

Motivational Elements in Yoga: A Conceptual Synthesis

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Abstract

The metaphysics of Yoga advocates the dissociation of *puruṣa* from *prakṛti* as the means to the dispersion of *avidya* and thus the means to escape from miseries of life. The dissociation here is the dissociation of the subject and the object; the seer and the seen; the pure consciousness and the matter. Meanwhile, *Yogaśūtra* describes the state of attaining the end of sufferings -*cittavṛttinirodhah-* as the one characterised by the fusing together of the knower, known and the knowledge. This is the state of *yoga*-the union, which is the union of the subject and the object; the seer and the seen; the pure consciousness and the matter. This explanation is in explicit contradiction with the one stated earlier. Liberation, which is the *summum bonum* of the practice of yoga can be resolved into the components of identification and alienation. The empirical ego, which is the subject of experience can be seen attaining the dual function of identification and alienation through ego dynamics. the ultimate state in Yoga, the *samādhi*, can be described as a state that is aimed at alienation of *prakṛti* from *puruṣa* through identification of the meditator with the object of meditation. Of these, the element of alienation satisfies the metaphysical necessity for attaining *Kaivalya* described in Yoga theory, while identification satisfies the phenomenological necessity described in the practice of yoga. Identification and alienation thus forms the thesis and antithesis of yoga practice, which is transcended and synthesised in the process of *samādhi*.

Key words: Yoga, motivation, freedom, ego, identification, alienation,

Introduction

Derived from the root ‘*yuj*’, aiming at the union of the empirical self with the transcendental self, yoga has been a living tradition in India since the third century BC (Whicher, 1998, p. 7). The union of the empirical self with the transcendental one has been seen as a soteriological aim that the tradition is meant for. Patanjali, often known as the founder of the system of Yoga, may be seen as the one who systematised the then existing long traditions in 300 AD (Leggett, 1981, p. xi). Being a systematiser, he brought into the variety of interrelated traditions on the practice of yoga under a single theoretical explanation.

Yoga can be seen primarily aimed at the alleviation of human suffering, mainly the psychological one. In order to achieve this psychological health, psychological harmony, yoga finds it necessary to build

up the social, personal and physical health as its foundation. Even though the aim of yoga in the practical realm is psychological, its final aim is essentially spiritual.

The psychology of yoga, which may be included in the contemporary classification of folk psychology¹, correlates the psychological experiences with the subject of those experiences. Since any experience for the subject is the experience of an object, the study of psychological phenomenon necessarily involves the study of subject-object relationships. This epistemological position on the subject-object relationship necessarily includes the inquiry into the nature of the object, which essentially is metaphysical. Hence, the true understanding of yoga psychology includes the understanding of its underlying metaphysics.

There are differences in opinion regarding whether Yoga has its own metaphysics or it borrows its metaphysics from the ancient Sāmkhya system. The metaphysical descriptions given in the *Yogasūtra*, the authentic text on yoga, in any case, is similar to the one given in Sāmkhya. There are also possibilities that both these systems, Sāmkhya and Yoga, stemmed out of a single philosophy(Feuerstein, 1980, p. x). The very controversy over the metaphysical foundation of yoga itself is sufficient to indicate the near identity of the metaphysical concepts of Sāmkhya and Yoga. The section II (Sādhanāpāda) and the section IV (Kaivalyapāda) of *Yogasūtra* describes the metaphysics of the system. These descriptions, however are not explicit and are more indicative than expressive. Hence, for the present analysis, we may consider the metaphysics of yoga identical with that of Sāmkhya, and depend on the resources from Sāmkhya that are easily available.

Kaivalya as the summum bonum of Yoga:

As stated earlier, Yoga primarily is an eschatological enterprise that seeks its prescriptions to be practiced to get relief from the sufferings of the everyday world. The ultimate liberation from the worldly sufferings in both the systems of Sāmkhya and Yoga is called *Kaivalya*. *Kaivalya* is the ultimate/ absolute freedom from the worldly bondage. The notion of *Kaivalya* in a metaphysical description amounts to the dissociation of the *puruṣa* from *prakṛti*. In the metaphys of sāmkhya-yoga, *puruṣa* is the subject, the seer, while *prakṛti* is the material substratum of the universe. The state of liberation, thus, is the result of getting out of the ignorance of the identification of the self (*puruṣa*) with the not-self (*prakṛti*) (*Yogasūtra* – II- 17, 24)ⁱⁱ. Through the acquirement of knowledge of the true nature of the self (*puruṣa*), the *puruṣa* gets liberated from the bondage of *prakṛti* and establishes its original nature, which is pure consciousness (*Yogasūtra* IV-34)ⁱⁱⁱ.

In the practice of yoga, *Kaivalya* is explained as the state attained through *dharmameghasamādhi* (*Yogasūtra* IV-26, 29), which is the highest form of *samādhi*. *Samādhi* according to *Yogasūtra* (III-3) is the state the subject has consciousness only of the object of meditation. Etymologically *samādhi* means equal mind (from the verb root *dhii* - "to hold" + the prefixes *ā* + *sam* - "together completely") (Grimes, 1996, p. 269). It may be seen that in the process of meditation (*dhyāna*), the meditator is confining his/ her concentration towards a single object of meditation, in the stage of *astāṅgayoga* called *dhāraṇa* (*Yogasūtra* III-1) and an uninterrupted flow of consciousness is maintained towards the object of meditation (*Yogasūtra* III-3). Hence, *samādhi* is the culmination of *dhyāna*, in which the object of meditation, the meditator, and the knowledge about the object are fused together.

The Conceptual Contradiction in Yoga Metaphysics and Practice:

We have seen in the metaphysical description of liberation that the notion of *Kaivalya*, which is the highest motivational principle (*summum bonum*), is attained through the dissociation of *puruṣa* from *prakṛti*. Through this dissociation, the dispersion of ignorance and hence is the real remedy for the miseries of worldly life (*Yogasūtra* II-25). The dissociation here is the dissociation of the subject and the object; the seer and the seen; the pure consciousness and the matter. However, in the practice of yoga, as seen in the previous section, the approach is contradictory to this position. *Yogasūtra* (I-41) describes the state of attaining the end of sufferings (*cittavṛttinirodhah*) as the one characterised by the fusing together of the knower, known and the knowledge. This is the state of yoga- the union, which is the union of the subject and the object; the seer and the seen; the pure consciousness and the matter. This

explanation is in explicit contradiction with the one stated in the metaphysical explanation. The present paper is an attempt to synthesise the conceptual contradiction stated above.

The Ego and its Dynamics:

According to *Yogasūtra* the true subject of experience, the seer, is *puruṣa* or pure consciousness (II-20). The *prakṛti*, what is seen, the objects of experience, exists for the sake of this seer (*Yogasūtra* II-21). Ignorance or *avidya* is the lack of awareness of this pure nature (YS II-24). This causes the sense of egoism in which the conscious power of *puruṣa* is wrongly identified with the power of intellect. This produces the feeling of 'I am'ness and the ego assumes the role of agency (Taimni, 1961, pp. 143-46). So, for the empirical or living self, the experienced subject (the phenomenal subject) is the ego. The ego in this sense is the principle of individuation (Sharma, 1960, p. 160). Instead of the true *puruṣa*, one feels that it is he/she (the ego) that acts.

Ahankāra, the ego-function, causes us to believe that we feel like acting, that we are suffering, etc.; whereas actually our real being, the Puruṣa, is devoid of such modifications. Ahankāra is the centre and prime motivating force of "delusion" (Abhimāna). Ahankāra is the misconception, conceit, supposition, or belief that refers all objects and acts of consciousness to an 'I' (aham)... It is thus the prime cause of the critical "wrong conception" that dogs all phenomenal experience... One is continually appropriating to oneself, as a result of ahankāra, everything that comes to pass in the realms of the physique and psyche, superimposing perpetually the false notion (and apparent experience) of a subject (an 'I') of all deeds and sorrows (Zimmer, 1990, p. 319).

From now onwards, we may restrict the usage of the term ego to the phenomenal

ego or the felt ego which is also an object of our own experience. It is the element that unifies our phenomenal experience under one subjectivity.

The nature of the ego dynamics lies in the essence of ego itself. Ego, by definition, is the principle of individuation. Any identity necessitates differentiation. One identifies oneself as belonging to a certain category through contrasting his/ her existence with some other distinct category. In this sense, identity and difference are two sides of a coin. Individuality is gained through differentiating others from oneself. The ego gains its identity through unifying all that can be categorised under its possession as mine and categorising everything else as 'the other'^{iv}.

The function of ego thus is two-fold. Firstly, it unifies all that can be called mine under the notion of 'I' or self. Secondly it alienates everything that cannot be called mine from itself to form 'the other'. The ego creates the 'self' and 'the other' through unification and alienation respectively.

Human Motivation and the Ego:

Every human action, consciously or unconsciously, is oriented toward the fulfilment of a need. The need that necessarily leads to an action is called motivation. Hence, it is the motivational theories that deal with psychological causation. All psychological theories of motivation, irrespective of their final outcome, view pleasure (or the avoidance of pain) as the most appealing aspect of human motivation. A few examples are psychological hedonism, psychoanalytical theory of motivation and Janet's tension theory. So, at the first instance, it may be seen that it is the nature of pleasure or the state of not being in pain that is to be analysed in the inquiry into human motivation.

One of the most widely used motivational hypothesis in biology and psychology is

stimulus intensity reduction theory, which is a version of *tension reduction theory* of motivation(Cofer & Appley, 1980, p. 601).According to such theories, human actions are intended for reducing the psychic stimuli. For example, since pain is the intolerable stimuli; the avoidance of it necessitates the reduction of the pain generating stimuli.The pleasurable stimuli also may be seen as the one whose intensity need to be reduced according to stimulus intensity reduction theories. In accounting for a theory of motivation, we need to accommodate this aspect too. Also, because the present attempt has to accommodate the concept of liberation (*Kaivalyan Yoga*), we need to go beyond mere hedonism to find the fundamental motivating principle.

Here, we may first introduce the term freedom, analyse its components and relate it with pleasure or pain. The concept of freedom is more or less obscure. No interpretation or explanation of it can be found satisfactory. However, here we shall analyse the essential aspect of it to find out the fundamental elements that are involved in the state of freedom.

The state of freedom is in opposition to the state of being bound. To be bound is to be bound by something else. So, the state of being bound presupposes the existents other than the self, which binds the self. Hence, to be free in the absolute sense presupposes a state in which nothing other than the self exists. The world as we know contains other existents along with the self who experiences them. Hence the *logical* possibility of achieving absolute freedom in the sense described above is twofold.

The first is a negative one of annihilating everything other than the self. The second is a positive one in which the self becomes identical with every other existent. Both the states are obviously impossible. Hence, the subjective possibility of attaining such a state may be inquired into. The crucial element in the above discussion is the

relationship between freedom and the dichotomy of self and the other.

In the earlier description, we have seen ego as the element that is responsible for the dichotomy of the self and the other. As freedom is seen as the state with no possibility of distinction of the self and the other, the state of freedom demands the non-existence of the ego. The existing self or ego can achieve the state of non-ego, or the ego can dissolve or destroy itself (phenomenologically) through any of the two processes; alienation or identification. Of these, the first one is the process in which one psychologically denies the existence of everything else and then he/she becomes the sole existent. In the second one, identification, one affirms the identity of everything else as that of oneself and thus becomes the sole existent.

Thus, the function of ego can be widely grouped into that of identification and alienation. These are psychic correlates of our former resolution of freedom into the positive one of ‘identification with the other’ and the negative principle of ‘annihilating the other’.

Identification:

In identification, the ego identifies itself with its possessions; whether it is material or mental. An ego can grow in such a way as to include many possessions^v. In such a growth, the narrow boundaries of ego get dissolved to include those ‘things’ that were the other. This dissolution of ego can be seen in positive emotions like friendship and love. Ego, the generator of the sense of me and mine, is dissolved here to form the sense of ‘we’ness and ‘our’ness.

Thus, the dissolution of ego with the other, when expands its boundary to include all the ‘others’ reaches a stage of perfection where no ‘other’ exists and thus attains the state of freedom. This –identification- is the principle of unification. The various

forms of dissolution of the ego through which it tries to identify with ‘the other’ are many. Driven by the motivating principle or the urge to unite with the ‘other’, it broadens its boundary from mere structural ego to material possessions to friendship to love to sex to universal love to a position where it includes all the other, that is salvation.

Alienation:

Alienation is another mode of attaining freedom. It becomes the other side of identification. Identification with some particulars has a negative aspect of alienating the others. Hence, the exclusion of the ‘other’ from the identity of self happens. This happens in the negative process of narrowing down the ego. The ego alienates all social relations and material possessions as it reckons itself as something different from these possessions. Here, the ego moves towards its pure state - the spatio-temporal structure of experience^{vi}. This is synonymous with the earlier stated negative way of attaining freedom - that is to annihilate everything other than the self. This is the reverse process of what we have seen in identification.

The psychological necessity of freedom is the state of being alone. Alienation enables one to attain this state negatively through making ‘the other’ non-existent. This empirically impossible thesis is phenomenologically possible to a certain extent. As seen in the case of identification, there are various possible degrees and variants of the expression of one and the same principle in alienation also.

A phenomenological account of alienation aims at ‘destroying’ ‘the other’ through various means. The modes and degrees of ‘destruction’ is attained in hate, aggression, anti-social activities, sadism, homicide, suicide and the like. These are the ways of attaining freedom through

making the unfavourable, non-identifiable, ‘the other’ ‘non- existential’.

All the modes mentioned above except suicide may be seen explicitly targeting the destruction of ‘the other’. The ‘destruction’ here is achieved through emotional or physical activities. In all these activities, the individual ego is strengthened against ‘the other’ being destroyed. Alienation, the negative way of annihilating ‘the other’ is achieving of freedom through over powering ‘the other’. This mode of freedom is contrary to identification where ‘the other’ is destroyed through dissolution of the ego into ‘the other’.

Death is not an event in one’s life; it is an event through which one passes from one mode of existence (life) into another mode of existence (dead). Keeping the immortality of soul in question, for the one who believes in the immortality, death merely changes his/ her mode of existence. For others death is the end of this world(Wittgenstein, 2001, p. 6.431).

Suicidal actions led by the outbreak of emotions are in either way an attempt to annihilate the world. The one who believes in the immortality of soul gets released from the worldly sufferings (the bondage by the other) through his/ her change of mode from the one in which world exists to the one in which the world is destroyed. The one for whom death is the end of everything, puts an end to ‘the other’ (the world) and achieves freedom. Suicide is an extreme end of transforming the world to get out of bondage. It is a way of transforming the world to meet one’s demands, to get freedom from sufferings. Suicidal actions motivated by emotions achieve this transformation as all emotional states do.

Emotion may be called a sudden fall of consciousness into magic; or’ if you will’ emotion arises when the world of the

utilizable vanishes abruptly and the world of magic appears in its place... Emotion is not an accident, it is a mode of our conscious existence, one of the ways on which consciousness understands... its Being-in-the-World(Sartre, 1962, pp. 90-91).

Identification and Alienation in the Psychology of Yoga:

The twin function of identification and alienation in the Yoga system may be looked into from three angles; a) metaphysical b) psychological and c) phenomenological.

The metaphysics of Yoga explains the false identification of *puruṣa* with *prakṛti* as the cause of bondage. *Kaivalya*, the liberation in Yoga, can be attained only by the removal of this false identification through the correct identification of *puruṣa* with pure consciousness. The wrong identification with *prakṛti*, which is the cause of bondage, is *avidya*. And by the dispersion of *avidya*, the effect- bondage- also disappears through the dissociation of *puruṣa* from *prakṛti* (*Yogasūtra*- II- 25).

If *avidya* is the wrong identification with *prakṛti*, knowledge aims at the removal of this identification. Through this removal, the *puruṣa* gets alienated from the *prakṛti*. The avoidance of the miseries of life-liberation-, according to *Yogasūtra*, can be achieved through the avoidance of the union (identification) of the seer- *puruṣa*- and the seen- *prakṛti* (*Yogasūtra*- II- 17).

The wrong identification necessitates the alienation here. *puruṣa* is the seer- the ultimate seer- the pure subjectivity. Whatever is seen is that which is other than *puruṣa*, that in the metaphysics of Yoga is *prakṛti*. For *puruṣa* (seer); *prakṛti* (seen) constitutes ‘the other’. The association of *puruṣa* with *prakṛti* is then one of subject-object relation. Thus, the dissociation of *puruṣa* means the non-existence of *prakṛti* as an object of *puruṣa*.

Through this dissociation the *puruṣa* alienates itself from *prakṛti*.

Coming to the psychological aspect of Yoga, Yoga is defined as *cittavṛttinirodhah* (*Yogasūtra*- I-2), or ‘yoga is the inhibition of the modifications of the mind’(Taimni, 1961, p. 6). The *citta*, the triple principle of intellect, ego and mind, is modified when it comes in contact with objects (*Yogasūtra*-VI- 17).

The *citta*, which of course is the product of *prakṛti*, is known to be modified through the changelessness of *puruṣa*, the seer (*Yogasūtra*-VI- 18). The cessation of the modifications of *citta* can only be achieved through non-cognition, that is by *citta* not coming in contact with the objects. The ‘object’ is ‘the other’ for the cognizing mind. Not coming in contact with the object then means the alienation from the objects. In other words, the modification of consciousness can take place only when the self acts as the subject. To be a subject is to stand against an object. That is to say that any experience presupposes a subject-object dualism. As long as the self remains to be the subject, ‘the other’ is presented to it. To cease all modifications is to cease the existence of ‘the other’. Hence Yoga is the process of ceasing the existence of ‘the other’ and Yoga in this sense is a discipline aimed at alienation.

Considering yoga from a phenomenological point of view, leads us to a conclusion different from that we have seen from the metaphysical point of view. Meditation (*dhyāna*) is the process of contemplating on the object of meditation (*Yogasūtra* III- 2). In this the subject constantly focuses his/ her attention on the object (the other). In this process, the subject associates itself with ‘the other’ rather than alienating from the other. In this contemplation, the *citta* gradually alienates the thoughts about all things other than the object of meditation. Thus, the one pointedness of mind and the state

of consciousness of the object of meditation alone (*ekāgratāparināma*) is achieved (*Yogasūtra* III- 11, 12). The mechanism at work here is the identification with object of meditation through the alienation from other distracting objects. Through this identifying process, the state of *samādhi* is reached. Even before accomplishing *samādhi* (as an outcome of *cittavṛttinirodhah*), the identification becomes prominent. In this state, there is a complete fusion (identification) of the knower and the known (*Yogasūtra* I- 41). In *samādhi*, there is a complete identification of the subject with the object, without even having the awareness of the subject (*Yogasūtra* III- 3).

Here, contrary to the metaphysical explanation, mind ceases to function owing to the non-existence of subject-object dualism and attains the inseparability of subject and object. This dissolution of subject-object dualism seen in the process of meditation culminates at *nirbijasamādhi* where there is no sense of the ego (*Yogasūtra* I-51). The act of dissolving the ego in the process of meditation is analogous to our earlier explanation of identification.

Conclusion:

It has been seen from the foregoing discussion that, in attaining freedom, whether it is through identification, or through alienation, the final state is the one

where the self (ego) alone exists. For the self, phenomenologically, being the subject of experience, to exist alone is to exist without the object (the other). The non-existence of the object makes the subject cease to exist as a subject (and so is the self without the other). Hence, it is the state in which neither the subject nor the object exist, but is the state of absolute existence without any subject-object distinction. Here the ego dynamics aim through the non-existence of ego to pure-existence (a state where the ego cannot be phenomenologically differentiated). Thus, we can see that the ultimate state in Yoga, the *samādhi*, can be described as a state that is aimed at alienation (of *prakṛti* from *puruṣa*) through identification (of the meditator with the object of meditation). Of these, the element of alienation satisfies the metaphysical necessity for attaining *Kaivalya* described in Yoga theory, while identification satisfies the phenomenological necessity described in the practice of yoga. Identification and alienation thus forms the two pillars of yogic practice. Hence, from the motivational point of view, Yoga is aimed at liberation, which is achieved through the dynamic process of meditation in which the self identifies itself with the object (thesis) as well as alienates itself from the other objects (antithesis) and culminates through different stages of *samādhi* (synthesis) and attains the state of *kaivalya* (Absolute existence).

Notes:

- i. Folk-psychology: The common-sense psychology that explains human behaviour in terms of beliefs, desires, intentions, expectations and so on. It is in contrast with the scientific psychology that relies on experimental data for explanation. It is also an interpretation of such everyday explanations as part of a folk theory, comprising a network of generalizations employing concepts like belief, desire, and so on(Baker, 1999, p. 319).
- ii. II-17: “The cause of that which is to be avoided is the union of the Seer and the Seen”(Taimni, 1961, p. 169). II-24: “Its cause is the lack of awareness of his Real nature”(Taimni, 1961, p. 196).

iii. IV-34: “Kaivalya is the state (of Enlightenment) following remergence of the Gunas because of their becoming devoid of the object of the Purusa. In this state the Purusa is established in his Real nature which is pure Consciousness”(Taimni, 1961, p. 443).

iv. ‘The other’, here and throughout the paper is used in an epistemological sense. In this sense, the other can be other persons/ individuals for the self, or other objects for the subject of experience.

v. This is obvious from the sense in which ‘I’ is used when it is stated that ‘I met with an accident’ when the car I travelled is caught in an accident and nothing has happened to me. In this case, the use of the term ‘I’ refers neither to my body nor to my mind but to the car which is taken to be an element in the constitution of the notion of ‘I’. Ego here is identified with the material possession.

vi. Distinguished from the act, impressions and appearing object, the ego... has no material content of its own. It is quite empty of such... ego becomes... a *form or structure* (Author’s emphasis) for such experiences (Mensch, 1997, p. 163).

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