vivekananda said “without the knowledge of the spirit, all material knowledge is only adding fuel to fire, only giving into the hands of selfish man one more instrument to take what belong to others, to live upon the life of others, instead of giving up his life for them”.²⁹ For spiritual unification Swami Vivekananda, is the very goal and purpose of human life.

III) RĀJA-YOGA

Rāja-Yoga is the path of psychic control. It is the realization of Divinity through the control of the mind. It is a science which gives systematic method for controlling one's inner nature resulting in the control of the external nature as well. It consists of physical and mental disciplines leading to concentration and *Samādhi*.

Rāja-Yoga is considered as the 'Master-Yoga' or *Sūtras* of *Pātañjali*. The king all *yogas* find its fullest expressions in the provisions. It is the noblest way for the realization of the Reality. It is mainly aimed at unity. It is a means of mastering one's internal nature and thereby he becomes the master of the whole universe.

According to Swami Vivekananda *Rāja-Yoga* is a science with a systematic method for reaching truth. *Rāja-Yoga* restraint the activities of the mind by taking various forms (*Chitta-Vritti-Nirodha*). The main purpose is to stop the activities of the mind and to make the mind completely free from bondage. When the faculty of the mind is properly guided the mind reveals the real nature of reality." When the body is sufficiently controlled, we can attempt the manipulation of the mind. By manipulating the mind

we shall be able to bring it under our control, make it work as we like, and compel it to concentrate its powers as we desire"³⁰. The observance of this *Yoga* necessitates the practising of certain preparatory steps for the control of the mind. One should take extreme care about food. One is permitted to take only that food which can keep his mind pure. Extra care must be taken in the discipline regarding sleep. One should uphold the purity of both mind and body which are necessary for a person who practice this *Yoga* and finally this *Yoga* should be practised regularly without any break.

Along with the observance of these preliminary conditions, one is required to follow the eight-fold path of *Rāja-Yoga*. They are: *Yama, Niyama, Āsana, Prāṇayāma, Pratyāhara, Dharma, Dhṛyana* and *Samādhi*.

i) Yama

It is the first limb of Pātañjali's *Rāja-Yoga*, the literary meaning is 'abstentions', and self-control. It is an external aid for the purification of conduct. It is comprised of five other principles of conduct namely non-injury, truth, non-stealing, celibacy and

non-possession. These five virtues of Hindu ethics purify the conduct of a Yogi through its regular practice. Ahimsa or non-injury is the highest virtue (*Ahimsa Paramōdharma*). It is the law of our species. Truthfulness in thought, word and deed brings about a moral transformation. *Asteya* is abstention from talking other's property. *Brahmaçarya* is the discipline of sexual purity. And the last is *Aparigraha* abstention from receiving gifts from others.

ii. Niyama

Niyama the second limb of *Raja-Yoga* consists of those disciplines for the cultivation of good habits. It comprises of five positive virtues. They are: purity (*śauca*) contentment (*santoṣa*), austerity (*tapas*), study (*Swādhaya*) and devotion to God (*Īsvara-Pranidhāna*). Purification of body implies bodily cleanliness and internal purification consists in acquiring the finer sentiments of life namely Love, brotherhood, kindness etc contentment gives peace of mind which is an essential element in the practice of *Yoga*. Penance or *Tapas* consists in the practice of austerity namely forbearance and fasting. By making austere vows one disciplines himself and surrenders himself to God. By the regular practice of those

disciplines one realizes his *Sattvic* self. Both *Yama* and *Niyama* prepare a man to take the higher steps of *Yoga*.

iii. Āsana

One of the eight limbs of *Rāja-Yoga*, *Āsana* meant 'posture'. It is mainly concerned with bodily postures which include a series of physical exercises. Through the practice of *Āsana* a person is able to control all his physical organs. It is better to learn these *Āsanas* with the help of a qualified Teacher. The main aim of practising *Āsana* is to make the body free from diseases. It also increases the power of the mind.

The practice of *Āsanas* is similar to the practice of *Haṭha-Yoga* which is also purely dealing with physical exercises. It enables to strengthen our body and to keep it healthy. It is also mentioned that the role of *Āsana* in *Rāja-Yoga* is of supreme importance for it keeps the body healthy.

iv. Prāṇāyama

It is the control of breath. It is the technique of regulating and restraining the function of breathing which helps to bring the mind

under control. This improves the functioning of heart, lungs and blood circulation.

Vivekananda upholds the importance of *Prāṇāyāma* in his commentary on *Śvetāswara-Upaniṣad* "the mind whose dross has been cleared away by *prāṇāyāma*, become fixed in *Brahman*".³¹

Vivekananda explains the technique of *Prāṇāyāma* as follows:

"stopping the right nostril with the thumb, through the left nostril fill in air, according to capacity, then without any interval, throw the air out through the right nostril with the thumb, through the left nostril fill in air ^{and throw} out through the right nostril, closing the left one. Again inhaling through the right nostril eject through the left, according to capacity, practising this three or four times a day, before dawn, during mid day in the evening, and at mid night. In fifteen days or month the purity of the nerves is attained then begins *Prāṇāyāma*"³².

Prāṇāyāma had three aspects namely inhalation, retention and exhalation. This is an exercise for health. Breathing causes disturbance in the concentration of the mind. For continued meditation it is necessary to suspend breathing. By regular practice of this discipline involved in *Prāṇāyāma* a *Yogi* is able to suspend

his breath for a long time and there by prolong the state of concentration of the mind.

Breath is the manifestation of *Prāṇa* which is the vital force in all living beings. Vivekananda was of the view that "He who controlled the *Prāṇa* has controlled his own mind, and all the minds that exist"³³.

With the constant practice of the technique of rhythmical breathing the *Yogi* is capable of bringing the mind and body under his will and command. *Prāṇāyāma* also has the power to rouse the energy of action stored in the *Mūlādhāra* (situated in the sairal plexus), known as *Kuṇḍalini*. When *Kuṇḍalini* is awakened due to the practice of the technique of *Prāṇāyāma* it goes higher and higher and finally reaches the brain. The further advance of this power in the different layers of the mind, the *Yogi* attains wonderful powers. The rousing of the vital energy, namely *Kuṇḍalini* is the one and only way of attaining Divine Wisdom or Super Conscious Perception and the consequent realization of the spirit.

v. Pratyāhāra

It is the withdrawal of the senses from their objects. Literally it means 'gathering towards oneself'.

In *Pratyāhāra* the *Yogi* withdraws his senses and attains control over his mind. Withdrawal of the senses from its natural objects helps the mind to remain free from disturbances caused by the external sense organs. It is only by regular practice that an individual can gain control over the senses so that the mind becomes calm and remain under the complete control of the *Yogi*.

The above mentioned five disciplines are the external aids to the practice of *Yoga* and are called *Bahiraṅga-Sādhana*-the remote aid to spiritual practices. It is comprised of daily and occasional actions. (*nitya* and *naimittika-karmas*). The last three are internal aids to the practice of the technique of *Yoga*. (*Antaraṅga Sādhana*)-proximate aid to liberation.

vi. *Dhāraṇa*

Dhāraṇa meant 'single mindedness'. It is the concentration of the mind (*citta*), on object with fixed attention. Vivekanada defined *Dhāraṇa* thus: "When *citta*, or mind-stuff is confined and limited to a certain place it is *Dhāraṇa*."³⁴ One has to practice this technique

regularly and constantly. The steady practice of this stage forces the mind to feel the presence of certain parts of the body excluding the rest. It is a step towards concentration. It prepares the individual for taking up higher stages of *Yoga*.

vii. Dhyāna

Dhyāna is the stage of meditation in which the mind flows in an unbroken current towards a particular object. Meditation begins with gross objects and advances slowly to higher and higher planes till it attains the formless. It is a state of steadfast meditation on an object without any external disturbance. According to Vivekananda "It is only to the soul that has attained to this contemplative state that the world really becomes beautiful... The manifold changes of nature are one panorama of beauty and sublimity."³⁵ The *yogi* with the mind under his complete control has attained the goal of *Yoga*.

viii. Samādhi

The ultimate stage in the technique of *Yoga* is *Samādhi*. '*Samādhi*' mean 'concentration'. It is also a deep spiritual meditation into the object of meditation. It signifies a super conscious state in which there is complete absorption of the intellect

into the object. In this stage the *Yogi* goes beyond the state of self-consciousness, and the mind gets identified with the object. The mind takes the form of the object and completely lost in it. The object of meditation is there. The mind and all other thought process ceases to function. C.D. Sharma was of the view that "..... in conscious concentration, the mind is fixed on the object of meditation alone and modification arises only in respect of this object of meditation, but in supra-conscious concentration, even this modification ceases".³⁶ In *Samādhi*, the mind rises above self-consciousness. It is a state beyond verbal expression and intellectual comprehension. According to Swami Vivekananda "..... at that state all sorrows cease, all miseries vanish, the seeds of action will be burnt, and the soul will be free forever".³⁷

Samādhi has four aspects namely *Vitaraṇa*, *Vicara*, *Ānanda* and *Asmita*-which signifies *Samādhi* with knowledge of objects. (*Samprāñnata*). Where as in *asamprāñnata Samādhi* there is no knowledge of objects. The highest state of *Samādhi* goes beyond egoism and characterised by super consciousness- the state in which one enjoys perfect freedom in the city of God.

IV. KARMA-YOGA

'*Karma*' signifies 'action' or 'deed', *Karma-Yoga* is the path of action leading to the realization of the identity between the individual soul and the Absolute self. It is the realization of the Divinity inherent in man through action or deed. It is an ethical discipline pursued for the attainment of salvation. It implies that the performance of ethical acts directly leads to the ultimate goal of human life namely self- realization.

Karma-Yoga is a discipline prescribed mainly for the householder (*grahastha*). They can attain salvation, through the performance of deeds in a spirit of detachment. Vivekananda said, "If you want to be a house-holder hold your life a sacrifice for the welfare of others, and if you choose the life of renunciation, do not even look at beauty, money and power".³⁸

Generally actions are of the nature of *Pravṛtti* and *Nivṛtti*. All action done in a spirit of attachment is *Pravṛtti*. It is a path of active involvement in the affairs of the world. Where as *Nivṛtti* is the path of turning away from the world of ordinary activity. Such actions are ethical and religious and hence lead to liberation.

Karma-Yoga is the doctrine of practising detachment while in action. A *Karma-Yogi* engage in the performance of deeds but remains unaffected by it. True happiness consists in the total killing of selfishness. The performance of acts of self-negation amount to one's own purification. For self-purification through self-discipline is necessary for attaining the ultimate goal of life.

A *Karma-Yogi* is one who is disciplined, calm and has control over mind, body and senses but remains ever active, "A man must be active in order to pass through an activity to reflect silence. Inactivity should be avoided by all means. Resist all evils, mental and physical and when you have succeeded in resisting, then will calmness come".³⁹

Vivekananda's concept of *Karma-Yoga* is based on the teaching of *Bhagavad-Gīta*. *Gīta* teaches the ideal of ceaseless performance of action in the spirit of detachment. The path of disinterested action, righteous pursuit of duties and dedication of the fruits of action to God are the central theme of *Gīta*. Swami Vivekananda followed the *Gīta* ideals of disinterested service to mankind. When duty is performed for the sake of duty, we follow the path of *Karma-Yoga*.

According to Swami Vivekananda *Karma-Yoga* is a system of ethics and religion primarily intended to attain soul's freedom through the unselfish performance of ethical action. Swami Vivekananda is of the view that those who work without selfish motives attain the highest. Man has got the right only to work and not the fruits thereof. Man cannot command the result of his action for it is not within his control. Man is only capable of making his actions perfect. He is not recommending a life of asceticism but said that man can attain the ultimate goal of life by selfless work.

There is a vital difference between the *Gīta* Ideal of *Karma-Yoga* and that of Swami Vivekananda. Basically *Gīta* is a theistic system. God is conceived as the Highest Reality. God engages Himself in all the cosmic activities and men are mere instruments for serving the purpose of God. Where as Vivekananda being an absolutist consider, Supreme Reality as impersonal, transcendental and eternal. *Karma-Yoga* does not require the support of God. According to Swami Vivekananda a *Karma-Yogi* can be a theist or an atheist. Even a man who is a non-believer in God can by performance of ethical deeds in the spirit of detachment can secure

soul's freedom. He can realize salvation. The *Advaita* philosophy preached and practised by Vivekananda does not depend on God.

According to Swami Vivekananda man is the Architect of his own destiny. If an individual realizes salvation it is the fruit of his own effort and therefore need not be attributed to the will of God.

NOTES

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KARMA- YOGA IN BHAGAVAD-GITA

A.K. Vijayalakshmi “Swami Vivekananda's approach to the ideal of karma-yoga - a critical study ” Thesis. Department of Philosophy , University of Calicut, 2000

CHAPTER IV

KARMA-YOGA IN BHAGAVAD-GĪTĀ

Srimad Bhagavad-GĪtā or 'The Song Celestial' occupies a unique place in the religious literature of India. It forms part of the Great Sanskrit Epic *Mahābhārata*. The *GĪtā* with its 18 chapters and 700 verses, occupies the *Bhīṣma Parvan* of the great Epic. The relation of *Bhagavad- GĪtā* to *Mahābhārata* is co-equal with that of *Upaniṣads* to *Vedas*. *Bhagavad-GĪtā* is believed to be the quintessence of the whole of Vedic teaching. Sri. Sankaracharya in his commentary on the *Bhagavad-GĪtā* had brought out the same idea that *GĪtā-Śāstra* is an epitome of the essentials of the whole Vedic teaching.

Bhagavad-GĪtā has been described by its composer Vyāsa as the *Upaniṣad* dealing with *Yoga-Śāstra* and also as the Science of the Absolute or *Brahma-Vidya*, for it deals both with ethics and metaphysics. Thus it is a Science of Reality and the Art of Union with Reality. The *GĪtā* is understood to be the '*Upaniṣad* of the *Upaniṣads*', where in Sri Krishna had drawn the milk of the *Upaniṣads* which were later given in the form of the *GĪtā*, meant for the welfare of the humanity. The following popular verse from *Vaiṣṇavīyatāntrasāra* had

brought out the same point in which the *Upaniṣads* were compared to the cows, Sri Krishna as the milker, Arjuna as the calf, and the *Gīta* as the milk.

‘Sarvopaniṣad gāvo dodgha gopālanandanah

Parthā Vatsah Sudhīr bhokta dugdham *Gītamṛtam* mahat’

The *Bhagavad Gīta* stands for the teaching of Lord Krishna to Arjuna. The setting for the teaching of this holy treatise is the battlefield of *kurukṣetra* also known as *Dharmakṣetra*, in which the two forces of *Dharma* and *Adharma* were fighting against each other. At the very outset we find Arjuna had been worried at the thought that he had to fight against his own people. Arjuna said,

“Seeing these kinsmen, O Krishna, arrayed and desirous to fight, my limbs droop down, my mouth is dried up. A tremor comes on my body and my hairs stand on end”.¹

Arjuna refused to fight and said that he would liked to be killed by his enemies rather than killing them. Sri Krishna, who happened to be the chariator of Arjuna advises him to fight for it is the duty of a *kṣatriya* to fight when occasion demands it.

“Having regard to thine own duty also, thou oughtst not to waver. For to a *kṣatriya*, there is nothing more whole-some than a lawful battle”.²

In the battlefield of *kurushetra* Arjuna experienced intense agony and had lost the sense of discrimination (*Viveka*) by irrational impulses. It was nothing but his attachment to his own people that made him blind to discharge his duties as a *kṣatriya*. Arjuna overwhelmed with grief and in utter helplessness^{ness} seeks instruction from the Lord Arjuna said,

“My heart contaminated by the taint of helplessness, my mind confounded about *Dharma*, I ask thee: Tell me what is absolutely good. I am thy pupil: Instruct me, who have sought thy grace”.³

The central teaching of the *Gīta* is mainly intended to inspire Arjuna to action. As stated earlier the *Bhagavad-Gīta* has been described as a discourse on *Yoga-Śāstra* or the Science of Absolute. The main theme of the *Gīta* is understood to be the flight of the soul towards God. The *Gīta-Śāstra* in the main, is the science of Supreme Bliss. The *Gīta* dispels the soul from its dilemmas and opens up new vistas for the aspirant towards the abode of God. Sri Krishna, Arjuna’s

Guru, guide and friend instructs him to dispel all his weaknesses. The Lord condemned Arjuna's feeble mindedness. This underlies the very core of *Gīta* teaching and forms a necessary pre-requisite for fruitful *sādhana*. The teacher student discussion (*sainvāda*) laid the foundation of this *sādhana*. The *Gīta* starts with the *Yoga* of Arjuna's despondency wherein he is overwhelmed with grief and dejection. The *Bhagavad-Gīta* gives an elaborate account of the science of *Yoga*. It starts with the *Yoga* of Despondency or *Viṣhāda*.

In the *Bhagavad-Gīta*, *Viṣhāda* does not mean worldly unhappiness as it is ordinarily understood to be. It signifies a state of mind in which the initial despondency paves the way for higher spiritual wisdom. The Lord instructs Arjuna to dispel his despondency and prepares him to receive higher spiritual truths for sustained release from *Samsara*. It proceeds through the awakening of the inner psyche through strict adherence to the practice of *Yoga* which prepares the aspirant to receive the supreme wisdom of *Brahma-Vidyā* which dispels all false knowledge.

"Of the unreal no being there is, there is no non-being of the real. Of both these the truth seen by the seer of the Essence"⁴

The following verses give an idea as to what is real. The Lord said:

“But know that to be, imperishable by which all this is pervaded.

None can cause the destruction of that, the Inexhaustible”.⁵

Arjuna’s despondency thus is not a more psychological crisis, but it is the craving of the mind for higher spiritual wisdom.

Being a *Yoga-Śāstra*, the word ‘*Yoga*’ gives the clue to the understanding of the central message of this Divine Treatise. Its primary meaning is ‘Union’. It is a process or discipline leading to oneness with the Divine. Secondly *Yoga* signifies the ‘path’ or the ‘way’ leading to Divine realisation. Many are the ways expounded and pursued in Traditional Indian Philosophy and Religion for Divine realisation. The author of the *Gīta* recognises all these different paths but took extra care to explain and evaluate them in the light of the total picture of man’s spiritual quest. The *Bhagavad-Gīta* recommends different *Yogas* for Divine realisation. But primarily *Gīta* is considered to be the Gospel of work or the Gospel of *Karma-Yoga*. It is a practical means for the attainment of higher spiritual ends.

Primarily *Gīta* is understood to be a Treatise on *Niṣhkāma-Yoga* or the Gospel of disinterested interest which is also known as disinterested action or *sādhana* of work. S. Radhakrishnan consider *Gita* "as a mandate for action"⁶.

The *Bhagavad-Gīta* is a comprehensive Treatise on the Gospel of Action or *Karma*. In the context of the *Gīta*, *Karma* is not merely physical action but includes thought as well. It is not the mere mechanical performance of outward actions. It is the result of proper deliberation and choice at will. *Karma* or action is different from the *Karma-Yoga* or 'Yoga of Action'. *Karma-Yoga* is one of the oldest and most widely accepted practice meant for the realisation of the ultimate goal of life. Actions performed for the enjoyment of worldly pleasures is *Karma*. Whereas actions performed in the spirit of disinterestedness is *Karma-Yoga*. *Karma-Yoga* is not renunciation of action but renunciation in action. According to the *Gīta* teaching, Wisdom is not possible for those who are aspiring for worldly pleasures. It is unwise and ungodly to seek worldly happiness per se.

"No conviction of the resolute nature is formed in the mind of those who are attached to pleasures and power, and whose

minds are drawn away by that flowery speech which the unwise-enamoured of Vedic utterances, declaring there is nothing else, full of desire, having *Svarga* as their goal- utter, (a speech) which promises birth as the reward of actions and which abounds in specific acts for the attainment of pleasure and power, O son of Pritha"⁷.

Sri Krishna instructed Arjuna by presenting an elaborate philosophy of Action to dispel his agony. *Gīta* is not a Treatise purely on Action or knowledge in isolation.

"Wherefore, for a man who is qualified for works it is necessary to perform works before he becomes fit for the path of knowledge"⁸.

The performance of action in the right spirit provides an occasion to come face to face with the Absolute. The *Yogi* always acts with an ultimate end in view. That is why Sri Krishna defines *Yoga* as 'dexterity in action' - '*Yoga karmeṣu kauśalam*'.

The third chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gīta* gives an elaborate account of the causal origin of our action. Man's actions are not merely the result of his biological and psychological make up but are the

outcome of his cosmic reality. Man's biological nature is such that he is made to perform action. He cannot remain in a state of inaction for even a moment. So *Gīta* suggests to engage in activity.

"None, verily, even for an instant, ever remains doing no action; for every one is driven helpless to action by the energies born of Nature"⁹.

The *Bhagavad-Gīta* elaborating on the peculiarities of the performance of action gives the clue that men are so made to act because of his *Svabhāva* and also because of the *Guṇās* inherent in *Prakṛti*. *Prakṛiti* which is constituted of the three *Guṇās* or essential modes of energy namely *Sattva*, the seed of intelligence which conserves the working of energy; *Rajas*, the seed for force and action, creates the working of energy; *Tamas*, the seed of inertia and non-intelligence. *Prakṛiti* with all its *Guṇās* in perfect equilibrium is in a state of rest and with the slightest imbalance in it working create disturbance in *Prakṛiti* and then begins ceaseless action involving creation (*śṛṣṭi*), conservation (*sthithi*) and dissolution (*samhāra*) which continues so long as *Puruṣa* permits it. The continuance of the world process completely obscures the real nature of *Prakṛiti*. And when

Puruṣa withdraws from the process of cosmic evolution the *Guṇas* fall into its original position and the soul preserves its pristine purity and turn Godward.

Lord Krishna points out the importance of action by quoting his own case:

“I have nothing what so ever, O Partha to accomplish in the three worlds, not these anything attainable which is to be attained. Still I keep on action.”¹⁰

“For should I not ever engage in action, unwearied, men would in all matters, follow My Path, O son of Pritha”¹¹.

Even though God is not directly obliged to anything mundane, but he remains ever active. The withdrawal of God from the entire cosmic process would necessarily cause evolutive confusion and men in every walk of life remain inactive.

Stressing the necessity of action in human life, Lord Krishna give us instructions as to how we should perform action. Men ordinarily do actions with attachment to the work, i.e., with a desire to its results or the fruits of action. This will naturally bind the soul resulting in rebirth and transmigration of the soul.

"He who, restraining the organs of action, sits thinking in his mind the objects of senses, self-deluded, he is said to be one of false conduct"¹².

"He who, follows not here the wheel ^{thus} set in motion, who ^{of} is sinful life, indulging in senses, he lives in vain, O son of Pritha"¹³.

We must engage in the performance of those kinds of works which will bring peace and prosperity in the Universe and equally cleanse the individual bodily and mentally. The work which proceeds from egoistic motives and desires is lower to those kind of works which are selfless and unattached.

According to the *Gīta* an enlightened man never engage in the performance of actions for selfish interest or for its fruits.

"Renouncing all actions in Me, with thy thought resting on the Self, being free from hope, free from selfishness, devoid of fever; do thou fight"¹⁴.

Naiṣkarmya in *Gīta* is a state or condition in which one is affected by the work done. The natural law is that we are always bound by the results of action. Every action in its natural course binds

the soul and therefore remains bondage or *samsāra*. What is required is not the total renunciation of works, but renunciation of selfish desires.

The *Gīta* teaches that abstention from action is not a remedy to free the soul from desires. Actions according to the *Bhagavad Gīta* teaching has to be undertaken and performed in the spirit of sacrifice (*Yajña*). *Yajña* means exerting oneself for the benefit of others in a word of service. And where service is rendered for the sake of service, there is no room for attachment and the like. So one should perform actions for the benefit of others. Such a man alone is said to be qualified for liberation.

The term *Yajña* is derived from the sanskrit root '*yaj*' which means 'to worship'. The meaning of the term in English is 'sacrifice'. But the underlying idea that all actions performed for the good or service of others are forms of *Yajña*. "One who is always engaged in *Yajña* is not subject to the binding effects of *Karma*"¹⁵.

The *Bhagavat Gīta* stresses the importance of *Yajña* for the sake of relieving the soul from the binding effects of *Karma*. Further the *Gīta* also insists on *Yajña* or work for the good of others where in one sacrifices his whole body for the service of others. The word *Yajña*

which also means 'to worship'. As such it is an act of pleasing God by worshipping Him through service to others. The whole concept of *yajña* was that people should engage in physical labour. 'Laberare est orare' - 'work is worship'.

The *Gīta* having thus outlined how the soul can be liberated from the bondage of *Karma* insists upon the performance of unattached action for the attainment of the supreme.

"Therefore, do there ever perform without attachment the work that thou must do, for performing action without attachment man attains the supreme"¹⁶.

According to the *Gīta* work done without attachment is far superior to the work done in a spirit of sacrifice and for selfish motives. The unselfish and unattached performance of work purifies the mind which will in turn lead to ultimate realization and welfare of the world. Hence *Gīta's* insistence on the performance of actions without the desire for its fruits or *phala* there of fulfils the purpose of God.

The central teaching of the *Bhagavad-Gīta* namely the ideal of i.e. *Karma-Yoga* is clearly explained in the following verses.

"Our concern should be solely with the action, and not for the benefits of action. We should not become benefit motivated and attached to inaction"¹⁷.

Thus the *Gīta* teaches us how to attain spiritual self-realization by performing one's duty for the sake of duty in the spirit of renunciation. In the *Gīta*, the Lord declares that actions need not be renounced but should be performed without attachment. When an action is performed for the welfare of others without any selfish motive it is called *Karma Yoga* or the discipline of Action.

The Lord said:

"Actions pollute me not, nor have I a desire for the fruit of actions. He who knows me thus is not bound of actions"¹⁸.

Sankaracharya too made clear as to what this idea means.

"Anyone who identifies himself with and hence realise that he is no doer, has not desire for fruit and is freed from the bondage of action"¹⁹.

That is to say, he must ascent to the state of God-realization.

He who dedicates his action to *Brahman* and performs them without attachment is not smeared by sin, as the lotus leaf by water. In

Chāndogya Upaniṣhad it is said, "As water does not touch the lotus - leaf, even so the sinful does not smear one who knows *Ātman*"²⁰.

In Bhagavad *Gīta* it is said that *Yogies* perform unattached action like this.

"Only with the body, mind and intellect and also with the senses, do the yogies perform action without attachment for the sake of self purification".²¹

The body, senses and the mind are not ours as we ordinarily think of them. But they belong to nature or *Prakṛiti*. They are meant for serving a larger purpose and therefore are meant for the world. Hence, it is a misnomer on our part to think of them as ours and to have such notions as 'thine' and 'mine' in them. The actions performed with the body, mind and intellect are intended to serve others rather than oneself. In such a state there should not be a sense of doership and hence are completely free from the clutches of actions. A true *Karma-yogi* do not refrain from the performance of action but do it with an altruistic end in view mainly intended for the good and welfare of the world (*Lokasaṅgraha*).

In the *Bhagavad-Gīta* *karma* or action is understood in the sense of performance of one's duty or *Svadharmā*. *Paradharmā* is other's duty. *Svadharmā* constitutes the uniqueness of personality. The personality of each individual has a value and sense in itself. One cannot hide the anatomy of his personality. It is the sense in which *Gīta* refers to *Svadharmā*.

"Again, seeing thine own duty, shouldst not shrink from it, for there is no higher good for a *Kṣhatriya* than a righteous war. A *Kṣhatriya* has no duty higher than that of fighting in a righteous war"²².

Svadharmā in the context of the *Gīta* plays a double role. As a general doctrine, it has various implications. It speaks of those specific qualities which are expressive of the inherent nature of human beings. *Svadharmā* in the given context of the *Gīta* is nothing but the performance of one's duties in accordance with one's station in life without any reference whatsoever to caste, creed, or birth. Arjuna's *Svadharmā* lies in his determination and commitment to discharge his duties as a warrior. *Svadharmā* comes to one as a natural course of his birth. We are born to fulfil those duties which fall in our way. To disown *Svadharmā* amounts to disowning oneself which is suicidal.

In determining one's *svadharma* due consideration should be given to what is helpful and appropriate to one's nature and station in life. One has to find fulfilment in the performance of *svadharma* by persisting in the continued practice of the same which is always indicative of growth and development. The nobility or otherwise to *Svadharma* does not depend on our ordinary understanding of it. What is required is that *Svadharma* great or small may be performed in the best manner possible. In the words of the *Gīta* one's own *dharma* even if devoid of merit, is the best for oneself.

"Better one's own duty, though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well discharged. Better is death in one's own duty; the duty of another is productive of danger".²³

The happiness thus resulting therefrom the performance of one's own work even without excellence is far superior to the performance of another's duty with merit. Steadfast loyalty and faithfulness in the discharge of one's own duty however low and ignorable it may be is sure to pave the way towards the Supreme.

According to the *Gīta* there is not a short cut method for the realization of the Supreme. *Karma-Yoga* pervades the whole of human life. The cause of life and every value implied in it bear a stamp of realization. The attitude of a dedicated person is always uninfluenced by the pairs of opposites such as pleasure and pain, victory or failure etc. but ever remain established in Pure Being. He should not have any anxiety about the past, present or future.

Closely allied with the concept of *Swadharma* in the *Gīta* is the description of the concept of *Sthithaprajña*. *Sthithaprajña* is one who is established in the divine consciousness. The *Sthithaprajña* is a man of steadfast mind and the fullest embodiment of self control. He is capable of controlling all the organs including the mind. He can guide them to *Karma-Yoga* or the Way of Action to fulfil the purpose of God.

"One who renounce all the cravings which torment the heart and desires his contentment from within himself is said to be a *sthithaprajña* or *samādhista* (one stable in spirit)."²⁴

Sthithaprajña can devote himself to the performance of his duty with an evenness of temper. This is the cultivation of the skill in action or *Yoga*. The success of an action no longer lies in the performance of the action and never in its results. A *sthithaprajña* is capable of performing his duties totally unattached. A *sthithaprajña*, having full control over the senses, mind and intellect, abandon all desires and restrain himself and do not indulge in undesirable activity. He directs himself to holy objects and dedicate himself in the service of God and is ever fit to receive the grace of God. Once the grace of God has been descended upon him all his sorrows vanish and he is said to be stable both in body and mind.

"One who is over patient and works with single minded attention to the task on hand may be described as a yogi skilled in action"²⁵.

"He who knows Brahman can neither rejoice on obtaining the pleasant, or grieve on obtaining the unpleasant - steady - minded, undeluded, resting in *Brahman*"²⁶.

Sri Krishna instructs Arjuna to practice *Karma-Yoga* and set an example for the whole world. Ordinarily people always imitate the

standards set and followed by great men. The *Gīta* points out that great men are path makers and hence Sri Krishna asks Arjuna to be a typical model of *Karma -Yoga* to the world. In the *Gīta* reference was made to both Janaka and Sri Krishna as best example of *Karma-Yogins*.

"For through action alone Janaka and others achieved perfection, even with a view to the guidance of man behind thou must act"²⁷

Those who have renounced all actions and remains steady in right knowledge obtain liberation. *Karma-Yoga* performed in the right spirit of devotion to the Lord leads to *moksa* or liberation. It involves the purification of the mind, knowledge and renunciation of all actions for final release.

The successful practice of *Svadharmā* demands complete control over *kāma* and *krodha* ie. craving and anger. So long as the mind is not pure and peaceful the state of desirelessness is impossible of attainment.

Desireless action is the outcome of the working together of the internal and external aspects of action. The fourth chapter of the *Gīta* gives an account of how the mental aspect of an action can be kept in

complete control. The *Gīta* gives instruction to a *Karma-Yogi* to perform such actions with the sole aim of purifying the mind. The act of purifying the mind in the *Gīta* is known as *Vikarma*.

The Fourth Chapter of the *Gīta* gives utmost importance to the three co-related concepts- namely *karma*, *vikarma* and *akarma*. *Karma* is understood in the sense of *Svadharmā*. The active participation of the mind in the performance of an action is *vikarma*. The *Yoga* of desirelessness is the result of the involvement of the mind and the complete mastery of the mind by the doer of the action. The desireless in action is a prelude to the purification of the mind and complete mastery of the mind.

The role played by *Vikarma* is central to the *Gīta* teaching in that the mind gets united with it. Every outward action has an inward reference. This internal reference of an action i.e. *Vikarma* largely determines the course of the action. The unification of the internal and the external aspects of an action is so strong that its disunity very often damages the spirit of an action. The *Gīta* teaches that action should be performed in the spirit of desirelessness. Hence mere outward action

without any reference to the mind whatsoever and mere meditation in itself which is not concretised in overt action are value less.

“Renunciation and *Yoga* through action both lead to the highest bliss: but, of the two, *Yoga* through action is esteemed more than renunciation of action”^{२४}.

The outward action without reference to the mind loses its meaning and significance. The performance of such actions ever remains barren and hence are not capable of cultivating desirelessness. The internal touch gives the action a unique form. The potency that *karma* is capable of developing with the mere touch of *vikarma* is beyond description. The element of desireless in action is the result of *vikarma* being applied to *karma*. In the same way *Svadharna* combined with *vikarma* opens up new avenues and pave the way for supreme wisdom.

Vikarma and *Karma* in combination releases a power which result in *Akarma* ie inaction in action. This is has the potency to reduce karma to the ashes of *Akarma*. Eventhough one acts he is no longer the doer and therefore is not bound by the results of the action. The action so performed leaves no residues of sin or virtue. (*Pāpa* or *punya*).

“He who can see inaction in action, who can also see action in inaction, he is wise among men, he is devout, he is the performer of all actions”²⁹.

The mind and heart of the doer is no longer polluted by the result of the action. His mind remains still, steady and illumined. In the fourth chapter the *Gīta* Sri Krishna advises Arjuna for an indepth study of *Akarma*, wherein the Lord instructs Arjuna to act but no longer to be affected by the actions. Remaining calm and steady in mind and heart one continues to act for the fulfilment of a Divine purpose. *Akarma* is the state of being released from the bondage of action.

“Free from desire, with the mind and the self controlled, having relinquished all possessions doing mere bodily action, he incure no sin”³⁰.

Man cannot escape from the life of action. The desires bound us to *samsara* from which ordinarily there is no escape. ‘Dedicate to God and do your work’, is the only way out of *samsara*. *Karma* becomes natural and normal to every one if it is done in a spirit of *Akarma*. *Karma* with the aid of *Vikarma* prepares the mind for Divine Grace.

“..... While performing *Svadharna*, one can remain unattached and get beyond *Kāma* and *krodha* (craving and anger) *lobha* and *moha* (greed and delusion). When once actions do not distort the mind and take place naturally, we do not notice that they have taken place at all. When *karma* becomes natural and normal (*Sahaja*), it becomes *Akarma*. It is this *sahajakarma* that we call *Akarma*”³¹.

Akarma in the *Gita* is understood to have two aspects namely *Saṅkhya* and *Yoga*. Both of them lead to the same goal of salvation. *Saṅkhya* means the intellectual way of renunciation of works (*Sannyāsa*) and *Yoga* means *Karma-Yoga* i.e. the unselfish performance of work. The bewildered Arjuna asks Sri Krishna which of the method is better to be followed. Sri Krishna replied:

“The renunciation of works and the unselfish performance both lead to the soul’s salvation. Better of the two, the unselfish performance of works is better than their renunciation”³².

From the stand point of the seeker after perfection (*sādhaka*) *Karma-Yoga* is of utmost importance. *Yoga* is understood to be one

aspect of *Akarma*. It is a state in which one acts as if he does not act. Whereas in *sāṅkhya* one refrains from action but has the power to move the whole world to action. This is understood to be the dilemma resulting from *Akarma*. Thus action through inaction is a riddle beyond comprehension of a *sadhaka* but possible for the *siddha* (the perfected one). *Karma-Yoga* is thus both the way (*sādhana*) and the (*niṣṭha*) whereas *sannyasa* is only the goal. From the stand point of the *sadhaka*, *Karma-Yoga*, is performed as against *sannyasa* for it comes to one as a natural course of events. *Karma-Yoga* according to the *Gīta* is the concern of a man who is possessed of the higher self (*Ātman*). A *Karma-Yogin* finds his satisfaction in the determination of all activity with the help of his higher self (*Ātman*). An action is performed not because it is rewarding nor it is rejected if otherwise. The *Gīta* insists on the performance of an action both unconditionally and categorically because it is the reflection of our real being (*Svabhāvajam*). It is obligatory on the part of a *Karma-Yogin* apart-from its results. It is the stability and equanimity of mind shown by a *Karma-Yogin* towards the agreeable and the disagreeable which is the supreme merit of *Karma-Yoga*.

Karma-Yoga being a philosophy of life and is very much ease to practice. This is the distinguishing mark of *Karma-Yoga* from that of *sannyasa*. But in the ultimate stage of perfection both are the same.

“The ignorant speak of renunciation (*Saṅkhya*) and practice of works (*Yoga*) as different, not the wise. He who applies well to one, gets the fruit of both”³³.

“The status which is obtained by men of renunciation is reached by men of action also. He who sees that the ways of renunciation and of action are one, he sees (truly)”³⁴.

Then it goes without saying that perfect *Karma-Yoga* is *sannyasa* and perfect *sannyasa* is *Karma-Yoga*. In the ultimate analysis there is no line of distinction drawn between the two. But for the seeker of perfection *Karma-Yoga* is much easier.

Karma-Yoga is thus understood as a discipline of self-realization. It implies that every act is expressing of the faith and conviction that

one has in one's self. It is the living faith in one's *dharma* i.e. *Svadharmā* which is ultimately counted and also acts as a means to one's uniting with one's ownself. (*yukta-chetas*)

"Doing continually all actions, seeking refuge in Me, looking upon Me as the supreme, and ever remaining steadfast, do they fix th thought on Me. Fixing thy thought on Me, thou shalt, by My grace, tide over all difficulties, but if from self-conceit, thou wilt not listen (to Me), thou shall perish"³⁵.

Further the *Gīta* attempts to show the place of God in *Karma-Yoga*. *Karma* and God in the *Gīta* is understood as the highest embodiment of *Dharma*. God is also the ideal *Karma-Yogin*. It is also instructed that one has to transcend the barriers of *Karma* in order to move towards the spirit.

"All that is here" says Sri Krishna "is strung on Me as row of gems on a string"³⁶.

God is immanent in the world and remains ever active. The world needs God and vice versa.

"By me all this universe is pervaded through. My unmanifest form. All beings abide in Me but I do not abide in them"³⁷.

To quote Radhakrishnan: "The man of the world is lost in the varied activities of the world. He throws himself into the mutable world (*kṣhāra*). The quietist withdraws into the silence of Absolute (*akṣhara*) but the ideal man of the *Gīta* goes beyond these two esteems and works like *Purushothama*, reconciles all possibilities in the world without getting involved in it. He is the doer of works who yet is not the doer, *kartaram akartaram*, The Lord is the pattern of an unwearied and active worker who does not, by His work forfeit his integrity of spirit"³⁸.

The path that is shown by the *Gita* is known as 'practical reason (*Vyavasayatmika-buddhi*) *Karma-Yoga* in the *Gita* is but the application of this practical reason and therefore acquires uniqueness and serves the highest purpose for man. (*Yoga karmeṣu kauśalam*).

In the state of *Avidya* Arjuna failed to know his real nature. The self in its essence is of the nature of pure consciousness. In the highest stage of perfection of the soul *Karma* ceases to have hold on the liberated self. Knowledge is thus a prelude to correct understanding and right action. In this sense *karma* in the *Gīta* is said to culminate in *Jnana*. *Karma* and *Jñāna* are paths to ultimate self-realization.

In the context of the *Gīta*, Arjuna in his despondency failed to understand his true nature. Then the Lord instructed

“In this world a two-fold way of life has been taught by Me—the path of knowledge for men of philosophic discrimination and that of action for men of *Karma*”³⁹

Karma-Yoga is distinguishable from other *Yogas*. Lokamanya Balagangadhara Tilak in his '*Gīta Rahasya*' had brought out the significance of the primacy of Action. According to him the real meaning of *Bhagavad-Gīta* consists in spreading the message of *Karma-Yoga*. *Karma-Yoga* is the essence of *Bhagavad -Gīta* and all other *Yogas* are directed towards *Karma* as the ultimate goal of life.

NOTES

1. Sri. Sankaracharya, *The Bhagavad-Gīta*, (Trans) by Alladi Mahadeva Sastri, Samata Books, Madras, Chapter I, 28-29.
2. *Ibid* Chapter II, 31.
3. *Ibid* Chapter II, 7.
4. *Ibid* Chapter II, 16.
5. *Ibid* Chapter II, 17.
6. Radhakrishnan, S. *Bhagavad-Gīta*, Introduction: George Allen and Unwin Ltd
7. Sri. Sankaracharya, *The Bhagavad-Gīta*, (Trans) by Alladi Mahadeva Sastri, Samata Books, Madras, Chapter II, 42-44.
8. *Chandogya Upanishad*, IV, 33.
9. Radhakrishnan, S. *Bhagavad-Gīta*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd Chapter III, 5.
10. *Ibid* III, 22.
11. *Ibid* III, 23.
12. *Ibid* Chapter III, 6
13. *Ibid* Chapter III, 16
14. *Ibid* Chapter III, 30
15. *Ibid* Chapter III, 26.
16. *Ibid* Chapter III, 19.
17. *Ibid* Chapter II, 47
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20. *Chandoyga Upanishad*, 4 14. 3.
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22. *Ibid* Chapter II, 37.
23. *Ibid* Chapter III, 35.
24. M.K Gandhi, *Bhagavad-Gīta*, Orient Paper backs. p-
25. *Ibid* P.47
26. Sri Sankaracharya, *Bhagavad-Gīta*, (Trans) by Alladi Mahadeva Sastri, Samata Books, Madras, Chapter V, 20
27. *Ibid* Chapter III, 20
28. *Ibid* Chapter V-2.
29. *Ibid* Chapter V. 4.
30. *Ibid* Chapter V, 6
31. *Ibid* Chapter
32. *Ibid* Chapter V, 2.
33. *Ibid* Chapter V.4
34. *Ibid* Chapter VI, 20.
35. Radhakrishnan, S. *Bhagavad-Gīta*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, Chapter III, 3.
36. *Ibid*, Chapter, XVIII, 56-58.
37. *Ibid*, Chapter, VII, 7..
38. *Ibid*
39. *Ibid*, p.72

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S CONCEPT OF IURMA-YOGA

A.K. Vijayalakshmi “Swami Vivekananda's approach to the ideal of karma-yoga - a critical study ” Thesis. Department of Philosophy , University of Calicut, 2000

CHAPTER V

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S CONCEPT OF *KARMA-YOGA*

Swami Vivekananda, one of the greatest prophets India had ever seen was primarily a spiritual leader. He appeared in the Indian scene as a Religious reformer and a Social Revivalist. His commitment to this noble cause was because of his great love for mankind. Intellectual brilliance, purity of heart, and unselfish love are the secret of his tremendous popularity and electrifying influence that drew the entire world towards him. Explaining the tremendous influence that Vivekananda exercised over his audience at the Parliament of Religions, the late Christopher Isherwood wrote, "No doubt the vast majority of those present hardly know why they had been so powerfully moved. The appearance, even the voice, of Vivekananda cannot fully explain it. A large gathering has its own telepathy, and this one must have been some how aware that I was of the most unusual of all beings, a man whose words express exactly what he is"¹.

What Swami Vivekananda preached and practiced was not anything new. It is part and parcel of ancient Indian thought, philosophy and culture. What is novel is the successful application of the metaphysical truths contained in ancient wisdom for the spiritual awakening of the Indian masses. His main attempt was to revive and reform the ancient Indian religion based

on the scriptures such as *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads* and *Bhagavad-Gīta*. Such a programme also included removal of extreme orthodoxy and dogmatism. Swami Vivekananda under the influence of his master Sri. Ramakrishna undertook the great mission ‘to preach unto mankind, their divinity’. He incessantly laboured for the development of the physical, mental and spiritual dimension of man and the possibilities of its manifestation in every walk of his life to which Swami Vivekananda termed ‘man-making’.

“The ultimate goal of all mankind, the aim and end of all religions, is but one re-union with God, or what amounts to the same, with the divinity which is every man’s true nature”².

According to Swami Vivekananda spiritual realization requires spiritual discipline. It requires a course of ethico-spiritual training. Realization is not possible of attainment all at once. A continuous struggle is required for the same. He stated that:

“... the great benefit in the life is struggle. It is through that we pass, if there is any road to Heaven, it is through Hell. Through Hell. Heaven is always the way”³.

In the field of spirituality every one has to struggle. No one can help another to climb up the steps of the ladder of life. Vivekananda said,

“None can teach you; none can make a spiritual man of you, you have to teach yourself, your growth come from inside”⁴.

So when the truth Seeker proceeds in the path of spirituality everything comes to his defense. As every science has its specific method of inquiry so has every religion. The method of attaining the end of religion is *Yoga*. There are different *Yogas* preached and practiced by different people which are always in accordance with the different nature and temperaments of men. The *Yogas* of Work, of Wisdom and of Devotion are all different roads converging to the same goal namely God.

“Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or psychic control, or philosophy-by one, or more or all of these- and be free”⁵.

Swami Vivekananda used the word ‘*Yoga*’ in a very wide sense. The ultimate goal of *Yoga* namely. Self-Realization is not the outcome of any one discipline. *Yoga* according to Swami Vivekananda is a process involving unification and elimination. As Dr. Radhakrishnan puts it ‘Via purgative’ (the way of concentration) and finally the ‘via intuitiva’ (which is actual identification with God.....)⁶. The object of *Yoga* is the realization of the higher self which manifests the Divinity inherent in man.

Karma-Yoga, as the very word signifies the Path of Action or Work. Ethical acts directly lead to self-realization. According to Swami Vivekananda “*Karma-Yoga* is the knowledge of the secret of work”⁷. It gives us the knowledge relating to the secret of work and also the organising power of the work. *Karma-Yoga* thus gives an elaborate and systematic method as how to discharge our duties.

In the technical sense of the term, *Karma* means ‘the effects of action’. In metaphysics *Karma* signifies ‘the effects of which our past actions were the causes’. Hence the entire world is subject to the law of activity or *Karma*. Further the law of *Karma* is the law of moral continuity. Our actions leaves behind certain residues (Samskaras). These are the casual factors that largely determines our future not only in this life but even after. The dictum ‘As you sow, so you reap’ sums up the law of *Karma*.

‘To do work for work sake’ sums up the secret of *Karma-Yoga*. “Any work” says Vivekananda” that is done with any, the least selfish motive, instead of making us free, forgoes one more chain for our feet. So the only way is to give up all the fruits of work, to be unattached to them”⁸.

“*Jñāna, Bhakti, Yoga* and *Karma*-these are the four paths which lead to salvation. One must follow the path for which one is best suited; but in this age special stress should be laid on *Karma-Yoga*”⁹.

Vivekananda accepts the Vedantic metaphysics of the Absolute oneness of God and man. He is convinced of the veracity of the Advaitic doctrine of the essential unity of God, man and for that matter of all that lives. This monistic doctrine signifies that all human beings are striving consciously or unconsciously towards the realization of the unity of all lives. What one man is capable of achieving is possible for others, since the nature of the soul is one in all. He laid stress on the need of unflinching obedience to the dictates of conscience. The divine music is incessantly going on within ourselves but 'the senses drown the delicate music'. Vivekananda considers the intellect as a barrier to the realization of God for God is beyond intellect. God can be realized only through dis-interested service to our fellow men.

According to the law of *Karma* every action has its consequence. The painful consequence of man's actions are necessary a corrective for him. The role of the external world is only to provide an occasion to study our own mind. The real knowledge of the self as divine is to be discovered by the removal of all the obstacles which fall in the way to the real self - the mine of infinite knowledge.

"Like fire in a piece of flint knowledge exists in the mind suggestion is the friction which brings it out."¹⁰

Karma includes both physical and mental actions. The performance of these actions in its turn leaves behind its own traces or residues in man. Man is

best expressed through his actions, feelings and emotions, which comes from within ourselves in the form of so many 'blows'. All these 'blows' put together are called *Karma* or action. Thus *Karma* is defined by Vivekananda as follows:

“Every mental and physical blow that is given to the soul, by which, as it were fire is stuck from it, and by which its own power and knowledge are discovered is *Karma*, this word being used in its widest sense”¹¹

Thus life of man is full of activity and inactivity to the cessation of life.

Thus *Karma* plays a central role in the life and character of a person. *Karma* indicates one's character. Character is the permanent disposition of a man and it finds its expression through one's conduct. Character is the permanent bond of the mind constituted by the 'settled habits of will'. Character is the inner side of conduct and conduct is the overt expression of the settled habit of will. Vivekananda was of the view that action produce tendencies on us which determine our future lives. Man is the reservoir of knowledge and he has infinite powers or potentialities to know and reveal himself.

“What we say man 'knows', should in strict psychological language, be what he 'discovers' or 'unveils', what a man 'learns'

is really what he 'discovers', by taking the cover off his own soul, which is the mine of infinite knowledge"¹².

This process reveals the real in man-the Almighty, the Omniscient which draws everything towards him. Vivekananda stresses the importance of the law of *Karma* and treated it as an eternal law of life. The whole universe is bound by the same law. We are the effects of our *Karma*. Man is also responsible for what he had done and what he will do in future. We have the power to carve out the best in ourselves. Man is amply free to act at his will. Hence according the Vivekananda 'Man is the Maker of himself'-'The Architect of his own Destiny'. Swami Vivekananda basing himself on the teaching of the *Bhagavad-Gīta* said that one is able to reap the fruit of his action only if they have been done as per the methods prescribed in it. By the performance of action the soul gets relief and reveal its inherent powers which are like those 'blows' which cause the making of the mind and the realising of the innate knowledge. According to Vivekananda there are two positions which are open to mankind. One is to believe that we know nothing about the past or future or even the present. The other option kept open is to seek the real in man.

"In this body which is an aggregate to molecules of matter is thus anything which is real?"¹³.

Vivekananda sought for the real in man in his own characteristic fashion. According to him the real in man is a kind of ‘concentration of spiritual energy’. Man according to him is Spirit. Man is not what he ordinarily appears to be. Man is spiritual in the sense that he is the only being who is essentially and potentially divine. Vivekananda had gone to that extent of saying that spirituality in man is so great and that even the bodily aspects of man should get spiritualised.

Swami Vivekananda stands out unique in his conception of the importance of physical nature of man which is due to the presence of spirituality innate in man. He has not denied reality to the physical side of man. The physical nature represents man’s lower nature. His real nature is to go beyond the physical nature. The real nature of man, Vivekananda described as the soul-force or *Ātman*.

“You have to grow from inside out. None can teach you, none can make you spiritual. There is no other teacher but you own soul”¹⁴.

Religion too according to Swami Vivekananda is a growth from within. The essence of religion consists not in its external observances but in its inner aspect. Religion is the manifestation of the divinity inherent in man. True religion can not be seen in books, not in dogmas, not even in reasoning. The secret of religion lies not in professing but in practicing it.

“The secret of religion lies not in theories but in practice. To be good and do good-that is the whole of religion”¹⁵.

Karma-Yoga according to Vivekananda is mainly intended to attain freedom of the soul through unselfish performance of duties and also by good works. *Karma-Yoga* believes in the importance and value of action along with its unselfish performance. According to this concept, man has to remain in the world encircled by good and evil, pain and suffering, love and hate. One has to engage in ceaseless work throughout his life.

Vivekananda laid stress on the unselfish performance of action rather than inaction. Greatly impressed by the *Gita* ideal of *Nishkāma Karma* he recommended that one must not expect any reward for the action. The *Karmayogi* has to work for unselfishness in action which also meant that work has to be done in the spirit of non-attachment. According to Vivekananda,

“He works best who works without any motive, neither for money nor for fame, nor anything else; and even a man can do this he will be a Buddha, and out of him will come the power to work in such a manner as will transform the world. This man represents the very highest ideal of *Karma-Yoga*”¹⁶.

Like the ancient Indian thinkers Vivekananda believes that man usually perform action out of ignorance and somehow forgets the true nature of the

self and consequently fails to discriminate between the real and the unreal. This settled false notions directs him in his future life. Every action leaves behind *Samskaras* or tendencies which will determines the future course of action.

The proper performance of action requires to remain unattached and to give up the very idea of attachment altogether. One who does work without any regard whatsoever to one self gains the highest. Vivekananda asserts,

”Unselfishness is more paying, only people have not the patience to practise it”¹⁷.

One who succeeds in working without any selfish motive become morally powerful. According to him Love, truth and unselfishness are not mere words to be observed in speech alone, but they have to come from the deep layers of the mind. These virtues are the best representations of the divine power inherent in man. These are meant not only for preaching but for practice as well which necessitates tremendous mental restraint.

“This self-control will tend to produce a mighty will, a character which makes a Christ or Buddha”¹⁸.

Karma-Yoga requires among other things calmness of mind and unselfish performance of action as essential conditions for its practice. These conditions are possible of attainment by long and strenuous practice.

Vivekananda had given the direction to remain ever active and live in the midst of good and evil, pleasure and pain and so on. He brought out this idea in the following passage

“Plunge into the world, and then, after a time, where you have suffered and enjoyed all that is in it will renunciation come; then will calmness come”¹⁹.

The practise of *Karma-Yoga* requires Non-resistance which is considered as the highest ideal of *Karma-Yoga*. Non-resistance signifies the resistance of evil. Morality necessitates the observance of Non-resistance as its preliminary requirement. To remain moral one must be ever active. To be moral is to be active. And activity always necessitates resistance of evil.

“Resist all evils, mental and physical; and when you have succeeded in resisting, then will calmness come”²⁰.

Man has ample powers to resist evil by all means. By strict practice of non-resistance one gains control over his mind. According to Vivekananda a man must engage in activity and there by gains complete control over mind and then passes on to the highest stage of calmness of mind.

Vivekananda had explained the main characteric of a *Karma-Yogi* as follows.

“The ideal man is who, in the midst of the greatest silence and solitude, finds the intensest activity and in the midst of the intensest activity finds the silence and solitudes of the desert”²¹.

The concept of morality plays a significant role in *Karma-Yoga*. Like *Vedānta*, Swami Vivekananda also admitted that morality is a necessary precondition for the onward march of the individual to the highest realm of spirituality.

Morality “forms the steel frame foundation of the spiritual life”²².

But with regard to the questions about the standard of morality, he admits that there are no universal moral standards which can be equally applied at all times, places and circumstances. Morality varies from individual to individual, nation to nation. There are as many moral standards as there are number of individuals. Man is so made that he has an impulsive nature for the gratification of which he does immoral acts. There are instances in which even recourse to violence is considered as highly moral. In the *Bhagavad-Gīta* when Arjuna refused to fight in the battle field of *Kuruṣketra* the lord called him a ‘hypocrite’ and a ‘coward’ Sri. Krishna reminded Arjuna of his duty as a *Kshatriya*. Arjuna’s love and affection for his own kith and kin made him forget his own *Svadharmā*. The Lord said

“Thou talkest like a wise man, but thy actions betray thee to be a coward; therefore stand up and fight”²³.

Morality lays emphasis on the purification of mind, heart and action. It also insists on leading a life of renunciation with a view to free man from narrow selfish interest. Moral perfection of the individual is a prelude to ultimate self-realization.

Swami Vivekananda in accordance with the Samkhya conception of the fundamental constituents of nature believes that man too is composed of three constituent elements namely *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Thamas*. These factors finds its fullest expression in the nature and working of both Nature and Man. The slightest disturbance and variation in the presence of these factors cause disturbance in the nature and behaviour of both. A basic knowledge of the constituent factors and their influence upon Nature and Man enable man to perform their work in a better way.

Having outlined the basic elements of *Karma-Yoga* Swami Vivekananda had dealt with the concept of duty. It is impossible to give a precise definition for the concept duty. We get an idea of duty by knowing its ‘practical operations and results’. A Sanskrit aphorism as “Do not injure any being; not injuring any being is virtue; injuring any being is a sin”²⁴, fully express and acclaime to be the only universally accepted idea of the concept. But ordinarily duty understood to be that which is dictated by our conscience.

The question still remains as to what is that makes an act a duty? From the subjective side a duty may be any action that which makes an individual to go forward. On the contrary any action that makes us go downward is evil and hence is not our duty. The first and foremost duty thus is to have faith in oneself, 'Know thyself' is the starting point of all morality. Because without faith and knowledge of oneself one cannot have faith in others or even in God. The different systems of Indian Philosophy differ as to what is duty. They believe that duty differ from one another in respect of one's station in life.

Swami Vivekananda accepted the classical Indian Philosophical Ideal of *Āsrama-dharmas*. Accordingly he points out that there are different duties specified for the different classes of men. In Indian philosophy there was a mention of the classes of men namely the student, the householder and the sannyasin. At every stage of life there was specific duties to be performed. None of these stages can ever claim any superiority over another. These four stages of human life in Indian life has later on resolved into a two fold division namely that of the householder and of the *sannyāsin*.

The *Bhagavad-Gīta* also had given an elaborate description of duties which are depended upon the birth, life and society. It determine the mental attitude of an individual in the performance of the various activities in life. So it is therefore our duty to do those works which are always in accordance with the ideals and practices of the society in which we are part and parcel.

Vivekananda considered those activities as duty which are performed by the householder. He is of the view that each duty has its own place relative to the circumstances in which it has been done. Further he believed that each duty is great and good in itself and has its own merit. Men should not be judged as superior or inferior on the basis of the nature of work.

“A man who does lower work is not, for that reason only, a lower man than he who does the higher work; a man should not be judged by the nature of his duties, but the manner in which he does them. His manner of doing them and his power to do them are indeed the test of a man. A Shoemaker who can turn out a strong, nice pair of shoes in the shortest possible time is a better man, according to his profession and his work, than a professor who talk nonsense every day of his life”²⁵.

Every work is great provided that it is done for its own sake. And a stage will come where work will become worship. Every duty therefore is to be regarded as great and holy. He was of the view that devotion to duty is the highest form of worship of God.

In the performance of duty he laid emphasis on the spirit behind the action. Usually an action may be prompted by the moral will or by the Love. In the performance of domestic duties in life one is largely moved by such instincts like attachment, affection, and selfishness. The mere impulsive

activity is not moral conduct. Moral life is not the mere outward adjustment with the environment. It is an activity of the higher moral self. Man can not be fully satisfied with sensuous pleasures alone. Every one was given an opportunity within the limits of his present development for making himself better. Vivekananda therefore emphasized the need to conquer both external and internal nature. "It is good" Vivekananda said "and very grand to conquer external nature, but grander still to conquer our internal nature"²⁶. Moral life is a life of transforming the external environment in accordance with one's moral and spiritual advancement.

Morality involves social relations. It is therefore, our duty to perform those works in accordance with the ideals and practices that prevail in the society in which we are born. In the fulfillment of day-to-day activities, disharmony may arise due to attachment based on selfishness. The philosophy behind the performance of an action is that maladjustment between the social concern and individual interest invite conflict - 'between what he is and what he ought to be'. One should perform his duty with whole-hearted devotion and without any attachment to the results there of. The right performance of duty makes man transcend his impulsive real-self. Vivekananda stressed the importance of devotion to duty for it holds the key to spiritual progress. Performing one's duty Vivekananda says:

“Do it as a worship, as the highest worship, and devote your whole life to it for the time being”²⁷.

It should bear in mind that man is indebted to the world and ‘the world does not owe us anything’. Our duty should be primarily directed towards helping others, i.e. doing good to the world. By helping others we are really helping ourselves. We are in the world and the world is not in us. The world exists and is real in itself. The world provides the platform to carry out the moral exercises of men. Moral perfection is a prelude to spiritual realization. Vivekananda brought out this idea in the following passage.

“The world is a grand gymnasium wherein we have all to take exercise so as to become stronger and stronger spiritually”²⁸.

Karma-Yoga does not recommend asceticism or a life of withdrawal from the life of activity. On the contrary man has to remain in the world in the midst of good and evil, pain and pleasure. In the discharge of duties one has to remain unselfish. While discharging duties one has to remain as a stranger without allowing any work to dominate or to bind him. Swami Vivekananda was of the view that “While performing work we must work like a Master and not as a slave”²⁹. One should not allow personal consideration to enter into the very fabric of action and to regulate it. He was greatly influenced by the *Gita* ideal of *Nishkāma-Karma* according to which one must not expect anything in

lieu of actions. Actions are to be considered as free offering which are meant to satisfy some higher ends.

Swami Vivekananda with great reverence cited the example of Lord Buddha, as a real *Karma-Yogi*. Lord Buddha after attaining *Nirvana* led a life of activity throughout his life without any selfish motive. This can be taken as an ideal of non-attachment. Vivekananda said,

“He who works best who works without any motive, neither for money, nor for fame, nor for anything else; and when a man can do that, he will be a Buddha, and out of him will come the power to work in such a manner as will transform the world. This man represents the very highest ideal of *Karma-Yoga*”³⁰.

The *Bhagavad-Gīta* had made a distinction between two type of actions namely *Pravṛtti* and *Nivṛtti*. All those actions that bind us with the object is called *pravṛtti*. Such action include pursuit of wealth, power, fame etc. and consequently they lead to attachment and bondage. On the contrary all those action which lead one to detachment from the empirical self are called *Nivṛtti*. Vivekananda considered unattached actions alone as highly moral and religious. Hence Vivekananda had defined morality as “that which is selfish is immoral; and that which is unselfish is moral”³¹. It acts as a means to ultimate self-realization. According to the *Gita* too *Nivṛtti* is the theory of Non-attachment and to be attached to nothing while doing our work is the very

essence of *Karma-Yoga*. Every work by its very nature is a mixture of good and evil. Actions bind the soul. The solution offered in the *Gīta* with regard to bondage is that if we do not attach ourselves to the work we have to do, it will not have any binding effect upon our soul. This has been referred in the *Gīta* as “Non-attachment” (*Nishkāma*) to work.

The unattached action is the solution offered in the *Gita* to escape from the impressions or *Samskaras* left behind by the actions. All those works done without attachment leaves no traces of action in the soul and therefore does not bind us. Vivekananda reminds

“Work as if you were a stranger in this island, a Sojourner; work incessantly, but do not bind yourselves: bondage is terrible”³².

The question that can be raised is how can the soul be freed from bondage. It is a fact that every action bind the soul. To attain real freedom of the soul one should work through unselfishness and Love. True Love is the result of perfect freedom of the soul. The continuous practice of doing of self-less work enables a man to rise above his finite self. It enables him to cultivate a feeling of oneness with everything that exists. Bondage is nothing but bondage of self. Unattached action signifies transcendence from the bondage of the soul. Through self-less work one’s mind become as clear as crystal and then he alone is able to identify himself with the whole of creation. Such acts reveal the real nature of the soul and bring everlasting happiness. Existence

Knowledge and Love find its fullest expression as the three aspects of Supreme Reality namely Existence, knowledge and Bliss. To attain unattachment in action it is required to have intense sincerity on the part of the individual. It also requires continuous practice. Vivekananda asserts that realization of this goal brings about a radical regeneration of the individual, spiritually, morally, and religiously.

All thought of reward from the work hinder spiritual progress and make life miserable. Unattachment is also the result of the belief in a personal God. Belief in a personal God makes us surrender completely to him. And the fruits of action too are considered as offering to God. The *Bhagavad-Gīta* also endorses the same idea. According to the *Gīta* man has got the right only to do his work. In discharging his duties he must abstain from the fruits of action because he has no control over it.

Vivekananda considered Ritualism and Symbology in religion as integral parts of *Karma-Yoga*. Every religion has its philosophy, Mythology and practice of Rituals. Philosophy forms the very essence of Religion. Where as the mythological aspect of every religion tries to explain and illustrate its philosophy through legendary lives of Great men and stories. Ritualism on the other hand give a concretised form version of philosophy. Ritual is *Karma* and it is an integral aspect of every religion. The abstract ideas of religion are made illustrated by its symbolic representation. From time immemorial

symbols have been considered as a necessary part of every religion, the ritualistic symbols are the expression of religious thoughts of humanity. The whole world is a symbol, and God is the essence behind it. The symbols used in religion are not the creations of any religion but they have a natural growth. Just as it is impossible to create a language by convention as are with symbols Vivekananda stresses the importance of symbols in religion in the following passage.

“The association of particular temples, rituals and other concrete forms with particular religion has a tendency to bring into the minds of the followers of those religions the thoughts for which those things stand as symbols, and it is not wise to ignore rituals and symbology altogether”³³.

According to Swami Vivekananda the nature, power and proper usage of words also come under *Karma-Yoga*. Words are expressive of our thoughts. Words are symbols which play an important part in our daily life. Words have higher philosophic and religious value too. In religion words are considered as the external aspect of the thought of God. Words are very powerful both for the creation and the continued existence of the world. Words are often misused and manipulated which may result in evil and unhappiness.

Too much stress on work without attachment should not lead men to become Fanatics. Fanaticism would not in any way help for human progress. It

creates hatred and anger and cause inter-personal rivalry. It lacks all the finer sentiments of life. Fanaticism acts as a stumbling block to proper work. Vivekananda recommends a life of equanimity in the event of discharging duties. Therefore he said,

“It is the level headed man, the calm man, of good and cool nerves of great sympathy and love, who does good work and so does good to himself”³⁴.

The world and all that it contains is a mixture of good and evil. It is up to man to choose between these two. Each man creates a world for himself, a world in which we get ample chances for moral exercise. Life is made good or evil according to the state of mind in which we look at the world. And the world is perfect if only if perfectly fitted to meet its ends.

According to *Karma-Yoga*, every action has the power to produce its own result; No power on earth can stop it. The result of an action is in exact proportion to the nature of the action. If a person does a bad action he will have to suffer, similarly when a person does good action good result follows.

Concerning questions relating to how can we differentiate between good and bad actions Swami Vivekananda was of the view that we can never draw a line of distinction between them. There is no action which is completely pure or impure. Vivekananda points out that the attainment of

perfection in action is an impossibility. We are made only to work. Incessant work is what is expected out of man. We can not escape the inevitable association of good and evil in the effects of action. Vivekananda was of the view that

“ You may work on, and on, and on; there will be no end to this inevitable association of good and evil in the results of work”³⁵.

Good and evil are nothing but the two sides of the same coin. No body can say which is the obverse and which the reverse. The struggle between the two forces, namely between ourselves and the external world is going on continuously and the cessation of which marks the end of life.

Swami Vivekananda seriously considered the questions concerning the end of work. Generally perfect life is a life without disease, and unhappiness. But Swami Vivekananda is of the view that a perfect life is a contradiction in terms for life is a mixture of both good and evil. They are integrally related and therefore one can not exist without the other.

According to Swami Vivekananda happiness in life is the result of the incessant struggle. Work done with the main motive of serving others is always rewarding. For the performance of such actions purify our selves. By continuous practice of other regarding actions we forget ourselves and whole heartedly dedicate ourselves for the service of humanity. Thus true happiness

results from the killing of the narrow, selfish interest. Swami Vivekananda had shown the path of true happiness by killing selfishness where by we can transcend to the higher levels of spirituality.

Thus “every act of charity, every thought of sympathy, every action of help, every good deed, is lacking so much of self-importance away from our little selves and making us think of ourselves as the lowest and least, and therefore it is all good”³⁶.

The final goal of human endeavour is to attain that state of life where we are no longer bound by ‘I’ and ‘Mine’. The highest ideal is ‘all is Thou’-a principle worth living and aspiring for. In that state one is completely lost in oneself, leading a life of self-abnegation. *Karma-Yoga* according to Swami Vivekananda is the surest path paving the way to this supreme realization.

Karma-Yoga preaches a life of complete self-abnegation i.e., readiness to sacrifice mind, body and all other possessions for the service of others. When one reaches this state, he has attained the state of perfection in *Karma-Yoga*. This is the natural result of good work. Vivekananda describes this state as follows.

“Although a man has not studied a single system of philosophy, although he does not believe in any God and never was believed, although he has not prayed even once in his life, if the simple

power of good actions has brought him to that state where he is ready to give up his life and all else for others, he has arrived at the same point to which religious man will come through his prayers and the philosopher through his knowledge; and so you may find that the philosopher, the worker, and the devotee, all meet at one point, that one point being self-abnegation”³⁷.

Non-attachment in action marks the culmination of the practice of *Karma-Yoga*. Man though different from the world, exists in the world. Human life is nothing but a life of activity. Man has to do action not for the gratification of selfish interest nor for one’s own sake. But it should be done in the spirit of service. Service to humanity is the worship of God. God is found in all His creations. God has given the right to worship Him through service i.e. in the form of self-less work. Work should be done as a service with spirit of non-attachment. The ideal of *Karma-Yoga* teaches that non-attachment in action is the proper attitude in the performance of duty. The effectiveness and universality of the *Karma-Yoga* largely depends on non-attachment. A constant practitioner of *Karma-Yoga* keeps the idea of God alive and action is being considered as offering to God. The worshiper is convinced of the efficacy of this ideal that “thy will be done” as an offering to God.

The work done as offering to God will have no binding effect on us. The same point is explained in Ancient Indian Scriptures as “Even if he kill

the whole universe or to be himself killed) he is neither the killer nor the killed, when he knows that he is not acting for himself at all". Swami Vivekananda reinforced the same idea and said,

“Do not give up the world, live in the world, imbibe its influence as much you can; but if it be for your own enjoyment’s sake, work not at all”³⁸.

Action should not be done for the enjoyment of worldly pleasures. In discharging duties one has to ‘kill oneself’ and then alone he can identify himself completely with whatever exists in the whole world.

Ordinarily persons differ among themselves regarding their outlook towards life. A genuine *Karma-Yogin* who has attained the ultimate goal of self-abnegation, considers the whole of creation including man as the manifestation of the Ultimate Reality. *Karma-Yoga* is the discipline to attain perfection in the discharge of duties in day to day life. Swami Vivekananda has explained in detail the various stages involved in the practice of this ideal.

It is described as follows:

“First is feeling, then it becomes willing, and out of that willing comes the tremendous force of work that will go through every rein and nerve and muscle, until the whole mass of your body is changed into an instrument of the unselfish *Yoga* of work, and the

desired result of perfect self-abnegation and utter unselfishness is duly attained”³⁹

A *Karma-Yogi* always remains as a seeker after spiritual perfection. The goal of all the different *Yogas* is the attainment of spiritual perfection. The *Yogi* has imbibed the same truth through the practise of the different *Yogas*. According to Vivekananda all the different *Yogas* are but different paths for the realisation of the same goal. Through all disciplines the Sadhak “approaches God and as he gets nearer and nearer he finds his old self melting away”⁴⁰. The aim of spiritual discipline is to divinise man and to attain union with the Supreme Self. These spiritual disciplines are not separate units opposed to each other. Very often they overlap each other plays a pivotal role in unfolding the spirituality inherent in man. Swami Vivekananda asserted that:

“.....we may reach the same goal by different paths and these paths I have generalised into four namely, those of work, Psychology, love and knowledge. Each blends into the other the divisions are made according to the type of tendency that may be seen to prevail in man. In the end all these four paths convergence and become one.”⁴¹

NOTES

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CONCLUSION

A.K. Vijayalakshmi “Swami Vivekananda's approach to the ideal of karma-yoga - a critical study ” Thesis. Department of Philosophy , University of Calicut, 2000

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy is nothing if not religious and humanistic. Though not a Philosopher in the strict academic sense, the views that he profounded are essentially life and man-centered. It arose out of his awareness of the social, religious and economic conditions of the Indian masses. The way of life he has expounded is essentially practical and in no sense world-denying. He had a realization that most of the social evils rampant in Indian Social order were due to religious orthodoxy and superstition. Swami Vivekananda reacted to these evils in strong terms. Therefore he decided to work for the total regeneration and awakening of the Indian masses.

He was a man with a definite mission and programme of action. His own life is a standing testimony to this. He always preferred a monastic order of life and worked incessantly for the spiritual regeneration of the masses. "Do you think that because a man has renounced the world, he is devoid of all feeling?"¹ spiritual life is not a life of withdrawal but one of involvement in active life by performing duties pertaining to one's station in life. In the scheme of things he had devised, priority was given to the alleviation of poverty, social backwardness and the like. He was a man with the mind of a conqueror and he once said "Conquest is my *mantram*"² He always stood for a *Vedāntic* approach to human life by declaring that *Vedānta* as perrenial source of unity between God and all

that exists in the world. He had shown the people the effectiveness of the religion of *Vedānta* and exhorted people” to Arise, Awake and stop not till the goal is reached”³. He lived and fulfilled the mission of the spiritual remaking of man and dedicated himself to the upliftment of humanity.

Swami Vivekananda thus preached and practiced a dynamic Philosophy of life which can be seen at work in his interpretation of the ancient Indian Philosophic Wisdom of *Vedānta* for practical purposes. He called his *Vedānta* as *Neo-Vedānta*. “It is the Vedanta of forest come back to our home, our city and society. It is the *Vedānta* entering in our ordinary life and conduct, it is the *Vedānta* that may inspire our individual life, Social life and International life”⁴. The abstract ideals of *Vedānta* became living principle in the everyday life of the common man. He infused *Vedāntic* Philosophy the spiritual and humanistic ideas. The Philosophy and religion of *Neo-Vedānta* came to be characterized as *Mānavādvaita- Vāda* or ‘Humanistic *Advaitism*’ which centers on the Gospel of Man-making. It signifies the effort on the part of the individual to become aware of the divinity inherent in man. He said, “Let man remember his true nature – Divinity. Let it become a living realisation and everything else will follow – power, strength and manhood. He will again become a man”⁵.

The *Neo-Vedāntic* ideal has to be observed as a way of life. It recommends various spiritual and moral disciplines to be practiced in every day life with the sole aim of self-purification. For self-purification through self-discipline is essential for ultimate self-realization. The ultimate aim of the Philosophy and

Religion of *Neo-Vedānta* is to make man realize his own divinity i.e. to free man from the ills of life and also to realize his unity with the Ultimate. T. M. P. Mahadevan rightly observed, “the Supreme objective of *Advaita* is to urge man not to rest till he has realized the experience”.⁶ *Neo-Vedāntism* too upholds the same Vedantic ideal by prescribing a way of Life culminating in the vision of the Ultimate.

Neo-Vedānta laid emphasis on spiritual realization, which can be made possible by leading a life of detachment, love and compassion. The self has to be freed from worldly attachments. It also enjoins on the individual to render service not only to humans but to all living creatures. He asserted that all are ‘His creations’. According to Radhakrishnan, “Talk of compassion for beings... No, not compassion to *Jiva* (embodied beings), but service to them as Siva (God)”⁷. It was a recognized fact that service rendered to the poor and downtrodden are acts of worship of God. Renunciation if not coupled with service is utterly meaningless. Service rendered in the spirit of detachment alone leads to the realization of God. *Neo-Vedānta* had gone to the extent of considering service as a spiritual discipline of a high order for the attainment of self-realization. He has assigned top priority to selfless service in the scheme of things devised to attain the realization of *Brahman*. Stressing the importance of spiritually Vivekananda said, “The main spring of the strength of every race lies in its spirituality, and the death begins the day that spirituality wanes and materialism gains ground”.⁸

Another peculiarity of the *Neo-Vedāntic* ideal of service is that it is absolutely different from charity and humanitarianism as it is ordinarily understood. *Neo-Vedānta* recognize the dignity and divinity of the individual self and also its identity with God. Hence it is believed that man's bounden duty is to render service to the suffering millions. For him 'Service is Worship' and asserted that a true servant of man alone can be a true servant of God. Swami Vivekananda's Fundamental Humanism is radically different from all forms of Western Humanism. Swami Vivekananda's Humanism attempts to satisfy the cravings of the spiritualists, naturalists and religious men. Radhakrishnan remarked "a religion whose centre is man and not God is never a strong one".⁹

Swami Vivekananda through his own life and teachings set an example for the followers of all faiths and the entire rationalistic school of the Present Era. He had a total dislike for any 'isms' being attached to his name for a God fearing man it is impossible to have any 'isms' of his own. Swami Vivekananda built an edifice of the Philosophy and Religion of *Neo-Vedānta*, on the foundations laid down by his Master Sri Rama Krishna *Neo-Vedānta* was characterized as the movement of *Samanvaya* and *Avirodha* (synthesis and Reconciliation) and it was left to Vivekananda to build up the super-structure of Neo-vedanta on it.

Swami Vivekananda had always reminded people not to be carried away by materialism and Atheism. Instead he upholds the supremacy of the twin ideals of self-control and renunciation in all walks of life. It requires strenuous effort on the part of the individual to go through the different ordeals of the process of Self-

realization. The process in brief may be described as *Yoga*. It signifies 'discipline' and 'union'. Swami Vivekananda used the concept '*Yoga*' in the widest sense which includes its popular sense as well which signifies meditation through Postural adjustment. The aspirant is required to follow the discipline of his choice, consequently he should have the feeling of oneness or union with the Ultimate.

Various are the disciplines prescribed which relate itself to cognition, feeling, action or a synthesis of these three. All these ways are different paths converging to the same goal. They are not contradictory, but always complimentary to each other.

Of the four *Yogas* Swami Vivekananda laid special emphasis on *Karma-Yoga* for it provides a workable formula for all the ills of modern age. *Karma-Yoga*, Swami Vivekananda understood as a system of Ethics and Religion. It is mainly intended for attaining Freedom from selfishness. It is *Yoga* through *Karma*. All *Karma* is not *Yoga*. Desirelessness and faith in the Existence of the Highest Good are the special marks of *Karma-Yoga*. Desirelessness (*Niṣhkāmatva*) skill (*Kauśala*) and the belief in the Highest Good (*Āstikyabudhi*) are considered by Swami Vivekananda as the rules which regulate *Karma-Yoga* and are therefore considered as its very essence.

In Vivekananda's concept of *Karma-Yoga* there effects a synthesis between Service and Discipline. The ideal of Service is to be based on the ideal of

Renunciation and are considered as the two sides of the same coin. In *Karma-Yoga* one gives up one's body, mind and everything as an eternal sacrifice unto Lord and attains perfect peace.

***Karma-Yoga*:- Its Modern Relevance**

Karma-Yoga is the most instructive and inspiring doctrine of Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy and Religion. He was a *Karma-Yogi* Par excellence. He was indeed a 'cyclonic monk' with the mission of revolutionizing human life. He had demonstrated to the world through his own life and teachings the efficacy of the concept of *Karma-Yoga*. For him revolutionizing life meant moralizing and spiritualizing life. He was a man who ceaselessly worked for the moral and spiritual regeneration especially of the toiling millions of India. He was in fact a 'Genius' both of Intellect and Spirit.

He was not the originator of any new Philosophical System he was only an activist who extended it to every sphere of life. His mission consists in coming face to face with God through action in the form of Service to society. 'Service to man is Worship of God' formed the main spring of his life and message. All men according to him are 'His own Creation'. Hence no one can ever claim superiority over another. God fully expresses Himself very often in the lowliest of the low than in the mighty and the high. Man according to him is not the limited finite self as it is ordinarily understood to be but conceived as Śiva (God).

The greatest contribution of Swami Vivekananda lies in his new interpretation of *Vedānta* known as *Neo-Vedānta* which had a tremendous influence on people both of the East and the West. It is in essence a re-statement of the traditional *Vedānta* for the modern age – to satisfy the cravings of modern man. It is life giving and world affirming. It is essentially man-centered and therefore Humanistic. It appealed men of all religious faiths.

Spiritualism and Humanism are the whole-marks of his message. He was indeed a Spiritualist in the true sense of the term who lived and had his being with the name of God in his lips. He spiritualized everything that he come across including man. The description of Ultimate Reality in negative terms, as is common in the traditional approach did not appealed him much. In contrast he emphatically asserted the Reality of world and man. Negation is not bare negation but it is purposive. According to him negation is the first step in the awakening of thought. We have to give up ignorance and false hood and then truth will make its appearance. He said “ when we have grasped the truth, things which we gave up at first will take new shape and form, will appear to us in a new light and become deified”.¹⁰ In his views concerning the world, he fully endorses the *Vedāntic* ideal which says that “ the whole world is full of Lord. Open your eyes and see Him”.¹¹ His views range from the simple assertion that the Absolute has become the Universe and that it appears as the Universe. These contrasting views got resolved in a higher synthesis in Swami Vivekanada which is in conformity with the teachings of his Master.

The modern world is at cross-roads. It suffers from acute Moral and Spiritual bankruptcy. Swami Vivekananda appeared the Indian scene primarily to awaken the divinity inherent in man. Man has lost faith in himself and therefore also in God. According to him one need not go to places of worship to see God. But God is inherent in every man. This satisfies the cravings of the theist and atheist alike. Another tendency that is found in the modern world is too much leaning towards materialism, sensualism and atheism. Swami Vivekananda never forced to believe in a God imposed from outside. Belief in God is an 'inspired belief'. It is the recognition of the innate divinity and goodness of man is a life that is worth living. One can find solace in oneself. Man has infinite powers bestowed on him which has to be utilized for rendering selfless Service to society. For according to him service tinged with spiritualism works wonders and invite drastic changes throughout the globe.

Karma-Yoga according to Swami Vivekananda stood for the gospel of work to be discharged in the spirit of Renunciation. It is one of the paths prescribed for the realization of the spirit. *Karma- Yoga* is the expression of vital energy to be utilized for the sole aim of spiritual self-development. It enhances self-confidence and consequently the aspirant can perceive the path of *Karma-Yoga* very easily.

Further the ideal of *Karma-Yoga* had tremendous mass appeal and therefore has immense value. In order to practice *Karma-Yoga* one need not believe in God, religion, cult or in any doctrine whatsoever. It can be practiced by

the same measure even by an atheist. Its universal appeal is evident from the fact that even a non-believer in God can practice it. It is the merit of *Karma-Yoga* that it enhances the feeling of one-ness among human beings by braking the barriers between religions, casts, sex and even nationalities. The sole aim of *Karma-Yoga* is to attain selflessness in action. Actions were performed not for the satisfaction of narrow selfish interest but for the fulfillment of a supreme purpose. The motive force behind the performance of action is not the result of the action but rather it is performed for its own sake. By constant practice one attains skill and proficiency in the discharge of selfless action for the goodness and well being of others.

By constant practice and steadfast loyalty the *Karma-Yogi* gains mastery over himself. He keeps his mind steady and in perfect equilibrium both in pleasure and pain. Nothing will haunt his mind. He was no longer attracted buy 'I' and 'Mine'; everything is 'Thou'. A *Karma-Yogi* can ever remain happy and contended. He was no longer moved by the problems of ordinary life. He live and have his being in this world and remain unaffected by it, for a true *Karma-Yogi* 'Work is Worship'.

The *Karma-Yogi* is proficient in the art and science of discharging duties. He fully concentrates on duties alone and never the results thereof. The whole-hearted devotion and concentration on work may lose sight of oneself and become one with work i.e. itself a '*Samādhi*'-wherein one feels or experiences one-ness with work. Renunciation in action is the keynotes of the entire message

of Swami Vivekananda. Renunciation of the desire for the fruit of action is nothing but *Yoga* which is an 'Art of living'. The same idea is stated in the *Gīta* as "Don't do this, but eat action itself, drink action itself, digest action itself"¹²

The ideal of *Karma-Yoga* influences both personal and social life. It did not merely aim at personal salvation alone. In it there effects a synthesis between individual salvation and social self-realization. Personal salvation unmindful of social perfection is immoral and non-spiritual. Swami Vivekananda upholding the ideal of divinity of self and Salvation of Humanity said, "You will go to hell if you seek your own salvation. Seek salvation for others if you want to reach the highest ! kill out the desire for personal *Mukti* that is the greatest of all *Sādhana*."¹³ The 'Salvation of Humanity' stands united with the gospel of Universal love, Service, Unity and Harmony. The ideal of 'Salvation of Humanity' is Swami Vivekananda's unique contribution to Humanity at large which can stand to the test of time. This noble message will remain beacon-light for generations to come. The reconciliation thus effected marks the final or the ultimate stage of *Karma-Yoga* wherein one dedicates one's own salvation at the altar of Divine Love of Humanity.

To the spirit of the *Neo-Vedāntic* ideal of *Karma-Yoga* Swami Vivekananda extended love of the Mother India. He recognized Nationality as a *Dharma* and as a means to salvation. *Neo-Vedāntic* nationalism was not based on political or economic considerations. On the contrary it has spiritual and religious approach to nationalism. It also stood for the dynamic spirit of Nationality.

According to Swami Vivekananda 'practical *Vedānta* ' could be the foundation of strong and vigorous national power. The leaders should declare national *Dharma* above the personal and local *Dharma*. To have this Sannyasa spirit i.e. entire renunciation of self-interest, making the little self absolutely at one with the great self or Mother India'. He conceived national Integration and unity as a step towards universal self hood. It satisfies the demand of both intellect and the needs of humanity reconciling the traditional *Vedāntic* truth with the new world perspective. The religion and Philosophy of Neo-*Vedānta* finds its best expression in the following passage, " this movement indeed constitutes a challenge to the best and the highest everywhere in the world across the barriers of nationality, religion, politics or race."¹⁴

Concerning the utility of *Karma-Yoga* Swami Vivekananda said, "*Karma-Yoga* is the knowledge of the secret of work.... We learn from *Karma-Yoga* the secret of work, the method of work, the organising power of work. A vast amount of energy may be spent in vain, if we do not know how to utilize it *Karma-Yoga* makes a science of work, you learn by it how best to utilize all the working of this world."¹⁵

Karma-Yoga thus has immense practical value for it is engaged in the greatest mission of the 'spiritual re-making of man'. Modern man in the midst of uncertainty in every work of life, the ideal of *Karma-Yoga* throws a ray of hope and optimism. Man by his own strenuous efforts can succeed in life if strictly adhered to the ideal of *Karma-Yoga* in letter and spirit. The ideal of *Karma-Yoga*

imparts the knowledge of the 'great book of life' which is absolutely absent in the Libraries. Hence the clarion call "Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached" by following which every one of us can accomplish great things in the world.¹⁶

A CRITICAL ESTIMATE

Swami Vivekananda had made an attempt to redefine 'Religion', 'Divinity' and 'Spirituality' by preaching and practicing a philosophy of life founded on *Karma-Yoga*. Swami himself was a *Karma-yogi* par excellence who worked ceaselessly for the moral and spiritual regeneration of his country men. The action-oriented philosophy that he expounded stood the test of time. He found no incompatibility between Activism and search for the Absolute. Swami Vivekananda described the process involved in the realization of the absolute in one word namely 'Yoga'. He recommended four different *Yogas* taking into consideration the human nature. The paths are not rigid, mechanistic principles enforced from outside. It provides ample freedom to choose the path one likes but the observance of these paths demands devotion and sincerity on his part to ensure complete success. Swami's coining of the term 'Triveni' justify his assertion that the different *Yogas* are not rival paths but are complimentary to each other. According to him these paths though different lead to the same goal.

One of the notable features of his action-oriented philosophy is his belief in *Jivan-mukthi*. He had brought out in clear terms the distinction between *Jivan-*

mukthi and *Videha-mukthi*. At the same time he had not completely ruled out the possibility of *Sarva-mukthi* (Universal salvation). He never considered individual liberation as a step towards *Sāva-mukthi*. He believed that it is possible for everyone to attain spiritual growth and development. Swami Vivekananda through his philosophy of life had instilled in the mind of men a hope and awakening to rekindle the spark of the divinity inherent in man.

The Action-oriented philosophy of Swami Vivekananda is not beyond criticisms. The critics try to minimise his importance by pointing out that his views lack originality. According to them the philosophy of *Yoga* was already in vogue and Swami has borrowed these methods from the members of the Brahma-Samaj. Swami Vivekananda responded to this criticism in his own characteristic style. The answer to this criticism is not far to seek. The Swami had emphatically rejected the contention of the critics and in a letter to Prof. Henry John Wright on 24th May 1894, he wrote, "I never identified myself any way with Mazoondar's party chief".¹⁷ Swami developed the conception of *Yoga* borrowed from his own contemporaries is not true to facts. On the contrary he picked up these different paths from the ancient Hindu scriptures, *Bhagavat-Gīta*, and *Pātañjali Yoga-sūtras*.

Another line of criticism came from the orthodox followers of *Advaita-Vedānta* who reacted against Swami's too much emphasis on 'Practical action' for them every thing including service belongs to the realm of *Māya*. Hence the *advaitins* demanded a thorough break from the tradition of the 'practical' and

confined themselves to abstract monistic Idealism. Against this abstract intellectual pursuit Swami Vivekananda retorted, “well in that case even liberation is *Māya*. *Vedanata* teaches us that the *Ātman* is eternally free. Why, then should we strive for liberation?” The very idea of liberation through escape from active social life had very little impact on him. He on the contrary appealed the common people to Plunge into the world..... and learn the secret of work”¹⁸.

Further human life is full of action and inaction on the other hand signifies lifelessness. Inaction according to Swami Vivekananda amounts to the lack of faith in oneself. Without faith in oneself one can have faith neither in others nor in God. Man came to be treated as both a ‘sinner’ and ‘helpless being at the mercy of God’ by the theistic faiths. The development of theism in India witnessed the growth and development of Humanism at the same time. Humanism assigned primacy to the human soul and believed that the soul is the ‘dwelling place of the Divine’. Swami Vivekananda never lost sight of the divinity and glory of human nature. In an exclusive interview at New York in 1895, Swami said, ‘Never forget the glory of human nature. Let each one of us declare ‘I am the greatest God that ever was or will be’. According to him true religion should unfold itself divinity inherent in men.

According to Swami Vivekananda the philosophy of *Advaita-vedānta* can never be interpreted as preaching the ideal of the devaluation of human nature. This resulted from the self-sided and partial understanding of the main tenant of

Advaita-Vedanta. According to him the *Advaita-Vedānta* had attempted at restoring the lost faith of the glory and greatness of human nature. The Swami says “*Vedānta* does not ask us to prostrate ourselves. It tells us, Lift up your head. Each one of you carries God within. Be worthy of Him”¹⁹. He further declared “If God is in me why should I accept the indignities of the world? Rather it is my business to abolish them”²⁰.

Swami Vivekananda’s faith in the divinity of man and its realisation by the practice of *Yoga* evoked the following comment from Romain Rolland “I rightly condemn the Indian Yogin for talking as proud apart nobody as yet has been able to prove experimentally”. Continuing further he said “I am well aware that Sri Arabindo Ghose, who has devoted years of his life to these researches in absolute seclusion from the world, has, it is said achieved ‘realizations’ that are destined to transform the realm of the mind, as it is known to the present. But while credit must be given to his philosophic genius, we are waiting for the discoveries amounted by his encourage to be presented the full light of scientific investigation”²¹.

Swami Vivekananda responded the stringent criticism as follows: to quote the Swami himself “we dare not say that it is possible. We can only say we do not know how it happens. Material scientist have no right to say that things like this are not possible; they can only say, ‘we do not know’”²².

According to Swami the scientists are no way qualified to evaluate the 'Spiritual' and 'Divine' realms. There are innumerable yogins who had developed extra-ordinary powers by the practice of *Yoga*. Only a true *Karma-Yogin* is the fully qualified person to evaluate the intuitive powers which are outcome of the Yogic practice. Swami Vivekananda had proved through his sole life the wonderful powers he had developed by living a life of a true *Karma-Yogi*. Thus Swami was of the opinion that "Yoga cannot be taught in lectures, for it is life and life can only convey life"²³. Thus to him *Yoga* is a matter of experience which has to be lived.

Swami Vivekanandas attempt at reinterpreting Religion and Spirituality for the modern age in terms of Activism and Service was well received by the people of the East and the West. It assigned man a supreme consideration and instilled him the spirit of activism in the service to humanity. It satisfies the cravings of the theist and atheist alike. He had preached and practiced a philosophy which harmoniously integrates all the different aspects of Religion namely Philosophy, Emotion, Work and Mysticism, the realisation of which according to him is made possible by the practice of *Yoga* which includes within its fold the Worker the Mystic, the Lover and the Philosopher. The ideal of *Karma-Yoga* with its emphasis in Love and Service reminds one Swami Vivekananda's poem *To Awakened India*,

“Awake, arise and dream no more!

This is the land of dreams, where *Karma*

Weaves unthreaded garlands with our thoughts

Of flowers sweet or noxious.....

.....

.....

.....

Or, if you cannot, dream, but true at dreams

Which are Eternal Love and Service²⁴

NOTES

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