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PATAÑJALI'S NIYAMA IN MODERN PERSPECTIVE

SHARMA, B. R.*

ABSTRACT

An attempt has been made to analyze a few Yogic Texts to find out the state of knowledge regarding the tradition of Niyama and the relevance of this knowledge in modern perspective with special reference to Patañjala Yoga Sūtra (PYS).

Key Words : *Niyama, modern perspective, yogasūtra*

Introduction

The term 'Niyama' literally represents 'binding rules' or 'observances' or 'discipline'. It can be observed that the human existence is based on the awareness of some rules or discipline in the form of do's and don'ts as the value of such concepts has been recognized in entire literature of the world and hence it can be said that this aspect of human life existed in some form or the other with the human race since the beginning of civilizations wherein don'ts can be said to be prohibitive while do's as disciplinal and constructive. The don'ts aspect lays ethical foundation while do's regulate the inner ambience of an individual which is to be maintained regularly with help of healthy guidelines such as the role of cleanliness, satisfaction, hard work, self analysis and self surrender etc..

Yoga, as a science of discipline (anuśāsana) which has several stages and dimensions, well recognizes and incorporates these aspects under the practices of Yamas and Niyamas respectably. Maṇḍiśa Patañjali, the author of Yoga Sūtra, has very succinctly accorded them as first two components in the scheme of his eightfold path of yoga. The practice of Yamas & Niyamas is preparatory and facilitatory to get the desired results of further components such as dharana, dhyana etc., hence it is essential to understand the nature and significance of these components.

Objective of the study

In Yoga texts, description of Yamas & Niyamas has been made thoroughly so as to lead Sādhaka towards Samādhi. While viewing from modern perspective it may not be possible to follow the Niyamas to fullest possible extent as described in yogic literature. However, so far

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the common people are concerned, the aim of the Yoga studies/practices is not to achieve Mokṣa or Kaivalya but their aim is to live a meaningful, healthy and happy life with contentment. Keeping this aspect in mind the twofold analysis has been undertaken-

1. What Yogic Texts say about the traditions of Niyamas?
2. Discussion of Niyamas in Modern Perspective with special reference to PYS.

Material and Methods

Following Traditional Yogic Texts were chosen for the purpose of understanding the traditions of Niyama-

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|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Patañjala Yoga Sūtra (PYS), | 2. Haṭhapradīpikā (HP), |
| 3. Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati (SSP), | 4. Darśanopniṣad (DU), |
| 5. Maṇḍalabrāhmaṇopaniṣad (MBU) | 6. Śāṇḍilopaniṣad (SAU) |
| 7. Yoga Tattvopaniṣad (YTU) | 8. Varāhopaniṣad (VU) |
| 9. Tejobindupaniṣad (TBU) | 10. Trīśikhabrāhmaṇopniṣad |
| 11. Vasiṣṭha Saṃhitā(VS) | 12. Yogiyājñavalkya (YY) |
| 13. Jyotsnā of Brahmānanda(J) | 14. Aṣṭāṅga Yoga of Cāraṇadāsa (AYC) |

1. What Yogic texts say about the traditions of Niyama

Collected material for this study has been presented as follows-

- a. Niyama as one of the components of ashtanga yoga. Patanjali has mentioned five **niyamas**: **śauca, santoṣa, tapas, swadhyāya** and **īśvarapraṇidhāna** (PYS II 29, 32;40-45;
- b. DU I 4, 2/1-16, SAU I (1) 2-3, (2) 1-11; YTU 24, 29 and VU V 11,13, 14) describe 10 Niyamas
- c. In MBU I (1) 3-4 we find the description of 9 niyamas.
- d. YTU considers **niyama** to be one of the twenty components of **Haṭhayoga** and **ahiṃsā** to be the principal **niyama**. No other **niyamas** are mentioned in this text. HP (I 38) also considers **ahiṃsā** to be the principal **niyama**.
- e. Although TBU I 15- 18 never said in this text that **yoga** is eightfold but **yogaṅgas** are described one after the other wherein **Reality brahman** is one description of **niyama**.
- f. Observances like bathing early in the morning, eating only at night, in other words fasting, are called **niyamas** by the commentator Brahmānanda (on HP I 15),. He does not recommend this theory for yogis.

- g. HP II 14 talks about the restrictions about food etc. According to this text, these must be observed by *yogis* in the beginning but can be released after the practice is well established.
- h. VS and other texts enumerate Niyama as vow (VS I 33, 35, 53, 83; SSP II 33 VU V/ 1,113&14,AYC p.7-8), Niyama is the second among eight yogangas. It is ten in number. They are: **tapas** (austerity), **santoṣa** (contentment), **āstikya** (thesim), **dāna** (charity), **īśavarapūjana** (worship of God), **siddhāntśravaṇa** (listening to the doctrines), **hṛ** (modesty), **japa** (repetition of mantra), **mati** (decision), and **vrata** observance of vows). SSP defines it as restraining all the activities of **manas** (mind). For this SSP describes to dwell in aloof, non-attachment, indifference, contentment over what is acquired, absence of sentiment and devotion to the feet of **guru**.

Observations

- Patañjali enumerates 5 components of niyama along with effects thereof. He does not provide any instruction about their practice. However, in the context of yama & niyama, we find a technique called '**pratipakṣa bhāvana**' i.e. cultivation of opposite feeling in the face of negative ones with a view to maintain serene frame of mind.
- YY & VS and other texts have described 10 components of Niyama with little variation in their names e.g. **īśvarapūjana** in place of **īśvarapraṇidhāna** etc.
- Haṭhapradīpikā does not include niyama in his fourfold path of yoga but emphasizes the utility of **ahiṃsā** as niyama in his text. TBU & HP consider **ahiṃsā** as niyama whereas in PYS **ahiṃsā** is described under yamas which is prohibitive in nature.
- Jyotsnā (a comm. on HP) talks about simple observances like bathing in the early morning, eating only once in a day etc.

The above observations make it clear that mainly there are two traditions available in yoga wherein one tradition accepts 5 components and other 10 components of Niyama. However, the purpose of the practice of these components of niyama (either 5 or 10 in number) is nothing but to develop inner ambience of yoga sadhaka by controlling the senses so that he can take up the higher practices of yoga.

2. Discussion of Niyamas in Modern Perspective with special reference to PYS

Śauca – (Purity)

It is said "Cleanliness is next to Godliness" that helps us in clearing away the negative

physical and mental states of being and thus considered to be of two types- outer and inner. Outer purity can be gained through bathing and brushing and keeping all the body organs in healthy condition with the help of neti, dhauti etc., also we should earn our food through hard work and fair means. The inner purity can be gained through recitation of mantras, prayer that helps in purifying the feeling of egoism, fear, lust, anger and all other negative thoughts and emotions. When we understand the value of pure body and mind we become health conscious and accordingly avoid whichever is not conducive to our constitution and temperament. We try to avoid even the touch of other body and engage ourselves in purifying our own thought process.

Santoṣa – (Contentment)

This is an important virtue which is described as not desiring more than what one has earned by his honest effort. This state of mind is about maintaining equanimity through all that life offers. Santosha involves the practice of gratitude and joyfulness—maintaining the serene state of mind at all conditions. This state of mind does not depend on any external cause. This attitude will reduce pain and suffering in life. When these contented feelings are cultivated by the mind, the perpetual happiness is not far behind.

Tapas (Austerity - process of purification & self discipline)

Tapas means to bear conflicts with a good intention even when there is some physical or mental strain, one should not discontinue his efforts and on the contrary should continue them. This is known as Tapas. It includes fasting, observing various vows and practicing pranayama, which is considered to be the best form of tapas, etc. with a view to remove all kinds of physical, emotional, mental impurities and when impurities are removed, one becomes self disciplined and thereby gets mastery over his personality as a whole.

Swadhyāya (Self Study)

Study of scripture or japa of holy mantras is swadhyaya that ultimately leads one to analyze one's own existence. In daily life of commoners, swadhyaya can be said to mean reflection over the deeper problems of what is taught by the Holy Scripture with the help of which one develops serene state of mind and can achieve whatever one wants.

Īśwarapraṇidhāna (Total Surrender to God):

It means while believing in the existence of God and having faith in His Greatness, completely devoting oneself to Him and do only what is approved of by Him is living with an awareness of

the Divine. In other words, there is some divine force at the root of this universe, which is beyond our imagination. To identify this force and to surrender completely to it is *Īśwarpranidhana*. Moreover, Surrender to God in the form of detachment towards the fruits of one's actions leading towards minimizing one's **feeling of doer** which is the root cause of all worldly problems. At times, even after our persistent efforts, we are unable to succeed. At such a time, if we have faith in Divine existence, we get courage to face any situation in life.

Conclusion

Thus, on the basis of the above discussion it becomes aptly clear that though there are two traditions available in Yogic Literature wherein one tradition accepts 5 components of Niyama and other 10 components but for the sake of common people in modern context the understanding of niyamas in the light of PYS is appropriate and sufficient in managing our thoughts, feelings and emotions in an integrated manner, complementing our outer life to the development of inner ambience by way of developing a self discipline and controlling the senses so that we can respect the values of this life and can live a meaningful, healthy and happy life with contentment. In short, Niyamas help us to lead a conscious life.

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