

DIFFERENT DESTINATIONS OF DIFFERENT YOGA PRACTITIONERS

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Abstract

There are different types of yoga. Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Raj Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Astanga Yoga, Bhakti Yoga have been mentioned several times in Bhagavad Gita and other Indian Philosophical Systems. Bhardwaj (2019) says that whether they be karma yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga or raja yoga, they pave the way for the lifting up of human consciousness to a higher and nobler realm of light, love and life with divine harmony and joy. The term “yoga ladder” is under explored in the academic world and otherwise. A lot of in-depth research has been done on yoga and different types of yoga but the term “yoga ladder” remains untapped.¹⁸ According to Prabhupada (1972) “The process of linking oneself with the Supreme is called yoga. It may be compared to a ladder for attaining the topmost spiritual realization. This ladder begins from the lowest material condition of the living entity and rises up to perfect self-realization in pure spiritual life. According to various elevations, different parts of the ladder are known by different names. But all in all, the complete ladder is called yoga and may be divided into three parts, namely Jnana-yoga, Dhyana-yoga and Bhakti-yoga.”

Bhardwaj (2019) gives various definitions of yoga in his paper “The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root ‘yuj’, which means to yoke or to unite. Shukla, B. (2016) says in later times, however, another technical meaning came to be associated with the term, and this is derived from “yujirsamadhu”, which means “contemplation”, or “absorption”. The oldest use of the word yoga, as found in the vedic literature, Atharvaveda indicates a union of various things. (ii) Shukla, B. (2016) says The Kathopanishada states: “The supreme path begins when the five senses and the mind are stilled and when the intellect is silent. This tranquility of the senses is yoga. (iii) The Yoga Vashistha defines yoga “as a device by which one go across the ocean of suffering.

While there exists a lot of research papers and thesis separately on yoga and on each one of the yoga systems including Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Astanga Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, there exists a gap of a work which ties up all these yoga systems and explains the connections between them. As quoted above, Prabhupada (1972) says that the complete ladder is called yoga and therefore there exists a deep connection between the yoga systems, a connection hitherto not explored academically. What would be benefits of knowing this connection? A lot of things would be clear. Presently, there exists a misconception that a practitioner can take up to any yoga system they prefer or find convenient. Or that all yoga systems are the same or lead to the same destination. Bhardwaj (2019) concludes in his paper by saying” There are different paths of yoga, all leading to the same goal of self-realization. All the paths of yoga are like different spokes of a wheel, they all meet at the same centre: self-realization.” While this conclusion has some element of truth in it that self realization does occur in all systems as an intermediate goal, the statement is not true in its entirety. The analogy of a

ladder more suits to the paths of yoga rather than the spokes of a wheel. This work aims to prove the same through further research on the matter.

Keywords: yoga ladder, destination of yogis, different yoga systems

INTRODUCTION

The word “Yoga” is a Sanskrit word and is derived from the root word “yuj” which as per Saraswati, S. S., & Hiti, J. K. (1996) means “to attach, join, harness, yoke. Dasgupta, S. (1975) writes that Panini a Sanskrit renowned grammarian in ancient times said that the term “yoga” can be derived from either of two roots: yujir yoga (to yoke) or yuj samādhau "to concentrate". Bryant, E. F. (2015) quotes Vyasadev defining the term “Yoga” as meaning Samadhi or absolute concentration.

Vivekananda, S. (1982) says “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. Both the goal and the methods employed for reaching it are called Yoga, a word derived from the same Sanskrit root as the English "yoke", meaning "to join", to join us to our reality, God”.

A common misunderstanding about the Bhagavad Gita is that all paths lead to the same goal. All paths or Yoga systems do not give the same results or destinations. Rather, Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita states and describes each Yoga system and then, ultimately recommends the best system to reach the ultimate destination.

METHODOLOGY

This paper employs the descriptive and analytical method as the methodology for research. Using hermeneutics, the study derives the different destinations yogis attain from the Vedic scripture Bhagavad Gita, one of the widely read scriptures of the world.

DESTINATION OF A BHAKTI YOGI

Bhakti-yoga gives a result beyond the guṇas. Lord Krishna says, "I consider those who worship me, desiring to associate with me constantly, absorbing their minds in me, endowed with faith beyond the guṇas, to be the best knowers of yoga.” Thakura, S. V. C. (2003). Faith in the performance of bhakti, which is directly connected with Lord Krishna, is beyond the guṇas. Towards the end of Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna asks how a person might surpass the guṇas. Lord Krishna replies in Bhagavad Gita 14.26 that one surpasses the guṇas by the method of bhakti-yoga. This bhakti must be pure, or unalloyed. That is, it must not be mixed with the desire to enjoy this material world or even to merge with Brahman or obtain mystic powers.

He again explaining that māyā endowed with guṇas is his energy, Kṛṣṇa emphasizes that those who surrender to him alone surpass the material world. Eternality is a characteristic of ananya-bhakti. Krishna uses the word eternal to describe bhakti. This means that any bhakti performed gives its results eternally. Unlike the credits for pious acts one earns by karma-kāṇḍa, bhakti credits are never exhausted but stay eternally. Rūpa Gosvāmī explores this concept in depth in the Bhakti-rasāmṛtasindhu. He explains that bhakti is eternally present in the spiritual world six and appears thirty six within the soul by Krishna’s spiritual energy.

This awakening is called bhāva-bhakti. The cit energy, which is Kṛiṣṇa's personal energy divides into knowledge and bliss and gives the devotee spiritual happiness and direct perception of Kṛiṣṇa. Thus bhakti is Kṛiṣṇa's own gift to the devotee, an eternal gift beyond the guṇas. Ananya or unalloyed pure bhakti awards personal service to Kṛiṣṇa. The destination of the ananya bhakti yogīs is explained the ananya bhaktas do not take birth again in the world of suffering, but rather attain the highest goal of personal service to Krishna. These devotees are endowed with love for Krishna in one of four relationships: servitorship, friendship (e.g., Arjuna, as mentioned), parenthood (e.g., Vasudeva and Devakī, his parents), and romantic love (e.g., Krishna's wives) Thakura, S. V. C. (2003).

DESTINATION OF A KARMA YOGI

Now coming back to the results and destinations attained by different yogis, let us discuss about Karma yoga. The question is can karma-yoga by itself allow the performer to escape the cycle of birth and death? No. Even though karma-yoga is connected with Lord Krishna through the offering of results to him, it cannot by itself enable the soul to go beyond the guṇas, because it is a process under the guṇas. Lord Krishna explains that niṣkāma-karma-yoga is in sattva-guṇa or the mode of goodness. Basically, Karma-yoga is a work-in-progress that purifies the performer and does not allow the Karmic reactions to bind him. In Karma yoga, there arises knowledge of the soul which actually arises from sattva. But this knowledge cannot deliver the yogī from the material world. In other words, the Karma Yogis, if they remain a Karma Yogi and do not make further progress will take birth again and continue their practice of Karma Yoga in their next birth. In order to get liberation from this world, one must along with Karma Yoga, take to Jnana Yoga, Astanga Yoga or Bhakti Yoga. Karma Yoga brings detachment from the material world but there also has to be attachment to the spiritual world. Karma-yoga cannot elevate the soul beyond the guṇas.

DESTINATION OF A JNANA YOGI

The next question is what is the destination of a Jnana Yogi? Jnana-yoga is a process in the mode of goodness or Sattva guna. Lord Krishna says the knowledge by which one undivided spiritual nature is seen in all living entities, though they are divided into innumerable forms, you should understand to be in the mode of goodness. Maya, the illusory potency of the Lord has two energies, Vidya and Avidya. In Jnana-yoga the destruction of avidyā (ignorance) by vidyā (knowledge) occurs, but both are material energies. The destruction of avidyā can reveal the soul, but that is not sufficient for liberation or to go beyond the guṇas. Therefore, like karma-yoga, Jnana-yoga by itself cannot allow the soul to escape the guṇas. Jnana-yoga has to be mixed with little bit of bhakti which can then lead to Brahman. Brahman is also known as Brahmajyoti or the effulgence coming out of the spiritual body of the Supreme Lord. The little bit of Bhakti which a Jnana Yogi must develop is by worshiping, who is an expansion of Lord Krishna in the material world existing in the hearts of living entities and in every atom Thakura, S. V. C. (2003).

How a Jnana Yogi progresses towards Brahman is given in the fifth chapter of Bhagavad Gita. First he practices Niskama Karma Yoga to purify himself. As a result of this,

Jnana (knowledge of the soul) arises. If after this stage some bhakti arises for gaining knowledge of Paramātmā, then by the appearance of that knowledge the Jnana-yogī experiences Brahman. Moreover, at the end of life the Jnana -yogī merges into Brahman. This merging also requires bhakti, as Kṛṣṇa emphasizes in the eleventh chapter: “Only by ananya-bhakti is it possible to know me, see me, or even merge with me, O Arjuna.” The small amount of eternal bhakti that remains in the Jnani at death gives him a result of going beyond the guṇas and merging into Brahman. When vidyā (knowledge) destroys avidyā, one achieves direct experience of the soul. In his commentary Thakura, S. V. C. (2003) explains that with the destruction of avidyā, the yogī must also surrender vidyā to Krishna. When vidyā ceases thus, the trace of bhakti that was hidden in the yogī’s practices becomes manifested. Then again he explains that by the function of this bhakti there is experience of Brahman and subsequent merging into Brahman at death: “Only by bhakti can a person know me as Brahman. Then knowing me as Brahman, by that bhakti he merges with me.”

All Jnana Yogis do not attain the above described liberation. Those Jnana Yogis who are offensive in nature and attack the form of the Lord, saying that God has no form are not liberated. Prabhupada (1972) says in “Unintelligent men, who do not know Me perfectly, think that I, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krishna, was impersonal before and have now assumed this personality. Due to their small knowledge, they do not know My higher nature, which is imperishable and supreme.” Thus those who think that Krishna’s form, birth, activities and pastimes are all material are offensive towards Him. Similarly Prabhupada (1972) says “Fools deride Me when I descend in the human form. They do not know My transcendental nature as the Supreme Lord of all that be. The result of such thinking is given...” Those who are thus bewildered are attracted by demonic and atheistic views. In that deluded condition, their hopes for liberation, their fruitive activities, and their culture of knowledge are all defeated.” Thakura, S. V. C. (2003) says Meaning the Jnana Yogis who think Krishna’s form is material are offensive towards Him and do not get liberated.

Thakura, S. V. C. (2003) explains in the commentary on Bhagavad gita that some Jnana Yogis practice Jnana Yoga mixed with bhakti, knowing that they cannot attain liberation by Jnana yoga alone. However, these Jnana yogis think that God’s form is a product of Maya and is made of the guṇas. However God’s form is not material and those who think he is an ordinary human being with a material body cannot know him. These Jnana yogis cannot go beyond the guṇas; they stay in the material world. Only Jnana yogis who accept the eternal nature of God’s birth and activities are liberated by merging into Brahman.²⁶

Why does Krishna not give the same destination for all his seekers? The answer lies. There Krishna says “As all surrender unto Me, I reward them accordingly. Everyone follows My path in all respects, O son of Prtha, Prabhupada (1972). So those who accept Krishna’s form, pastimes etc as eternal are rewarded by Him. And those who reject Him continue to be in that illusion. Thus Krishna is not partial but reciprocal. There is one another category of Jnana Yogis, who worship Krishna’s form and accept it but they consider the form as a

product of Maya. This is also offensive and therefore these Jnana Yogis also do not attain liberation. Prabhupada (1972).

DESTINATION OF AN ASTANGA YOGI

What is the destination of the Astanga Yogis is the next topic for discussion. In Sarartha Varsini Tika, a commentary on Bhagavad Gita, Thakura, S. V. C. (2003) mentions that the astanga-yogi merges into Brahman with the help of bhakti. Lord Krishna briefly touches upon aṣṭāṅga-yoga. Again, he explains that the astanga-yogi attains Brahman liberation by obtaining knowledge of Paramātmā through bhakti, similar to the Jnana-yogīs.²⁸ He explains how during the practice of yogic posture, the aṣṭāṅga-yogī should meditate on Paramatma and remain absorbed in devotion to him. By this devotion, in the final stage of samādhi (trance) the astanga-yogi, aided by Paramatma, experiences the bliss of seeing Paramatma and realizes himself as the soul.

CONCLUSION

We have already discussed the processes other than Bhakti yoga give result only when they are mixed with at least a pinch of Bhakti. The result of Karma kanda is good facilities in this life and utmost a temporary vacation in the Heavenly planets after which one comes back to the earthly planets. The result of a successful Karma yogi is Jnana Yoga. The result of Jnana Yoga and Astanga Yoga is impersonal liberation, merging into Brahman or Brahmajyoti.

Now we can discuss the results of Pradhanabhuta Bhakti or processes where Bhakti is predominant but may be mixed with Karma, Jnana, desire for siddhis etc. In Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna describes two types of mixed devotees, or bhaktas: the Karma Misra Bhakta and the Jnana Misra Bhakta. Devotees who seek knowledge, material benefits, or relief from suffering are Karma Misra Bhaktas. What happens to the Karma Misra Bhaktas? After they attain their respective material desires and are purified of them, they attain the spiritual planets which are different from the Brahmajyoti or Brahman. The spiritual planets are floating in the Brahmajyoti just like the material planets are floating in the sunlight. Thakura, S. V. C. (2003) says that, Lord Krishna confirms that the Karma Misra Bhaktas attain the spiritual planets, from which one does not fall down again to this material world.

Further Thakura, S. V. C. (2003) says that the result of Jnana misra Bhakti is to attain Santa rasa in the spiritual planets. Jnana Misra Bhaktas use the process of Jnana to control the mind rather than using the process of Bhakti such as the nine processes of Bhakti like hearing, chanting, remembering etc.

The Yoga Misra Bhakta is described a yogi who is a devotee predominantly but uses the process of astanga yoga in order to fix his mind on God at the time of death. He also attains the spiritual planets. Three more types of devotees, inferior to those we have discussed. These are those Jnanis, who worship themselves, considering themselves nondifferent from God; who worship secondary forms like the devatas as nondifferent from God; and who worship the universal form or the Viratarupa as the totality of everything in the universe. These devotees achieve Brahman liberation.

The destination of the Bhakti yogis or ananya-bhakti yogis is explained in Bhagavad Gita etc. The ananya-bhaktas do not take birth again in the world of suffering, but rather attain the highest goal of personal service to God. These devotees are endowed with love for God in one of four relationships: servitorship, friendship (e.g., Arjuna, mentioned), parenthood (e.g., Vasudeva and Devakī, his parents), and romantic love (e.g., Kṛṣṇa's wives).

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