

REVIEW PAPER

Vedānta Philosophy as Yoga for Everyday Life

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Received: 13-05-2024

Revised: 24-08-2024

Accepted: 03-09-2024

ABSTRACT

Man wants to abstain from pain and crave for enjoyment. This tendency if not directed in the right direction leads to many complications. Society at large and individual subjectively as a solitary entity would suffer the consequence of such tendency. The theory of ancient Vedānta philosophy and Yoga helps avoiding such scenario. Traditionally, the Vedāntic practices are meant for- the ascetics. The present condition of society demands that these practices should penetrate every mode of our daily life. Vedānta is an abstruse philosophy and hard to understand. The theoretical aspect can be comprehended undergoing proper instructions from the preceptor. Vedānta philosophy in general can be called as the. In addition, Yoga is the practice of such theory, which leads us towards the goal. Yoga as commonly presumed is not joining but disjoining from our false beliefs. It requires constant practice for a considerable amount of time. A layman cannot understand the real nature of the man. This misunderstanding becomes the cause of all miseries, declares Vedānta. The real nature of man is 'Ātman' which is deathless, ever conscious and eternal bliss. The clarion call from the Vedānta is that, 'the source of our all strength and happiness is 'Ātman' not the mundane existence around'.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❶ Scriptures define goal of human life in clear terms.
- ❷ To avoid sorrow and to acquire perennial happiness in any situation.
- ❸ Vedānta philosophy as theory and the practical aspect of Yoga.
- ❹ Practice of the solution for a long period with reverential attitude persistently offered by Vedānta.
- ❺ Seeking the guidance from the path trodden by the great ones.
- ❻ Equanimity is the bedrock which prepares for any eventuality.

Keywords: Vedānta or Upanisads, Ānandamaya kośa or sheath of Bliss, Geeta and doctrine of equanimity, Yoga is disjoining, Practicality, Ātman source of strength

Human being is in search of perennial happiness. He shuns pain. He employs various means to get happiness from external objects. This makes him mired in the snares of enjoyment even further. It increases his craving and instead of satisfaction, his thirst increases day by day. Desires do not perish. Nevertheless, we devour ourselves, we did not observe penance, but we inflict suffering upon ourselves. Time did not pass but we ourselves are Aged (Madhavananda, 2011). The conclusion of the study is that- man fails to get

the desired happiness from the worldly objects. After a long fruitless pursue an understanding draws upon him; that the material objects of the world are perishable, finite and conditioned in time, space and causation.

anityamasukham lokama (Bhagavad Geeta ix.33)

How to cite this article: Shrimohanananda, S. and Vedalankar, B. (2024). Vedānta Philosophy as Yoga for Everyday Life. *Int. J. Soc. Sci.*, 13(03): 155-160.

Source of Support: None; **Conflict of Interest:** None



World is imperfect and there is uncertainty in everyday life. Man faces multiple challenges daily on various levels but he can seek solution through ancient wisdom of Vedānta.

To solve the problem as discussed in the research paper we are going to utilize the analytical research method. Root cause of the human being misery is his wrong understanding and takes this world as a place of enjoyment (Kierkegaard, 2002). World in reality is like a school, where we have come to get proper education through various experiences (Bharathi, 2010). Additionally comparative study of Vedānta and Yoga is also. Research problem elaborates the terms as needed using the descriptive research method. The steps taken for the analysis of the research problem of “getting rid of the miseries in life” faced by the human beings in the present research paper are listed below:

1. What Is Vedānta And The Solution It Offers
2. Vedānta And Yoga
3. Ātman The Source Of All Strength Bliss And Knowledge
4. Identifying The Problem And Implementing Vedāntic Solution
5. Yoga Is Disjoining
6. Practice Makes Perfection
7. Conclusion

What is Vedānta and the Solution it Offers

The Vedas define Vedānta as the end portion. However, it can be more precisely defined as an essence of Vedic teachings. Vedānta is the culmination of the Vedic teachings. Now a pertinent question arises that though being so ancient, do this philosophy provides solution to the hustles, boredom, misery and confusions of a layman? Moreover, for alleviating misery of the masses can one practice Vedānta like some Yoga? We can elaborate and delve deep into the problem with an anecdote.

A doctor while talking over the telephone ascends the staircase to take his meals upstairs and suddenly dies on the spot. Such kind of tragic incidents makes us ponder on the ephemeral nature of human life. A

thinking mind would certainly try to find some solution to such existential problem. Various scriptures proclaim that life is ephemeral (Samyukta Nikaya) and that there is not even an iota of happiness in the mundane objects as they are insentient.

du:khālayamaśāśvatam (Bhagavad Geeta viii.15).

However, the world continues to be in the mad rush towards enjoyment. Vedānta proclaims that the sensual pleasures of the world are a mere reflection of the bliss of the self. *Taittirīya* Upaniṣad declares *Ānandamaya kośa* (Sheath of Bliss) as the innermost sheath of our personality. The more we get hold of the bliss aspect of our personality the more we are calm and steady within and without. Yoga is such a state of tranquility. This state will be like a steady anchor to wade through any difficult situation in life.

.. samatvaṃ yoga ucyate (Bhagavad Geeta ii.48).

Vedānta and Yoga

Yoga is an extremely subtle science, which focuses on bringing harmony between mind and the body. It is an art as well as the science of healthy living. “Yoga” word is derived from the Sanskrit verb root ‘*Yuj*’. Its meaning is “to join” or “to yoke” or “to unite” (Vasu, 2007). In a larger sense, it refers to the integration of personality. The method of achieving “union within, union without with the ultimate reality” can also be termed as Yoga. The average human being is a bundle of thoughts, emotions and energies that are horribly discordant. Yoga is the method of self-integration. Vedānta says, this self-integration is already there within us. However, one must manifest the self-integration not just in the hours of meditation but in everyday life and circumstances. The means applied to manifest this integration can be through work, worship by controlling nature, external and internal. One can achieve such state by work, or worship, or mental discipline, or philosophy—by one, or more, or by combination of all of these (Swami Vivekananda, Vol.i, p.124, Ed.1999). The *Rishis* (Monier-Williams, 2001).

rṣati jñānena saṃsāra-pāram

i.e., “one who reaches beyond this mundane world by means of spiritual knowledge”) and sages of yore have

made experiments and researches in deep meditation and given to the world their inner experiences, which are way beyond explanations to the common man.

naiṣā tarkaṇa matirāpaneyā (Kaṭhopaniṣad I.ii.9)

These teachings are all authoritative and known as śāstra (Sharma, 2000) (śāstra literally means, “that which has been instructed/decreed”, from the root ‘shashana’ which means “instruction/decreed”) and the great ones sayings are Aptavakya (Harshananda & Math, 2008) (āstika-darśanas of the Vedas say āpta-vākya are statement of a trustworthy person). Therefore, we need not spend further time in making the preliminary experiments once more. Whole lifetime of an ordinary human being is not sufficient for making such experiments and researches. The experiences of sages are like ready-made compressed formula. Following the instructions of the great ones with perfect, unswerving faith and devotion leads one to the goal of overcoming sorrow.

śraddhāvān labhate jñānam (Geeta iv.39)

It is the only way to make progress in the path of attaining peace and steady wisdom in life.

nānyaḥ panthā vidyate”yanāya (Swetashwataropaniṣad vi.15)

Ātman the Source of All Strength Bliss and Knowledge

Vedānta declares ‘Ātman’ as the real identity of man. It is due to the primal ignorance (*mulavidyā* - means (universal or primeval ignorance or nescience) (Harshananda, & Math, 2008) of not knowing the knowledge of self or Ātman. Vedānta calls it “Self-knowledge”. To understand Self-knowledge the intellectual precondition will be to know what kind of entity or principle this Ātman or self is. Besides how it is viable that knowing such principle one can attain freedom from all miseries. Scripture declare that the knower of Self becomes Self only. Moreover, this Ātman is nothing but *Brahma*.

ayam ātmā brahma (Mandukyopaniṣad ii)

Means, all the qualities of Self or ‘Ātman’ or ‘Brahman’ will be manifested in such individual.

brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati (Mundaka Upanishad iii)

Principle or any prescribed tenet remains uninfluenced by time, space or causation (*trikālbādhita*). Any fundamental truth should stand boldly the test of all ages ancient or modern. Truth is supposed to be self-evident, as the light of the Sun. Truth does not pay homage to any society ancient or modern (Swami Vivekananda, Vol.ii, p.84, Ed.1999). It is not limited by or dependent on country, nation or any individual authority. We cannot even consider the great Lord Krishna, the preacher of Bhagawad Geeta as an authority on the Vedas. On the contrary, Vedas as fundamental principle are the authority over the words of Lord Krishna. Vedas are

apauruṣeya (अपौरुषेय).

na pauruṣeyeyatvaṁ tatkartuḥ puruṣasyābhavāt (v.45)

The Vedic philosophers and later, the Upaniṣadic sages, tried to discover not merely a cosmic principle or the source of the universe as a whole, but the psychic principle or the inner essence of man. In the Rigvedic hymns, ‘Ātman’ refers to the ultimate essence of the universe and to the vital breath in man in different contexts. Human being is not just a bundle of flesh and bones or even some ideas called as ‘mind’ but in reality is the ‘Ātman’, which is deathless and free. Ātman is pure not due to some process but it is pure by its intrinsic nature. Ātman is deathless and free always, nothing can bind it (Kaṭhopaniṣad(I.ii.18)).

Ādi Śankarāchārya the great Advaita Vedānta teacher deliberating on the idea of the ‘Ātman’ says in his commentary on kaṭhopaniṣad”, Various modifications (Nirukta, by Yashka I 2) are incidental to a thing which is produced and not eternal” but ‘Ātman’ does not belong to this category. Remembering this reality as our real nature makes a person filled with strength and fearlessness. Fearlessness is the source of all wisdom that is why; the scriptures declare it as one among the many divine qualities.

abhayaṁ sattvaśuddhiḥ jñānayogavyavasthitiḥ | dānaṁ damaśca yajñaśca svādhyāyastapa ārjavam || (Bhagawad Geeta xvi.1)

This clear wisdom paves the way towards bliss in a deeper level and happiness in our day today life. To bring these ideas in the core of our convictions through practice is 'Yoga', which should be worked upon for a long duration with right convictions.

sa tu dīrghakālanairantaryasatkārāsevito dṛḍhabhūmiḥ ||
(Patañjali yoga-sūtra I.14)

Identifying the Problem and Implementing Vedāntic Solution

There is a general misconception that Vedānta preaches a doctrine, which encourages negation of human effort (*Purushartha*). It demands a changed mental attitude towards world and in the process develops mature understanding with refined angle of perception. Until now, the world with all its limited cause and effect dimension was, 'be all and end all' of everything to the man and this is the cause of his despondency.

kṛipānāḥ phala-hetavaḥ (Bhagavad Geeta II.49)

Hereafter, getting the Vedāntic understanding and the practices of yoga, the Reality of the 'Ātman' alone as his real nature becomes his realization. Here is a story depicting the problem as well as the solution of the problem.

Once there lived two friends, "Ārya" and "Anārya". They were both rationalistic and man of contemplation in temperament. By analysis and self-enquiry, Ārya learned to see the Glory of the Self (Ātman) reflected in and through all the manifested objects since he has been the earnest student of Vedānta. On the other hand, Anārya did not venture deep into the enquiry and continued to remain a theoretical armchair rational being. He would condemn the universe as an illusion and dream containing nothing but vice and misery. One day, after a long time, Ārya called upon his friend for a friendly discussion. Anārya discussed, for a long time, as usual, the vices of the world. Anārya while taking leave asked Ārya, "Had he brought anything for his friend"? Ārya knew the selfish attitude of his friend. To knock some sense to Anārya and pondering for a while he brought out a broken piece of mirror from his pocket. Handing it over to Anārya, he said, "This is my tiny and humble present". It will help you to

fathom your own beauty and charm, which you cannot otherwise visualize. Anārya learnt a precious lesson seeing the mirror. Moreover, from that moment onwards began to visualize and understand the Glory of the Self (Ātman) reflected in the entire universe just like the mirror as told by Ādi Śankarāchārya.

viśvaṃ darpaṇa-drśyamāna-nagarī-tulyaṃ nijāntargataṃ
|... *yaḥ sākṣātkurute prabodha-samaye svātmāname-*
vādvayaṃ || (Dakshinamurti stotra of Adi
Shankaracharya)

Ādi Śankarāchārya propounded the Advaita doctrine where he declared the world as an illusion. This doctrine of illusion instead of making him inactive made his life full of dynamism. It is the proof that the idle way of living is the wrong understanding of Vedāntic doctrines. One must practice the teachings of Vedānta relentlessly as Yoga with the utmost effort to discard all human negative tendencies.

Vedānta does not teach hating anyone or looking down upon the world. It teaches that nothing is futile in the world. All the entities have their value in the proper context. The vices and miseries exist to reflect and glorify the positive nature of the self. Nevertheless, the good and the bad by themselves are not the self or Ātman. Ātman or Brahman is the substratum of the both. Ātman is like giving existence to everything good or bad. Otherwise, how can one know the existence of the Self (Ātman)? Verily, the miseries and all kind of misfortune are like a mirror that truly reflects the Self (Ātman) for us to cognize. Evil is like the mirror for the good. The presence of sages and saints is easily cognized amidst an assembly of beastly ignorant men. The perishable exists to remind us about the Imperishable. This Vedāntic truth has to be taken as a continuous Yogic practice with detachment (of the worldly pursuits) to establish firmness in the conviction about the principle.

abhyāsavairāgyābhyāṃ tannirodhaḥ (Patañjali yoga-sūtra
I.12)

Yoga is Disjoining

We usually say that "Yoga" is union. However, disunion must first occur in "Yoga". It is the process of avoiding

the conjunction between Puruṣa and Prakṛti as told in sankhya philosophy.

*triguṇamaviveki viśayaḥ sāmānyamacetanam
prasavadharmi|vyaktaṁ tathā pradhānam
tadviparītastathā ca pumān|| (Sankhya karika 11)*

Patañjali yoga-sūtra emphasizes the fact that 'Yoga' is "Viyoga" a type of disunion or disjoining. Even Bhagawad Geeta (XV.iii) teaches that detachment is the only weapon to cut away the ill effects of the world. The practice of different aspects of Yoga gradually removes the impurities of the personality. It results in attaining perfect equanimity (Bhagawad Geeta (ii.48)). This further culminates into true and deeper awareness of reality. The awareness of reality makes us understand wrong knowledge and Puruṣa gets separated from Prakṛti. The statement 'Viyoga' is 'Yoga' is valid in the Yoga, Samkhya, Vedic and even tantric perspectives. The Dṛṣṭa (noumenon) of Yoga has to separate itself from the Dṛśya (phenomenon) to overcome the afflictions (*kleshas*) (Patanjali Yoga sutra ii.3). The *Viyoga* in Patañjali's yoga-sūtras is the final stage of Pratyāhāra (Patanjali Yoga sutra ii.54).

The ultimate aim of Yoga is nothing less than the total destruction or dissolution of the wrong patterns of the manifestation of consciousness. One must divest the mind or consciousness of all its forms so that the consciousness alone remains without name and form. It is Brahman consciousness (Brahmajñāna) in Vedāntic terminology. However, the mental modification of the highest type called as 'Brahmākāra vritti' happens in and through mind only (Panchadasi VII. 91).

Practice Makes Perfection

Everyday life brings new challenges and every moment in a way is the opportunities to practice the truth of Vedānta. This practice has to happen gradually (Bhagawad Geeta vi.xxv). The goal is not to think anything. It is such an arduous task and is so difficult, that to achieve it even in a whole lifetime is not easy. The hinderance is mainly because it is the goal, which demands utmost sincerity (Kāthopaniṣad I.III.14). The desire to attain perfection and to lead everyday life with utmost perfection is not the aim of the masses

(Bhagawad Geeta VII.iii). However, some very rare sincere souls strive to attain this perfection. They are ready to pay any price for attaining the perfection (Lalita vistara xix.57). He is supposed to be like *Siddhartha* sitting under the *bodhi* tree with firm resolve to attain *Buddhahood*.

CONCLUSION

Human being is not bothered about the philosophy as long as it helps him resolving his day today afflictions. Thus to prove or to disapprove the validity of the philosophical truths is the job of the scholars not of a layman. Ordinary man wants to go beyond sorrow and conflicts. The abstruse philosophy is not for him to comprehend but he can feel the inner poise through elevating thoughts and yogic practices. Vedānta teaches that human being is essentially a divine being. It says that the misery faced by man is due to his wrong identification with the body and mind. One can never be a combination of physical matter, however subtle, because physical entities are perishable. This knowledge cannot dawn upon him until unless he spends sufficient time in Yogic practices, as told in Patañjali yoga-sūtras. Vedānta and Patañjali yoga-sūtras, do differ in their basic premises in their understanding about reality. But the practice aspect of Yoga scriptures like *Asana* (Patanjali Yoga sutra ii.46), *Pranāyāma* (Patanjali Yoga sutra ii.49) and *Pratyāhāra* are necessary to realize the truth of Vedānta. The Bhagawad Gita is called a *Smṛiti prasthan*, and is categorized as a Vedantic text among the *Prasthan Trayas*. The Bhagawad Geeta is called a *smṛiti prasthan*, and is categorized as a Vedāntic text among the *prasthan traya* (Nath, S. (2002) . Thus, it can be referred like some Upaniṣads. Geeta in the sixth chapter describes many yogic practices (Bhagawad Geeta, vi.12-13). If such practical aspects are left behind, then any philosophy however grand may be, will reduce to a mere mental gymnastics. Consequently, it will not produce any tangible result in the life of an individual. On the positive note, such amalgamation is happening on organizational level also. This integrated approach is more acceptable because it brings definite results and is applicable to the solutions of practical everyday life situations.

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