

VARṆĀŚRAMADHARMA IN YOGA *YĀJÑĀ VALKYA*

K.S. Balasubramanian

Abstract

The Vedic literature and the later *Smṛti* texts have given elaborate description of the duties to be performed by all the people born in this world. The *Smṛti* texts enjoin duties for people belonging to different castes and exhort them to perform those acts assiduously to obtain merit and to escape from the sufferings.

Yoga on the other hand treats everyone equal and does not differentiate anyone with regard to caste, colour, creed, sex, nationality or religion. It has universal appeal and hence is popular across the globe unlike some other systems of practice confined only to a particular geographical area or period of time. But it is also curious to know that *Yoga Yājñavalkya*, an ancient, popular and authentic yogic text gives importance to *Varṇāśramadharmā* as enjoined in the *smṛtis*. This paper deals on this subject.

INTRODUCTION

There have been many Yogic texts, teachers and students of Yoga in different parts of India and now in many other countries too. The science of Yoga has attracted people from all walks of life irrespective of their religion, colour, creed, sex, profession and so on. By the practice of various techniques of Yoga, one attains control over his body and mind. The Yoga school of Patañjali endeavours to make a person lead a moral, ethical and healthy life. This school starts with *yama* and *niyama* which are moral and ethical codes, followed by practices such as *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* which contribute for the development of physical and mental well-

being of a person. As such, Patañjali does not exclude anyone from the practice of *aṣṭāṅgayoga*, provided one follows the instructions given in his *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* (YS). It is to be noted that the major texts on Haṭhayoga, like *Gorakṣa Samhitā* (GS) of Gorakṣanātha, *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* (HYP) of Svātmārāma, *Haṭharatnāvali* (HR) Śrinivāsa Yogīndra, *Śivasamhitā* (ŚS) and *GheraṇḍaSamhitā* (Gh.S) also do not differentiate a person by his caste for the practice of Yogic techniques.

Yoga Yājñavalkya (YY) is an authentic and ancient text on Yoga. It is a unique text describing the *aṣṭāṅga yoga* of Patañjali but different from it in its description and definition of many practices. YY also describes many aspects of theory and practices which are not found in *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali.

YY is divided into 12 *adhyāyas*. What makes YY unique is that, it gives many concepts found in *Dharmaśāstra* texts and also offers its own views on such concepts. These are not found in later texts on Yoga. One such concept is *varṇāśramadharmā*.

Varṇāśramadharmā

YY differs from *HYP*, *HR*, *GS*, *ŚS* and *Gh.S*. with regard to the practice of *mantra* by *sādhakas* of different castes. It strongly upholds the view that one must practise the rules of his *varṇāśrama*. It says repeatedly that one should follow instructions enjoined in the scriptures. These can be seen from the phrases such as “*vidhivatkarma kartavyam*” (I. 27, 39 ; II. 3, 11 ; VI. 82 ; IX. 42 ; X. 6 ; XI. 8, 9 and XII. 41). Also YY advocates different practices, especially the use of Vedic *mantras* and the *praṇava*, for people of different castes and women.

YY (I. 29 - 38) says that the *Brāhmaṇas* are eligible to all the four *āśramas* (*viz.*, *brahmacarya*, *gāṛhasthya*, *vānaprastha* and *sannyāsa*); the *Kṣatriyas* for the first three; the *Vaiśyas* for the first two and the *Sūdras* for the second stage (i.e. *gāṛhasthya*) only. YY (I. 36 cd),

however states that in the opinion of some saints, the *Śūdras* are eligible for *brahmacarya āśrama* also.

The *Brāhmaṇa* should perform his duties daily. He should marry a girl of the same caste and beget children¹. He should perform *agnihotra* and in the end, lead the life of a *sannyāsin*.

YY says : शूद्रः शुश्रूषया नित्यं गृहस्थाश्रममाचरेत् ।²

"The *Śūdras* should serve others by leading *gṛhasthāśrama* life.'

While discussing *siddhāntaśravaṇa* (listening/ study of scriptures) as one of the ten *niyamas*, YY (II. 8 - 10) says that only *Brāhmaṇas* and *Kṣatriyas* are eligible to study *Vedānta* or *siddhāntaśravaṇa*. It also says that some hold the view that *Vaiśyas* are also eligible for this; but for *Śūdras* and women, who follow their duties, *siddhāntaśravaṇa* means only *purāṇaśravaṇa*.

During *japa* where the *mantra* is recited aloud, YY³ says that if it is heard by persons of low caste, it would not yield the ordained results :

नीचैः श्रुतो न चेत् सोऽपि श्रुतश्चेत् निष्फलो भवेत् ॥

On the practice of *prāṇāyāma* with meditation of *Gāyatrī mantra* accompanied by the *praṇava*, YY⁴ says, that only *Brāhmaṇas* are eligible for this :

प्रणवेन सुसंयुक्तां व्याहृतीभिश्च संयुताम् ।
गायत्रीं च जपेद्विप्रः... .. ॥

It emphatically says that a *Brāhmaṇa* should utter only *vaidika mantra* and never a *laukika mantra*. YY⁵ :

स वैदकं जपेन्मन्त्रं लौकिकं न कदाचन ॥

However, YY points out that if it is for the good of the other beings, he can use *laukika mantra*.

Kṣatriyas can also utter *vaidika mantra* and *praṇava*, says YY⁶:

द्विजवत्क्षत्रियस्योक्तः प्राणसंयमने जपः ।

But YY⁷ prevents *Vaiśyas*, *Śūdras* and women from uttering the *praṇava*. They can utter either *Saiva* or *Vaiṣṇava mantra* ending with *namaḥ*. The *Śūdras* and women can utter *laukika mantras* during *prāṇāyāma*.

वैश्यानां धर्मयुक्तानां स्त्रीशूद्राणां तपस्विनाम् ॥
 प्राणसंयमने गार्गी मन्त्रं प्रणववर्जितम् ।
 नमोऽन्तं शिवमन्त्रं वा वैष्णवं वेध्यते बुधैः ॥
 यद्वा समभ्यसेच्छूद्रो लौकिकं विधिपूर्वकम् ।
 प्राणसंयमने स्त्री च जपेत् ॥

YY in the next verse adds that *Śūdras* and women should never utter *vaidika mantra*; while some concede that *Vaiśyas* are eligible to do so.

These restrictions, it may be noted, are only for *japa* with *praṇava* and *vaidika mantras*.

YY⁸ hints that all are eligible for the practice of Yoga :

वैश्याः शूद्राः स्त्रियश्चान्ये योगाभ्यासरताः नराः ॥

CONCLUSION

From the above discussions, it can be seen that YY describes in detail the duties of the four *varṇas* with regard to Yogic practice involving Vedic and non-Vedic *mantras*.

In many places YY says that one should follow the duties of one's *āśrama* as ordained in the scriptures. This reminds us of the well known verses of the *Bh. g.*⁹ which say :

श्रेयान् स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात् स्वनुष्ठितात् ।
 and स्वे स्वे कर्मण्यभिरतः संसिद्धिं लभते नरः ।

This is reflected in YY¹⁰:

वर्णाश्रमोक्तं कर्मैव विध्युक्तं कामवर्जितम् ।
 विधिवत् कुर्वतस्तस्य मुक्तिर्गार्गी करे स्थिता ॥

This concept of strictly adhering to the *Varṇāśrama-dharma* makes YY unique among the texts on Yoga.

NOTES :

- ¹ ५५. I. 31: सम्स्कृतायां सवर्णायां पुत्रमुत्पादयेत्ततः ।
² I. 36ab; Cf. *Gītā*. XVIII. 44 –परिचर्यात्मकं कर्म शूद्रस्यापि स्वभावजम् ।
³ II. 17 cd
⁴ VI. 12
⁵ VI. 15 cd
⁶ VI. 16 ab; also in VI. 62 cd
⁷ VI. 16cd - 18
⁸ VI. 63 cd
⁹ *Gītā*, III. 35; XVIII. 45
¹⁰ I. 24 cd- 25 ab

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