



International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)

A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal

ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)

ISJN: A4372-3142 (Online) ISJN: A4372-3143 (Print)

Volume-VII, Issue-II, March 2021, Page No. 159-163

Published by Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

DOI: 10.29032/ijhsss.v6.i4.2020.1-8

Prāṇāyāma in Patañjali's Work- A Yogic Way to Enhance Vital Energy

Nilufa Yesmin

*State Aided College Teacher (SACT) of Kabi Joydeb Mahavidyalaya, Illamabazar,
Birbhum, West Bengal, India*

Abstract

The yoga system is one of the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy. Its exponent being Patañjali, it is called Pātañjala darśana. . However, yoga has its philosophic roots in the system of the Sāṃkhyas and it is from them that Patañjali drew on to write Yogasūtra which dated back to fourth to second century BCE. The yoga system devotes itself mainly to yoga, popularly known as rājayoga. As Patañjali says, “yogaścittavṛitti nirodha”, i.e., it is restraining the stuff of mind from taking various forms. There is a definite process for restraining them. Thus, yoga in Pātañjala yoga is a process or a path consisting of eight limbs : ‘yama’, ‘niyama’, ‘āsana’, ‘prāṇāyāma’, ‘pratyāhāra’, ‘dhāranā’, dhyāna and samādhi. Among those eight limbs this paper will concentrate upon the fourth one, i.e., prāṇāyāma. In the second pāda of “Yogasūtra” there are five sūtra-s (2.49 to 2.53) concerning prāṇāyāma. Naturally, those five sūtra-s will be elaborately exposed in this paper. In Pātañjala Sūtra what we have are some glimpses of how we can develop our physical health and attain our spiritual goal by exercising prāṇāyāma as increasing spiritual energy, stress relief, relaxation techniques, mental and emotional alleviation. But in several commentaries of “Yogasūtra” and in several writings of modern thinkers, we have an improvement upon those sūtra-s, as envisaged by Patañjali. This paper will also concentrate upon this improvement in order that we can show how prāṇāyāma can be used for gratifying the increasing needs of the day at every step of our diurnal life.

Keywords: Yoga, eight limb, Prāṇāyāma, spiritual energy, diurnal life, relaxation techniques.

Philosophers belonging to different systems of Indian Philosophy do not use the term ‘yoga’ in the same sense. The word yoga originated from the Sanskrit word yuj, which means “to yoke, unite, or join. Etymologically it means ‘union’, i.e., spiritual union of the individual soul with the Universal soul- to achieve a balanced life. The Vedānta accepts this etymological meaning. Again, the Gītā defines yoga as a state than which there is nothing higher or worth realizing. A person, who is in such a state is never shaken even by the greatest pain. Such a state which is free from all pain and misery is called yoga by the Gītā. But for Patañjali it does not mean any union. It is just an endeavor, a spiritual endeavor to attain perfection through controlling the body, senses and mind, and through right discrimination between Puruṣa and Prakṛti.

It is certain that yoga is intimately allied to the *Sāṃkhya* system. Yet, both the *Sāṃkhya* and the *Yoga* do not mean the same thing by the word 'yoga'. In *Patañjala Yoga*, *yoga* means spiritual action, but the *Sāṃkhya* means knowledge by it, whereas the *Sāṃkhya* is theoretical, *Patañjala Yoga* is practical. Thus both the systems may be treated as the theoretical and practical aspects of the same system. *Patañjala Yoga* accepts the metaphysics and epistemology of the *Sāṃkhya*. Scilicet, It adopts the *Sāṃkhya* metaphysics and adds to it the concept of God; and that is why it is called the *Seśvara Sāṃkhya*. It shows the practical path by following which one can attain *vivekajñāna* leading to *kaivalya*, i.e., liberation. It also accepts three *pramāṇa*-s such as perception, inference and testimony, and also the twenty five metaphysical principles of the *Sāṃkhya*. *Patañjalāh Yoga* believes in God as well as the highest Self, distinct from other selves. That is why it is called 'Seśvara Sāṃkhya' or 'theistic Sāṃkhya', as distinct from the classical *Sāṃkhya* which is atheistic by nature.

Patañjali's *Yoga-sutra* is split into four *pāda*-s or chapters. The first is called *Samādhi-pāda*, it deals with the nature and aim of concentration. The second is *Sādhana-pāda*, it deals with the means of realisation of this aim. The third, *Vibhūtipāda*, explains the supra-normal powers attainable through yoga. The last one is *kaivalya-pāda*, it is a description of the nature of liberation and the reality of the transcendental self.

The *yoga*, which Patañjali speaks of in his *Yoga-sūtra*, consists of eight limbs, as: 'yama', 'niyama', 'āsana', 'prāṇāyāma', 'pratyāhāra', 'dhāranā', 'dhyāna' and 'samādhi'. So, *Prāṇāyāma* is the fourth limb among them. Patañjali is concerned with it in the second *pāda* of his book. This *pāda* consists of fifty-five *sūtra*-s. Among them only four *sūtra*-s (2.49-2.52) deal with concept of *Prāṇāyāma*. An exposition of those *sūtra*-s may be given as follows as an initial commitment of this paper. Before we begin this exposition we must keep it in mind that *Pātañjala yoga* is called *rājayoga*. This was given by Swami Vivekananda in the nineteenth century. It is Swami Vivekananda who equated *rājayoga* with *Pātañjala yoga*.¹ Now in the contemporary times, everybody has conviction about yoga practices towards the preservation, maintenance and promotion of health. Yoga has spread all over the world by the teachings of great personalities like Swami Shivananda, Swami Prabhananda, Swami Kriyananda, Swami Satyananda Sarasvati and the like.

But in order to have a full grasp of *Prāṇāyāma* we cannot overlook the three limbs—*yama*, *niyama* and *āsana* preceding *Prāṇāyāma*. Thus a very briefly exposition of those three limbs will be added to this discussion.

Yama : It includes five vows—*ahimsā*, *satya*, *asteya*, *brahmacarya* and *aparigraha*. *Ahimsā* is abstention from violence in thought, word and deed. *Satya* means abstention from falsehood, it consists in word and mind corresponding to facts. *Asteya* is abstention from stealing, the abstinence from this in the shape of absence of desire therefore, is *Asteya*. *Brahmacarya* means abstention from passions and lust, that means the control of the secret generative organs, finally *Aparigraha* means abstention from avarice, it consists in the non-acceptance of any objects, that means the control of the senses.

Niyama : *Niyama* is a kind of self-culture. It includes external, consists in the removal of impure objects by means of clay and water etc., and the internal purification, in the removal of the impurities of the mind (*śauca*). contentment, consists in the absence of any desire to achieve things other than those that are near at hand (*santoṣa*).

austerity or discipline (*tapas*), study or the repetition of the *praṇava* it consists the communion with the desired *deity* (*svādhyāya*) and devotion to God—the offering of all actions to the supreme and worshipful (*īśvarapraṇidhāna*).

Āsana : *Āsana* is steady and comfortable posture. There are various types of postures, there are *Padmāsana*, *Veerāsana*, *Bhadrāsana*, *Svastikāsana*, *Dandāsana*, *Paryankāsana*, *Hastanishādāsana*, *Ushtranishadasana*, *Shirasukhāsana*, *Kraunchanishadasana*, *Samasansthanasana* etc. They provide physical help to meditation. *Āsana*, in fact, is the discipline of the body.

These three things, i.e., *yama*, *niyama* and *āsana* being pursued *Prāṇāyāma* begins. After having secured stability in the *Asanas* a person should try the *pranayama*. So, Patañjali says, “*tasmīn satiśvāsapraśvā-sayoḥ gativicchedaḥ*”,² it means control of breath and deals with, *puraka kumbhaka*, and *rechaka* i.e., inhalation, retention and exhalation respectively.

The second aphorism of Patañjali concerning *Prāṇāyāma* reads as follows : “*bāhyabhyantarāḥ stambhāvṛtīḥ deśakāla saṃkhyābhīḥ paridr̥ṣṭa dirghas-ookshmaḥ*”.³ That *Prāṇāyāma* is again defined in three levels in this aphorism. It means that three forms of motion of this *prāṇāyāma* are, one by which we pull the breath in—its external operation *bāhya vṛtti*, another by which we throw it out—its internal operation *ābhyantara vṛtti* and the third action is when the breath is held in the lungs or stopped from entering the lungs—its suspension *stambavṛtti*. Its modifications are observed space, time, long and subtle that which suspension of movements are either external or internal or motionless. So many constitute of breath first streak, so many number constitute the second streak, in the same way, the third streak.

The measurement of time related to Breathing control is thus described in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*: “One moment consists of the time taken by the rise and fall or the eyelid, or in a single clap of hands, or in the uttering of a short letter. For the measuring of the regulation of breath twelve moments have been laid down.”⁴ “twelve moments” is the time that defined as the mantra. Only twelve moments have been mentioned, because that is the time including to all three kinds. On the other hands, according to the *Vasishtha Saṃhitā* : the *Puraka* ought to last sixteen moments, *Rechaka* thirty-two, and *Kumbhaka* sixty-four. Both may accepted as being respectively the primary and the secondary methods of exercise.⁵

The third aphorism of Patañjali concerning *Prāṇāyāma* reads as follows : “*bāhyābhyantaraviśayakshepī caturthaḥ*”,⁶ it means that among the four processes of *Prāṇāyāma*, as mentioned above, the fourth one comes after the first three. We have a very nice interpretation of the result of *Prāṇāyāma* in the *Vyāsabhāṣya*. This interpretation refers to *ṣatcakra-s—mūlādhāra cakra*, (root *cakra*), *svādhiṣṭhāna cakra* (sacral *cakra*), *maṇipura cakra* (naval *cakra*), *anāhata cakra* (heart *cakra*), *viśuddha cakra* (throat *cakra*), *ājñā cakra* (third eye) and *sahasrā cakra* (crown *cakra*). These *cakra-s* are thought to vitalize the physical body and to be associated with the interactions of physical, mental and emotional nature of the body in balance. Each of the *cakra-s* is called *bhūmi* ; and the main target of *Prāṇāyāma* is *bhūmijaya* or *kuṇḍalinī-jāgarana*.

The fourth aphorism of Patañjali concerns the destruction of several *vṛtti-s* of *citta*. This aphorism reads as follows : “*tataḥ kṣīyate prakāśāvaraṇam*”.⁷ The term ‘*tataḥ*’ in this *sūtra* means after pursuing the four processes mentioned. *prakāśāvaraṇa* means *citta-mala* or *vṛtti*. The result of *Prāṇāyāma* is the destruction of those *vṛtti-s*. “*yogaścittavṛttinirodhaḥ*”⁸ bears in full signification of this aphorism. Spiritual insight can be had only when mind is purged of all *vṛtti-s*, impurities and rendered perfectly calm and serene.

It must be remembered, however, that while the *Prāṇāyāmas* are being practised, mind must be fixed by *dhāranā* and *dhyāna* on some external or internal objects without which these will be of no stead for the true object of *Yoga*. By the practice of pranayama mind becomes fit for concentration as in the Sutra “*prachardanabi dhāranāvyang bā pranasya*”⁹, where it is said that steadiness is acquired by *Prāṇāyāma*, and this steadiness is acquired in the same way as concentration as we find also in the Sutra “*dhāranāsu ca yogyatāmanasaḥ*”¹⁰. This state of calmness and serenity is called the state of “*sahaja*”. Anirvan's is an asseveration regarding this state : “Now, this pure existence, lived with a wide-open heart amid all the circumstance of life, is in itself the state of *sahaja*—a state in which the mind is freed from all duality, the motionless mind knows “that” which has neither beginning nor end, which is free in its very essence”¹¹.

There is no doubt that Anirvan's an improvement upon yoga, as advocated by Patañjali. In his “*Antaryoga*” Anirvan divides the eight-fold path of yoga into two—*bahiranga* and *antaranga*. *Prāṇāyāma* belongs to *bahiranga*. We also come to know from him the importance of *Prāṇāyāma*. Patañjali's *Yoga-sūtra* is a master piece on *yoga*. But it is the modern thinkers who have improved upon his yoga. Theirs is a concern about how we can develop our physical health and attain our spiritual goal by exercising *Prāṇāyāma* as increasing vital energy, stress relief, techniques for relaxation, emotional management and so on.

Prāṇāyāma focuses mainly on breath's control ; and breathing is an important part in yoga. *Prāṇāyāma* is looked upon as a method. Following this method regularly one can enjoy innumerable benefits. Some of them may be elaborate as follows.

Prāṇāyāma is rewarding for our body and mind. It improves the quality of life. One who practices it regularly gets relief from stress, tension. One also enjoys overall inner peace. *Prāṇāyāma* decreases breath rate and this leads to lower blood pressure, lower heart rate and a relaxed body. *Prāṇāyāma* is also used as a drug rehabilitation method. Such a method has no side effects. It gives emotional relaxation. Breathing process requires freedom from negative thinking ; and this freedom prepares mind for meditation. It is also useful for developing memory and concentration. Even there are some *yogī-s* who believe that our life expectancy depends on the number of breath we take in our life. The slower we breathe, the longer we live, As Swami Satchidananda understands, *Prāṇāyāma* is able to inject more *prāṇa* and more life into every cell in the body. In his words, “During *Prāṇāyāma* you are literally drinking vital energy and immunity. You supercharge the blood with extra oxygen”.¹²

We can here mention the name of another book authored by Sibananda Saraswati, *Yogabale Roga Ārogya*. In this book Sibananda explains yoga as a science. According to him it is a science for controlling breath or *prāṇa*. he speaks of several exercises, each one of which effects upon the flow of vital energy. As he says, inhalation brings more oxygen to our cells and brain. On the other hand, exhalation releases carbon-di-oxide and toxins out of the human system.¹³

We have mentioned the names of several *cakra-s* in our astral body. We can also add to it the *mūlādhāra-cakra*. That means, there are seven *cakra-s* including it. These seven *cakra-s* are, in fact, seven energy centers in our body. *Prāṇāyāma* delivers life energy to these centers, organs and nerves.

Finally, the *yogī-s* speak of three channels, three main channels, namely, *idā* ; the left channel representing feminine energy within, *piṅgalā* ; the right channel representing the masculine energy within and *suṣumṇā* ; the central channel through which *kunḍalinī* makes up when *suṣumṇā naḍi* is open and activated, *kunḍalinī śakti* is awakened. *Kunḍalinī* is the cosmic energy lying implicit at the

base of the spine of the *mūlādhāra-cakra*. It is a spiritual potential present in everybody in a dormant state. Awakening of *kunḍalinī* paves the spiritual way of the pursuers. But it requires strong discipline and purification in every aspect. As Swami Vishnu Devananda points out, wherever there is supernatural power or knowledge, these must be at least partial awaking of *kunḍalinī*. So, *Prāṇāyāma* plays a very pivotal role in attaining physical, mental and spiritual goals of us.

Reference:

1. Vivekananda, S. (31 December 1946). *The Complete Works Of Swami Vivekananda* (Volume.1). Belurmath: Advaita Ashrama, p.62.
2. Patanjali, M. (1904). *Yoga Sūtra*. Pune: Ananda Ashram Press, 2.49.
3. Patanjali, M. (1904). *Yoga Sūtra*. Pune: Ananda Ashram Press, 2.50.
4. Jha, G. (1894). *The Yogasāra-Sangraha*. Bombay: Tatva-Vivechaka Press, p.58.
5. Jha, G. (1894). *The Yogasāra-Sangraha*. Bombay: Tatva-Vivechaka Press, p.59.
6. Patanjali, M. (1904). *Yoga Sūtra*. Pune: Ananda Ashram Press, 2.51.
7. Patanjali, M. (1904). *Yoga Sūtra*. Pune: Ananda Ashram Press, 2.52.
8. Patanjali, M. (1904). *Yoga Sūtra*. Pune: Ananda Ashram Press, 1.2.
9. Dasgupta, S. (1920). *The Study of Patanjali*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, p.153.
10. Patanjali, M. (1904). *Yoga Sūtra*. Pune: Ananda Ashram Press, 2.53.
11. Reymond, L. (1983). *Letters from a Baul*. Calcutta: Sri Aurobinda Pathmandir, p.3.
12. Satchidananda, S. (1985). *The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali*. Virginia: Integral Yoga Publications, p. 37-38.
13. Saraswati, S.S. (2017). *Yogabale Roga-Ārogya* (35th Ed.). Guwahati: Umachal Prakashani, p. 388-390.