

## CONCEPT OF VITARKA IN PĀTAÑJALA YOGA SŪTRA

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*The disparate view points of different commentators of PYS have been revisited with the purpose of arriving at a reasonably consistent understanding of the patañjalian concept of Vitarka.*

**KEY WORDS :** *Vitarkānugamāt, Pratipakṣabhāvanam, smṛtipariśuddhi, samāpatti*

Patañjali uses term 'vitarka' altogether in three different places in Pātañjala Yoga Sūtra (P.Y.S.)

- 1) 'Vitarkānugamāt' under 'saṃprajñāta Yoga' (P.Y.S. 1 : 17)
- 2) 'Savitarka & Nirvitarka' under 'samāpattis' (P.Y.S 1 : 42, 43);
- 3) 'Vitarkabādhā' under 'aṣṭāṅgayoga' (P.Y.S 11 : 33). In the Sūtra 11/34 wherein he himself explains this term as :

*"Vitarka Himsādayaḥ Kṛtakāritānumoditā  
Lobhakrodhamohapurvākā mṛdumadhyādhimatrā  
dukkhājñānāntaphalā iti pratipakṣabhāvanam"*

Vitarka as 'himsā' and such other things done, caused or approved out of greed, anger and allurements that might exist in mild moderate or intense degree result in endless pain and ignorance and therefore one should bear the opposite affectation.

This explanation gives an idea that in P.Y.S. 'vitarka' is a technical term. However, when we go through the traditional as well as Modern interpretations on P.Y.S. we find two disparate opinions :

- 1) All the traditional and most of the modern commentators interpret this term altogether differently in all the three places and therefore do not seem to accept this term as the technical one.
- 2) Dr. P.V. Karambelkar and Dr. Kenghe are of the opinion that Patañjali himself defines the term 'vitarka' and hence the same is technical in P.Y.S.

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In the light of these two opinions, an effort has been made to arrive at a reasonably uniformed understanding of the term 'vitarka' in P.Y.S. which may be useful from the view point of the Yoga practitioner .

### ETYMOLOGY OF THE TERM 'VITARKA'

A) The term 'vitarka' is made up from 'vi' which is used as a prefix to verbs and nouns to express different meanings such as -

i) '*viśeṣeṇatarkaṇamavadhāraṇam vitarkaḥ*'.

'vi' stands for *viśeṣeṇa* i.e. specially with and 'tarka' means reasoning or ascertainment or cogitation etc.

ii) '*viparītāstarkāvicārā*'. 'vi' stands for *viparita* i.e. opposite or wrong, and 'tarka' means thoughts or ideas or action etc.

B) Some examples of its usage in the literature :

1) '*vitarkaḥ sambhūta teṣāṃ triṣvadhīṣeṣu ko mahān*' (Bhāgawata X : 89.1) where 'vitarka' stands for discussion.

2) .... '*eti me vitarka*' (Kumārasambhava I/41) where it means doubt.

3) ..... '*vitarkastupumānuhe saṁśaye ca nigadyate*' (Medini Kośa, p 13) - where 'vitarka' means a guess, examination, determination and so on and 'saṁśaya' means doubt.

In this way, as per the literary context we find different meanings of this term. Here our concern is what could be the meaning of the term 'vitarka' in P.Y.S. ?

### VIEW POINTS OF THE FIRST GROUP OF COMMENTATORS

With reference to Saṁprajñāta Yoga, which according to this group is Samādhi, Vyāsa states that '*Vitarka cittasya ālambane sthūla abhogaḥ*' (V.Bh. 1/17) i.e. 'vitarka' is a gross object for supporting the citta. However, he does not clarify the term '*sthūla*' anymore. Vācaspati and Ramanandayati understand '*sthūla*' objects for meditation as made up of five elements like the four armed icon of Lord Viṣṇu etc<sup>1</sup>(1). Vācaspati gives an illustration of an archer who in the beginning takes the support of gross object and then turns to the subtler one<sup>2</sup>(2). and then only can turn towards the objects. Similarly, in case of

1 स्थूलमेव पाञ्चभौतिकं चतुर्भुजादि ध्येयं साक्षात्करोति (त.वै. 1 / 17)

2 यथा हि प्राथमिको धानुष्कः स्थूलमेव पाञ्चभौतिकं चतुर्भुजादि ध्येयं साक्षात्करोत्यथ सूक्ष्ममिति (त.वै. 1 / 17)



vitarkanugata stage of '*saṃprajñāta*' samadhi one is believed to take support of gross objects for meditation first .

[Vijñānabhikṣu and his followers include the sense organs in the five gross elements as the '*Sthūla Viṣaya*' for meditation<sup>3</sup> (2). Vācaspati seems to disagree with this view when he asserts that sense organs can not become the object of sense organs and thus, can not be included under '*Sthūla Viṣaya*' i.e. gross objects. He made another point to support his view that '*vitarkānugata*' is an initial stage of '*saṃprajñāta*' samādhi in which sādḥaka does not have the capacity to meditate on an object which is not seen, heard or conceived by the senses and therefore, five gross elements can only become the object of meditation at this stage<sup>4</sup>(3).

However, Bhikṣu seems very clear in his statement that the objects are not perceived completely without the '*vitarkānugata*' stage. Bhikṣu thus defines the term vitarka as *viśeṣatarkāṇāmavadhāraṇam vitarka* i.e. special reasoning or ascertainment '*tenānugatoyukto*' *nirodha vitarkānugatanāma yogaḥ*, i.e. when the restriction is connected with special reasoning or ascertainment, the yoga is said to be associated with '*vitarka*'. Further, in relation to samāpattis this group of commentators accept that *savitarka* and *nirvitarka* are the two divisions of *vitarkānugata samādhi*<sup>5</sup>(4).

Bhikṣu comments that '*tatra ca vitarkaśabdo viparitatarkāṇārthakah*' i.e. also in *savitarka* state of samāpattis the word '*vitarka*' is used in the sense of wrong understanding. In '*savitarka*' samāpatti, *vikalpas* are said to be the confusion arising due to identifying the meaning and the knowledge with words<sup>6</sup>.

When one experiences the object, with all its fancies and attributes it is called mixed samāpatti named *savitarka*<sup>7</sup>. Again in the successive stage of meditation i.e. in '*apāgama*', of the memory of conventional knowledge, the objects alone shines forth. The

3 a) स्थूलयोर्भूतेन्द्रिययोर दृष्टाश्रुतामताशेषविशेषसाक्षात्कार : स वितर्क इत्यर्थः (यो. वा. 1/17)  
b) महाभूतेन्द्रियाणि स्थूलानि (भोज 1/17)

4 स च स्थूल विषयत्वात्स्थूलः (त.वै. 1/17)

5 सवितर्कनिर्वितर्कस्यावान्तर भेदौ वक्ष्यति (यो.वा. 1/17)

यः स्थूलविषय भोगो वितर्क इत्युक्तं स एकत्र सवितर्क निर्वितर्क समापतिरूपेण द्विधोक्तमिति (यो.वा. 1/43)

6 शब्दार्थ ज्ञान विकल्पस्यैव तस्मिन्सूत्रे विकल्पशब्दार्थावगमात् (यो.वा. 1/17)

7 शब्दार्थज्ञानानामभेद भ्रमेणानुविद्धो विषयीकृतो भवति तदा सा सङ्कीर्णा विकल्पमिश्रिता विकल्प विषयी भवदर्थ विषयिणीति यावत् समापति सवितर्क संज्ञा भवतीत्यर्थः (यो. वा. 1/42)

samāpatti becomes *nirvitarka*<sup>8</sup> and thereby the term 'vitarka' is understood as wrong thoughts, ideas and so on.

Furthermore, in the context of Sūtra II : 33 these commentators interpret the term *vitarka* in a different way. Vyāsa states '*yadā hiṃsādayo vitarka jāyaran....*' etc. that means whenever perverse or wrong thoughts arise in the citta, one should have the affectation opposite of them. Perhaps keeping this idea in mind Bhikṣu defines the term *vitarka* here as '*viparītāstarkāvicārā yeṣviti vitarkasaṃjñāhimsādiṣu tāntriki*' i.e. those in whom the perverse thoughts are present and thus the term *vitarka* as *Hiṃsā* and such other things, is to be understood as technical in this system. But, he himself does not seem to follow his own premise in the preceding sūtras and thus does not keep the consistency with regard to the understanding of the term. *reasoning, delebration or argumentation* while commenting on sūtra I : 17, 42-43 and sūtra II : 33-34 wherein '*vitarka*' is taken to mean perverse or wrong thoughts ideas etc. and thus do not seem to accept this term as technical in P.Y.S.

#### VIEW POINTS OF THE SECOND GROUP OF COMMENTATORS :

As said earlier Dr. P.V. Karambelkar and Dr. Kenghe are of the opinion that Patañjali himself defines this term and therefore the term '*vitarka*' is to be understood as technical term in P.Y.S. and thus its meaning should be taken as consistently the same throughout the P.Y.S. According to them when one starts practising '*ahimsā*' it is natural that long forgotten re pressed and suppressed ideas or thoughts of '*hiṃsā*' stored in the form of saṃskāras, may appear in citta. They may be of mild, moderate or extremely intense degree, caused by anger, greed or allure-ment. Whatsoever the situation, the '*vitarka*' starts disturbing the citta. This is to be understood by the term '*vitarkabādhā*' and therefore, one should have an affectation on the opposite of these '*vitarkas*'.

Dr. Kenghe explains '*pratipakṣabhāvanam*' as a sort of auto-suggestion which results into purification of past memories and thus, according to him, the terms '*smṛtipariśuddhi*' and '*pratipakṣabhāvanam*' play a very vital role to understand the

8 यत्रेत्यर्थं मात्र निर्भासऽखिल विकल्प शून्या या समापत्ति सा निर्वितर्केत्यर्थः ... शब्दसंकेतान् श्रुतानुमान रूपाज्ञाने या विकल्परूढा स्मृतिः चिन्ता सवितर्ककाले ऽं प्यनुवर्तते तदपगमे सतीत्याद्यपदार्थः (यो.वा. I/43)



concept of *vitarka* (5).

With reference to *sāṃprajñāta* yoga, which they do not seem to accept as *samādhi* but only as *yoga pradeśa* or sphere of yoga (PP. 37-42) (6), they understand *vitarka* as per the definition of Patañjali. So, when one takes the support of any object for meditation, the memory of past experiences related to that object, stored in *citta*, starts surfacing on the conscious level and the *sādhaka* starts following these *vitarkas*. Patañjali himself uses the term '*anugama*' i.e. following. So, by following these *vitarkas* the *sādhaka* investigates their root and thereby the full understanding about their nature.

Similarly, in case of '*savitarka*' and '*nirvitarka*' *samāpattis* the same meaning is to be applied. *Samāpatti* is a process of merging the *citta* with the object to be comprehended. In this process '*grahita*' (*citta*) '*grahaṇa*' (sense organs) and '*grāhya*' i.e. the object to be comprehended merge with one another (P. 119) (6). So, in *savitarka* state of meditation *citta* grasps all qualities of an object alongwith '*vitarkas*' that are closely associated with the words, their meaning and their knowledge related to the object. And thus, surfacing up of *vitarkas* in the conscious level becomes dominant feature. Hence, *vitarkas* are the result of wrong understanding caused by the limitations of *śabda*, *artha* and *jñāna* usage. This means that any word, its meaning and its knowledge are mere imaginary things having no reality (p. 127) (6). So when one takes any object for meditation, the meditator initially has its conventional knowledge based on scriptures and also in the form of inferences. So, in the state of *savitarka samāpatti*, emergence of *vitarka* in all its details is a dominant and essential feature. In the successive stage of meditation, an objective perception of the true nature of object purify the memory and thereby *citta* becomes purified. This stage of *samāpatti* becomes '*nirvitarka*' in which the wrong understanding disappears and *citta* becomes one with the pure essence of the object. Thus, *vitarka* is to be understood as wrong thoughts, ideas and actions. However, Dr. P.V. Karambelkar and Dr. Kenghe have a different approach while applying the same meaning in the first chapter with reference to *sāṃprajñāta* yoga and *samāpattis*. Dr. Kenghe seems to believe that when *vitarka* start emerging, the process of meditation gets disturbed and thus a sort of auto suggestion (*pratipakṣabhāvanam*)

is desirable to be practised. But to Dr. P.V. Karambelkar '*pratipakṣabhāvanam*' can be done only in the practical worldly life and cannot be attempted during meditational processes. Because in such an attempt citta will be diverted from the object of meditation' (P. 46) (6). To support his view he forwards a point that 'successive state of meditation happens automatically may be due to time distance or space distance. When one becomes separated from the thing, he may begin to see the thing more impartially and therefore with greater unbiased outlook and, so to say, vitarkas lose their power and gradually disappear automatically' (P. 106) (6).

### DISCUSSION AND COMMENTS :

The first group of commentators do not seem to accept the term vitarka as technical in P.Y.S. and thus interpret vitarka (1) as the gross object for supporting the mind in which the restrictions connected with special reasoning or ascertainment, the yoga is said to be associated with vitarkas ( P.Y.S. I : 17 ). (2) Vitarka as in the sense of wrong understanding or idea (P.Y. S.I : 42 & 43) as in savitarka state of samāpatti, and (3) Vitarka as perverse thoughts or ideas (P.Y.S. II : 33 & 34 ).

Now, if we understand vitarka as a gross object of meditation in which special reasoning is connected then how savitarka state of samāpatti is to be understood ? As these commentators themselves interpret it as the first division of vitarkānugata stage of saṁprajñāta samādhi, they themselves interpret the term vitarka as wrong understanding or idea. So also, how the term *smṛtipariśuddhi* is to be understood ? Dr. Kenghe made this point very clear that "by following the object of meditation, we are neither likely to get rid of it nor the second stage of absorption bereft of the object of meditation" (Yoga and Depth psy. p. 77). Thus, the word *smṛti* is to be understood as per definition of Patañjali (I : 2) and *pariśuddhi* as purification and not as '*apāgama*' i.e. elimination as understood by these commentators. Thus the first group of commentators have not been able to bring out the uniformity in their interpretations and also they have not been able to correlate the understanding of the term '*vitarka*' with the explanation given by Patañjali himself.

Again, if we understand the core concept of citta of P.Y.S., Patañjali does not define this term anywhere in P.Y.S. But on the basis of sūtras, citta can be structured to be a storehouse of countless subliminal impressions and *vāsanās* which are without beginning (P.Y.S. IV : 10) causing it (Citta) to incline towards sensory experiences. Thus, the first and the foremost idea of Patañjali is to



stop these processes by way of *kleśātanukaraṇa*, *aśuddhikṣaya*, *smṛtipariśuddhi*, *doṣabijākṣaya*, *cittavṛttinirodha* etc. These methods show the gradual purification of citta on one hand and the development of 'vivekakhyāti' on the other.

Keeping this idea in mind, the emergence of Vitarkas in the meditational processes is natural without which one can not understand their full nature. In the beginning they may disturb the citta, as shown by the term '*vitarkabādhā*' but in the advanced stage of meditative practice one can understand their full nature and can get rid of them. This understanding only can justify the usage of the term *smṛtipariśuddhi*.

Dr. P.V. Karambelkar & Dr. Kenghe have understood the term '*vitarka*' as per the explanation of Patañjali and also have attempted to correlate its meaning with other related sūtras thereby showing the consistency and integrity of Patañjali as a composer of sūtra style. Thus their understanding with regard to the term '*vitarka*' seems more in tune with other related concepts of Patañjali and therefore, more rational as well as practical.

Dr. Kenghe seems to propose that citta gets disturbed whenever vitarkas start emerging. But in *saṁprajñāta* and *saṁāpatti* stage of practice this view can not be acceptable because Patañjali himself seems to accept that to practice the *Sam-prajñāta* and *saṁāpattis*, *cittaprasādanam* (the blissfulness of citta) is essential. That is the reason why Patañjali himself describes some alternative means to achieve that state of citta ( P.Y.S. I : 33-39 ).

Now, if citta gets disturbed in *saṁprajñāta* and *saṁāpatti* state of practice, then there will be no chance for *saṁāpatti* and so long as there is no *saṁāpatti* or oneness with object of meditation one can not understand the full nature of *vitarka* and thereby cannot get rid of it. On the other hand, in the steady state of citta only one can investigate the nature of *vitarka* by following it and gets himself convinced that the *vitarka* is emerging due to his wrong understandings and thereby understands that *vitarka* can lead but to endless pain and ignorance and therefore in the initial stage of practice, *vitarka* may disturb the citta but this is not applicable in the advanced stages of practice such as *saṁprajñāta* and *saṁāpattis*.

Another point of Dr. P.V. Karambelkar is to be clarified with regard to *pratipakṣabhāvanam* where he comments that "this method can not be attempted during meditational processes..." But on the basis of above discussion it becomes clear that this method is not only applicable to *savitarka* and *nirvitarka* stage of *saṁāpattis*

and saṁaprajñāta yoga but in the stage of vivekakhyāti in which sādḥaka gets himself convinced by 'neti', 'neti'. This is a kind of *pratipakṣabhāvanam*.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS :

On the basis of above discussion and comments it becomes clear that unlike the first group of commentators, Dr. Karambelkar and Dr. Kenghe have tried to understand this concept by taking into account other related concept of patañjali and also have attempted to correlate the meaning of this term in tune with other sūtras in P.Y.S. Thus the consistency and integrity of Patañjali as composer to sūtra style is recognized.

In short , vitarka is a technical term in P.Y.S. which plays very significant role in purifying the storehouse of past memories and thus helps to understand the true nature of vitarkas through yogic methods such as *vitarkānugamāt*, *pratipakṣabhāvanam* and *smṛtipariśuddhi*.

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