

DISCUSSIONS

A NOTE ON THE CONCEPT OF YOGA

In what follows, I wish to point out certain gross misunderstandings and abysmal ignorance on the part of the author of the article entitled "Patanjali's Aṣṭāṅga Yoga."¹ The author argues that the word "Yoga" is misleading because it is used in many ways. This expression is combined with such words as *Jñāna*, *Karma*, *Bhakti*, *Aṣṭāṅga* and *Hatha* so as to form compound words like *Jñāna Yoga*, *Karma Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* and *Hatha Yoga*. The author's worry is that this multifarious use of the word "Yoga", leads to unclarity and confusion. I wish to ask the author only one question in this connection. On what basis does the author say so? What are his arguments for it? Possibly, he bases his statement not on arguments but on misunderstanding and ignorance. Multifarious use of an expression does not necessarily lead to confusion. Rather, it leads to clarity in the sense that it specifies that the expression in its different uses does not stand for the same thing.

The author maintains that the Yoga system is neither a philosophy nor a religion. I wish to point out that the author, in this connection, betrays abysmal ignorance of the original text of the Yoga system of Patanjali. Does the author maintain that the term "Yoga", as a matter of fact, has not been used in India to stand for a system of philosophy and religion or does he maintain that the Patanjali Yoga does not contain any such thing? In either case, his contentions are obviously false and cannot be accepted. As a matter of fact, the Yoga system of Patanjali not only elaborates sophisticated types of Yogic practices but it contains very subtle and sophisticated discussion on the nature of mind, its different modes, self and God. Are not these discussions philosophical? When the author claims that Yoga is not a philosophy he perhaps has in his mind different Yogic exercises. Is there anybody who says that the Yogic exercises are a system of philosophy? It seems that the author is afraid of his own shadow. He first imagines a

1. V. K. Bhardwaja—"The Concept of Patanjali's Aṣṭāṅga Yoga," *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. VIII No. 3, April (1981).

ghost and then tries to exercise it. If he maintains that the methods of *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* are not a philosophical system it is as good as saying that cultivating a piece of land is not doing philosophy. If the author means to say that the term "Yoga" either singly or in combination with other terms does not, as a matter of fact, stand for any system of philosophy he is absolutely mistaken. We fail to understand as to how he is blind to the obvious fact that *Jñāna Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga* and *Karma Yoga* contain systematic and very sophisticated philosophical discussions.

The author unnecessarily criticises the historians of Indian philosophy for their treatment of Yoga as a system of philosophy. This criticism of the author betrays complete ignorance of the deep philosophical problems of the Yoga sutra.

The author again maintains that the Yoga is not a religion. What does he mean by this? Does he mean to say that Yogic practices never constitute a part of religions traditions in India? The author perhaps knows, fortunately or unfortunately, that 'religion' in India is used in a very wide sense and as a matter of fact many religious sects and movements have incorporated Yogic practices in their pursuit of religious ideal.

The author apparently makes a very strong claim that Yoga is just a value-neutral technology. He also does not spell out arguments in support of his blunt statement. What does he mean by value-neutral technology? If he means that no technology is wedded to any value whatsoever, he is absolutely wrong and utterly confused. Yogic practices and Yogic exercises surely have an ideal or objective to achieve. The objective is either to achieve the equanimity of mind or *Kaivalya* etc. or whatever the case may be.

Neither the *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* of Patanjali nor the internal Yoga of Sri Aurobindo are growths from the scratch. They have been linked up with a theory of man, mind, world and the highest ideal of life. The author has miserably failed to take note of these aspects of Yoga.

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