

# Paranormal Phenomena in Patanjali Yoga Sutra

Dr. B. R. Sharma\*

\*Asst. Director of Research & Head,  
Philosophico-Literary Research Department  
Kaivalyadhama, Lonavla, India  
Email: adisheka@gmail.com.

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## Abstract

An attempt has been made to survey the vibhuti's & siddhi's (Supernatural Yogic abilities) of Patanjala Yoga Sutra and their relevance to paranormal phenomena of Para-psychology and found that if the Modern Parapsychologists understand the theory of yoga then their paranormal phenomena can be established as in yoga, supernatural abilities fall within the field of Nature and mind is a part and parcel of the Nature. When mind is perfectly mastered everything of the universe can be brought under full control and thereby any experience can be reproduced at will at any time.

**Key words:** paranormal phenomena, citta, ashtangayoga, samyama, siddhi/vibhuti.

## Introduction

Paranormal Phenomenon is being established by Para-psychologists. According to them Paranormal Phenomena occur without any conscious effort. It is also observed that normally we communicate through written or spoken words/aids but paranormal communication takes place directly through the mind without using any aids. However, when the same experience is not reproducible at 'Will' the person having the given ability is considered to be gifted. Such, phenomena do not fall within the range of the principles of psychology. Thus, 'Para-psychology', is a growing science that deals with the paranormal phenomena like supernormal feats such as precognition, retro – cognition, clairvoyance, telepathy etc. and can be said to be as an implied branch of psychology<sup>1</sup>. Parapsychologists are interested to know certain procedures with the help of which such phenomena can be established within the scope of some law. Yoga, particularly Patanjala Yoga Sutra, may provide answer to such phenomena as in its third chapter; we find ample references of paranormal yogic abilities, akin to the Western concept of paranormal phenomena, developed systematically by way of understanding the nature and functioning of the Chitta (mind-stuff) through various procedures. In this pursuit, at certain stages of progressive development, the *sadhaka* attains various supernatural yogic abilities (called *vibhutis* or *siddhis*) which do not seem to be based on speculations but based on the concrete experiences of

yogis from generation to generation and hence this text seems relevant to understand the paranormal experiences as advocated by Modern Parapsychologists. In this paper a survey of supernatural yogic abilities, described by Patanjali is undertaken and some passing observations are also made for the researchers who are engaged in the field of Para-psychology. Before we do so, let us take a short note of the Central Theme of Sage Patanjali.

### **Central Theme of Patanjala Yoga Sutra**

The Sutra Treatise of Patanjali divided in four chapters, is a psychological exposition of Yoga as its field of action is to refine the activities of *chitta* (mind-stuff) and thereby getting absolute mastery over it and the whole treatise deals with the means and ways to achieve this end. Thus, keeping this theme in mind, Patanjali defines Yoga as-“*chitta – vritti – nirodha*”. It does not mean that a sadhaka becomes ‘mindless’ being, rather he is left ‘conscious-full’ with a transformed mind which due to its transparent (*sattvika*) nature can function to understand the Self, as well as, the not-self. This state can be achieved step-by-step through dedicated and determined practice (*abhyasa*) of the eight-fold path of yoga and dispassionate objectivity (*vairagya*)<sup>2</sup> wherein Patanjali provides moral (*yamas*), ethical (*niyamas*) discipline (and considers them to be indispensable for this journey), firm and comfortable posture (*asana*), expansion of breath (*pranayama*), concentration (*dharana*) that leads to yoga meditation (*dhyana*) The process of these practices in its still higher stage is termed as *samapatti*-complete fusion into the chosen object.

The successful practice of these higher *sadhana* purifies the *citta* from its *vitarkas* i.e. the understanding things through the mixture of word, meaning and idea about the object, *vichara* i.e habitual mode of comprehending the objects in terms of space –time and causality and as a result, *samadhi* takes place which is termed as seed *samadhi*. The practice of last three limbs together (i.e. *dharana- dhyana- samadhi*) is called *samyama*. In this process, Yogi not only proceeds from the gross objects to the subtler objects but also attains various supernatural yogic abilities (called *vibhutis* or *siddhis*) as a mark of his progress. However, he continues his *sadhana* still further and there arise a *prajna* known as *rtambhara* (intuitive power) that purifies the subliminal impressions imprinted on *chitta* through inference and heard knowledge. Now the *chitta* is left with new impressions aroused from *rtambhara prajna* which are also need to be dropped. This dropping state takes place only through intense practice of *paravairagya*. As a result, there is a gradual dropping of subliminal impressions of *rtambhara prajna* and thereby arousal of Seedless *samadhi*. And ultimately when the very support of *chitta* is done away with it merges in its own cause i.e. *prakrti* (prime matter) and thereby *purusha* (Pure Consciousness) gets established in its pure pristine nature which is termed as liberation or *kaivalya*<sup>3</sup>.

Here, it is essential to note that in Yoga psychology *chitta* (mind-stuff) is a product of *prakriti* which is inert in nature and therefore, *chitta* is not considered to be the source of consciousness or an independent conscious entity in itself but, so to say, it derives its consciousness from *purusha* (Pure Consciousness) which is not in any way concerned with any *vibhuti or siddhi* (paranormal/ supernatural abilities). Thus, according to yoga, these yogic abilities fall with in the field of Nature and *chitta* is an inseparable part of the Nature. Hence, the whole material phenomena can be brought under full control when *chitta* is perfectly mastered and thereby any experience can be reproduced at will at any time<sup>4</sup>. This is the basic theory of Patanjala Yoga which needs to be understood by the Parapsychologists of the modern times.

### Description of Vibhuti/ Siddhis

It is already mentioned that when sadhaka becomes habituated in the practice of the successive stages of *samyama*, his *chitta* becomes a fit instrument in penetrating and understanding a particular object fully and ultimately crosses over the limitations of the senses thereby attains extrasensory perception, sensations and supernatural yogic abilities. Patanjali describes them in the third chapter of Yoga Sutra known as *vibhutipada*. Let us take the survey of such supernatural yogic abilities as described by Patanjali<sup>5</sup>-

Application of <i>samyama</i> on particular object	Ref. in PYS	Accomplishment
1. Threefold changes – basic properties ( <i>dharma</i> )- external signs & symptoms ( <i>lakshna</i> ) conditions ( <i>avastha</i> ) of an object	III-16	Knowledge of the past and future
2. The distinctions between name ( <i>word</i> ), external objects ( <i>artha</i> ) and experience ( <i>pratyaya</i> ) which ordinarily appears united as one.	III-17	<i>Sadhaka</i> reaches the state of ‘ <i>Sphota</i> ’ and thereby the knowledge of the sounds of all living beings
3. Latent impressions( <i>samskaras</i> ) of the past	III-18	Knowledge of previous life
4. Mental content	III-19	Knowledge of others minds
5. On the form & color of the body ( <i>kayarupa</i> )	III-21	Disappearance (by virtue of the perceptibility being checked)
6. Fast or slow fructification of action ( <i>karma</i> )	III-22	Pre-cognition of unusual happening & death

7. Friendliness ( <i>maitri</i> ), sympathy ( <i>mudita</i> ) and compassion ( <i>karuna</i> ) etc.	III-23	Strength ( at physical, mental & spiritual levels)
8. Strength of elephant	III-24	Elephantine strength
9. Illuminative power of super-sensual faculty ( <i>pravrittyaloka</i> )	III-25	Knowledge of things which are subtle, hidden and distant
10. Sun & Moon	III-26,27	Knowledge of Universe & the starry systems
11. Pole-star	III-28	Knowledge of the relative position & movements of the stars.
12. Navel ( <i>nabhi</i> )	III-29	Knowledge of the system of the body
13. Pit of the throat ( <i>kanthakupa</i> )	III-30	Power to go beyond hunger and thirst
14. Tortoise energy channel ( <i>kurmanadi</i> )	III-31	Steadiness
15. Cranial luminosity ( <i>murdhhyotishi</i> ) and inner intuition ( <i>pratibhat</i> )	III-32,33	Vision of the perfected ones, the seers or all knowledge by prescience
16. Heart ( <i>hridaya</i> )	III-34	Knowledge of the mind in its totality.
17. The distinction between pure consciousness and the subtlest aspect of the mind.	III-35,36,38	i. Extra-sensory experiences – divine hearing, touch, vision, taste, and odor. ii. By loosening the bodily limitations sadhaka can transmigrate into other body. iii. Knowledge of pure consciousness.
18. i. <i>udana vayu</i> ii. <i>samana vayu</i> iii. Relation between ear and ether iv. Relation between the human body and ether v. Gross ( <i>sthula</i> ), substantive ( <i>svarupa</i> ), the astral ( <i>sukshma</i> ) conjunction ( <i>anvaya</i> ) and purposefulness ( <i>arthavatva</i> )	III-39, 40, 43, 41, 42, 44 45, 46,	i. One can move unobstructed over water, mud, thorn and levitation. ii. Radiance and effulgence manifest. Removal of veil of ignorance iii. divine hearing iv. Extreme lightness and travel in space at will. v. Control over the element from which follow attenuation, perfection of the body and non-resistance by their

		characteristics. <i>ashtasiddhis</i> —eight-fold powers like <i>anima</i> (ability to become as small as one wishes etc.
19. Act ( <i>grahana</i> ), the substantive appearance ( <i>svarupa</i> ), egoism ( <i>asmity</i> ), conjunction ( <i>anvaya</i> ) and the purposefulness of sensation ( <i>arthavattva</i> )	III-47, 48,	Mastery over the senses and quickness of mind ( <i>manojavitva</i> ), unaided mental perception ( <i>vikaranabhava</i> ) (as in 17 above) and mastery over the <i>pradhana</i> ( <i>pradhanajaya</i> ) & thereby the total control over Natural phenomena.

Patanjali has also noted and described a few supernatural abilities in the fourth chapter of Yoga Sutra wherein **i**. By birth (*janma*) an individual may be having some strange abilities –supernatural feats such as clairvoyance and clairaudience etc. on the basis of impressions (*samskaras*) of the practice of his previous lives **ii**. Supernatural abilities can be developed by using certain drugs (*aushadi*) (about which Para-psychologists are well aware) **iii**. Attainment of supernatural abilities by the repetition of certain mantras, **iv**. Attainment of supernatural abilities by way of disciplined and austere efforts and **v**. Attainment of supernatural abilities through deep contemplation (*samadhi*) but it seems that Patanjali appreciates only the last one and does not seem to give much importance to the use of other means as such means may distract the *sadhaka* from the final goal of Yoga<sup>6</sup>. He has given much importance to those abilities which are cultivated gradually step by step and stage by stage through the methodical procedures of *samyama* to attain mastery over the entire Natural phenomena and not simultaneously at once. However, In Sutra III-38, Patanjali warns the *sadhakas* by saying that these abilities also can create obstruction to the final journey of yoga called *kaivalya*.

It is very much clear from the tabular presentation of yogic *vibhutis/siddhis* that these are related to precognition, retro-cognition, psychometric clairvoyance, telepathy, knowing the thoughts of others; clairaudience, knowledge of the subtle, concealed, remote etc. and few of them are spiritual and mystical and are very much relevant to paranormal phenomena. As these procedures are so systematically described by Patanjali that they can be applied and investigated scientifically by Modern Para-psychologists with a view to understand the efficacy of these procedures, as well as, to establish the paranormal phenomena. However, keeping the yogic goal in mind it can certainly be said that in the beginning, such abilities occur only to strengthen the faith of *sadhaka* in the path of his progress and they happen only as a result of the total transformation of the mind as a particular object. Even after getting the goal of yoga, a liberated yogi can make use of such abilities for the

benefit of mankind wherein he can create a new individualized mind (*nirmana chitta*) and can also dissolve it at will. Such examples are not only available in Patanjala Yoga Sutra or in Indian culture including Jainism and Buddhism but everywhere in all the cultures of the world<sup>7</sup>.

From this survey of *vibhuti/siddhi* discussed above, it can be said that the supernatural abilities, described in Patanjala Yoga Sutra, fall within the range of the transformed *chitta* and not beyond that. Hence, paranormal experiences too should be natural and can be explained through the Natural Law. For, the guidelines described by Patanjali, as well as, the guidelines of a few accomplished yogis may help the Modern Para-psychologists in investigating and establishing the paranormal phenomena in their Psychological Laboratories.

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