

Yoga, Religion and Mysticism

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Abstract: *Although a number of authors – in past times and contemporary – tried to link, or to make yoga close, or same as religion, others have rightly shown that yoga is not religion. One of the well known contemporary authors who related yoga with religion, was Mircea Eliade (1907-86), who tried to define the model from Bhagavad-Gita (which promotes bhakti yoga, which has religious character), as prototype of yoga and yoga teachings. In opposition to him, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) rightly pointed, that the goal and teachings of yoga are of a non-religious character.*

Some analogies - that can be found between some aspects of yoga and mysticism - were a starting point for Surendranath Dasgupta (1885-1952), to connect and interpret concepts and practice of yoga in terms of mysticism. This stand was more reasonable than the approach of those who interpreted yoga in terms of religion. It was particularly convincing in the domain of what Dasgupta named as the third level of knowledge.

Key words: *yoga, bhakti yoga, yoga not a religion, mysticism*

YOGA AND RELIGION

Some authors have suggested that the Sanskrit root *yuj* (harness, connect, unite), from which the word *yoga* is derived, is close to the meaning of the Latin *re-ligo* or *re-ligere* – which then signifies different religions (this linguistic connection was also indicated by our translator of the *Yoga Sutras*, Zoran Zec, 1977, p. 8).

Based on this, some authors concluded that yoga is also a sort of religion, or they even gave the title *How to Know God* to the English translation of *Yoga Sutras* (*How to Know God - The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* - trans. S. Prabhavananda and Ch. Isherwood, 1969). Thus, under this title, yoga is an Indian teaching similar to the Christian concept of deification (*theosis*), which brings salvation from sin and death, and entrance into the kingdom of God. There is some difference, since the Indian understanding, this deification sometimes would mean unification with the divine, and sometimes it would mean entering the paradise of the given deity. Of course, this point of view was not based only on the linguistic connection, but they interpreted the whole teaching of yoga in this manner. However, it really only applies to only one type of yoga - i.e. *bhakti* yoga.

The role of Ishvara in Patanjali yoga

In the *Yoga Sutras*, devotion to God (or Lord – Ishvara) was mentioned in a few places (1.23/27-2.1 and 45), as one of the ways to achieve *samadhi*, or to obtain the powers of *samadhi* (2.45).

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From this, we can see that Patanjali, or a later author who put this into the corpus of the *Yoga Sutras*, counted on two different pathways, or abilities to achieve the same goal:

(a) the pathway of yoga, where the yogi achieves *samadhi* and liberation through his own effort and insight;

(b) the pathway of religious devotion (*pranidhana*, later *bhakti*), by which termination of *samsara* could be achieved, perhaps in the easier way, by unification with the divine.

These two pathways came to the fore at the beginning of our era in Buddhism, and the pathway of religious devotion increasingly gained popularity.

Commenting on the role of the Lord (*Ishvara*) in yoga, Radakrishnan (Radakrishnan: *Indian Philosophy*, 1965, p. 287) says:

- *In the philosophy of yoga, the personal God is very poorly connected to other parts of the system. The goal of human aspiration is not union with God, but the absolute separation of purusha from prakrti. Devotion to God is one of several ways to obtain the highest freedom. God is the only one particular self (purusha-vishesha) and not creator and sustainer of the universe. He does not reward or punish acts of people. But some work had to be given to him when he has appeared on stage. He is said to help those who are loyal to him, to remove impediments to their progress. We become worthy of the grace of God through pranidhana, or selfless devotion, or bhakti. Ishvara facilitates the achievement of freedom, but doesn't give it directly. It is understandable that such a concept of Ishvara does not satisfy, so we are forced to say that the philosophy of yoga introduced the concept of God just to be in the spirit of the times, and to attract the attention of the audience. Those who tried to preach theory of sankhya about the universe, and the method of yoga disciplines, may have felt difficulty in expanding their ideas without satisfying theistic instincts of individuals.*

In support of his opinion, Radakrishnan (footnote 154) quotes the German author Garbe (*Richard Garbe*, 1857-1927), who says that parts of the *Yoga Sutras* (1/23/27, 2.1 and 45) that speak about the personality of God have no connection with the rest of the text - "moreover, they contradict the foundations of the system" (*Garbe: The Philosophy of Ancient India*, 1897, p. 15).

Garbe believes that, by connecting *sankhya* with yoga, Patanjali wanted to make it acceptable for the wide audience through erasing the atheism of *sankhya*. But, Garbe adds that inclusion of the personal deity has been done in a loose way, so both the content and purpose of the yoga system would not be affected. His view that parts of the *Yoga Sutras* that speak about God are in contradiction with the system, Garbe explains by pointing out that "*the ultimate goal of human strivings, according to the Yoga Sutras, is not the unity or absorption in God, but absolute independence (kaivalya) of the spirit from matter*" (ibid, p. 15).

Otherwise, when it comes to *Ishvara* who is mentioned in Patanjali's and in some other texts, it should be noted that the term refers to the Lord, or the Supreme, i.e. God in general, regardless of the named deities, such as *Indra*, *Varuna*, *Brahma*, *Shiva* or *Vishnu*, but may also occur as a kind of their attributes. In the Vedas, the term was used to denote a secular, royal power, and sometimes divine status and power.

Interestingly, on the other hand, Eliade and Veljačić represent a different view - compared with Radakrishnan and Garbe - they even believe that the difference between *sankhya* and yoga is domination of atheism in *sankhya* and theism in yoga.

Thus, Eliade says: - *Unlike Samkhya, Yoga affirms the existence of a God, Ishvara. (...) Ishvara can hasten the process of deliverance; he helps them toward a more speedy arrival at samadhi. This God, to whom Patanjali refers, is more especially a god of yogins. He can come to the help only of a yogin - that is, a man who has already chosen Yoga. (...) According to Patanjali, this*

divine aid is not the effect of a "desire" or a "feeling" for God can have neither desires nor emotions—but of a "metaphysical sympathy" between Ishvara and the purusha, a sympathy explained by their structural correspondence. Ishvara is a purusha that has been free since all eternity, never touched by the kleshas (Yoga sutra, I. 24). Commenting on this text, Vyasa adds that the difference between Ishvara and a "liberated spirit" is as follows: between the latter and psychomental experience, there was once a relation (even though illusory); whereas Ishvara has always been free.

Further on, Eliade notes a certain difference between the relationship of the yogi and Ishvara and relationship of believer and deity in *bhakti* yoga or in the path of faith, *bhakti marga*, and he adds: - *God does not submit to being summoned by rituals, or devotion, or faith in his "mercy"; but his essence instinctively "collaborates," as it were, with the Self that seeks emancipation through Yoga. What is involved, then, is rather a sympathy, metaphysical in nature, connecting two kindred entities. One would say that this sympathy shown by Ishvara toward certain yogins—that is, toward the few men who seek their deliverance by means of yogic techniques—has exhausted his capacity to interest himself in the lot of mankind. This is why neither Patanjali nor Vyasa succeeds in giving any precise explanation of God's intervention in nature. It is clear that Ishvara has entered Samkhya-Yoga dialectics, as it were, from outside. For Samkhya affirms (and Yoga adopts the affirmation) that Substance (prakṛti), because of its 'teleological instinct,' collaborates in the deliverance of man. Thus the role of God in man's acquisition of freedom is of no importance; for the cosmic substance itself undertakes to deliver the many "selves" (purusha) entangled in the illusory meshes of existence.*

Although it was Patanjali who introduced this new and (when all is said and done) perfectly useless element of Ishvara into the dialectics of the Samkhya soteriological doctrine, he does not give Ishvara the significance that late commentators will accord to him. What is of first importance in the Yoga-sutras is technique - in other words, the yogin's will and capacity for self-mastery and concentration. (Eliade: Yoga, 1969, p. 73-4)."

With respect to connecting yoga with faith in God, Čedomil Veljačić goes far beyond Eliade, and he says: *"The vulgar prima facie difference of yoga from sankhya is in the "faith in God" (Ishvara, the Lord) that we find in yoga without exception, while that faith penetrates the sankhya only in later periods, perhaps from yoga, a system that is, towards sankhya, in complementary relation of practical philosophy towards theoretical background (Veljačić: Crossroads of Asian Philosophy, Vol. 2, Liber, Zagreb, 1978, p. 123)."*

Otherwise, the tendency to reduce or completely equate yoga with a kind of religious practice and belief was present in many modern Indian and Western authors and translators. There is an example where this reduction has already been made in the title, and - as we already mentioned - one translation of the *Yoga Sutras* has the title *How to Know God (How to Know God - The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali)*.

Only human being achieves liberation (moksha)

Eliade notes that - according to the *sankhya* and yoga - it is not possible to rescue from *sansara*, if life wasn't met in its concreteness, i.e. on the one hand *sansara* restrains individual, but on the other hand, it chases him towards liberation. Thus, the human situation is not hopeless, because the experience of living itself refers it to the liberation. Therefore, deities and other disincarnated beings (*videha*) that are not physical don't have that experience and cannot reach liberation from *sansara*, concludes Eliade (Eliade, 1984, p. 59).

In fact, similar conceptions are found in some *Upanishads* and early *Buddhism* – in order to realize *Atman* (or in *Buddhism* – attain awakening) has to pass through the human incarnation as the best starting point for this trip (Gods cannot do that because they are in a too good position and inferior beings also cannot do that because they are in a too bad position). In this sense, the human situation - or karma - is considered to be the optimal starting point for the liberation or awakening.

The same words in religion, philosophy and yoga

When it comes to the relationship between religion and philosophy, there is one important principle aspect, which was shown in the domain of terminology. In fact, as noted by one researcher of the *Kashmiri shaivism Kaw* (*Kaw: The Doctrine of Recognition*, 1967, p. 12-23), religion preceded philosophy in India, thus the technical terms applied to denote metaphysical principles were the words that were used as the names of gods and goddesses in religious texts.

1) As an example of this terminological shift, *Kaw* says that the words *Maheshvara* (*Parama Shiva*), *Bhairava*, *Shiva* and *Shakti*, which indicate religious figures in the religion, in the philosophical setting indicate the ultimate reality (*parama shiva*), the strength of the knowledge (*bhairava*), and active force – energy (*shiva* and *shakti*) – we spell them here in lowercase because they are concepts here and not the names of deities.

In *Vedanta*, *Brahman* is the term that signified the absolute reality, while in the religious context there was the God *Brahman* (or *Brahma*). Besides that, in *Vedanta* there is a difference between *brahman* which, as the neuter noun, had a philosophical meaning and *Brahma* (masculine noun) which indicates deity, while in *Shaivism Maheshvara* was masculine noun, as well as *Parama Shiva* (i.e. as well as *Shiva*).

However, this relationship was also more complex and, as I showed in the chapter “The characters and concepts” in my book *Philosophy of the Upanishads* (1980, p. 61-76). Here we will mention only two aspects of the extensive analysis. First, the process of borrowing the terms and changing their meanings (between the religious and philosophical sphere) was not a one-way process (as stated by *Kaw*), but bi-directional.

Namely, in the religious context, there occurs personalization and spiritualization of individual categories, so, let's say, *vayu* (wind) and *agni* (fire) become the same-titled Gods, which can now be addressed, or predisposed by sacrifices, as opposed to the impersonal elements, which could not be influenced. On the other side, we find the process that describes *Kaw*, i.e. that some of the terms, as the names of the gods, become depersonalized in a philosophical context, i.e. they become categories, technical terms of abstract philosophical concepts.

2) A kind of concurrence between philosophy and yoga on one side and religion on the other, can be seen on the example of the term *prasada*.

Specifically, in a variety of texts in some cases *prasada* (in the philosophical option) means **peace** of mind, achieved by the ethical discipline (*yama*), yoga practice or knowledge of the *Upanishads*, and sometimes (in the religious option) **grace** (mercy) of some deity, and that grace is seen as essential for salvation of believers from *samsara*. In some traditions, we find the use of both meanings, suggesting that there was some kind of competition or struggle for one or the other meaning.

Let's first look the examples of *prasada* as the grace in the *Upanishads*. In the *Katha Upanishad* (2.20) it says: - He who is without active will sees the *atman* and releases himself from pain, when through the grace (*prasada*) of the Creator (*Dhatr* - he was the solar deity of the earth) realizes the magnitude of the *atman*.

A little further (*Katha Upanishad*, 2.20) says: - *Atman cannot be attained by instructions or cleverness or learning, only the one whom He chooses will reach Him!*

Therefore, here is denied the backbone of *Upanishad's* knowledge and philosophy - initiation, learning - and the knowing the *Atman* is represented as the grace of some deity.

In *Svetasvatara Upanishad* it was discussed at two places (3.20 and 6.21). At the first place, the greatness of the Lord (*Ish*) is perceived through the grace of Creator, and at the second place it says: - *By success of his accomplishment and grace of the divine (deva-prasada), wise Svetasvatara announced brahman appropriately.*

Examples of *prasada* as tranquility in the *Upanishads* are the following: - *By calming (prasada) the thoughts, karma, good and bad, is avoided (Maitri Upanishad, 6.20).* And this view is repeated at the second place in the same *Upanishad (Maitri Upanishad, 6.34).*

In the *Bhagavad Gita* (2.64) it is said that the one who restrains the spirit and senses and transcends the duality of desire and disgust, that one achieves the serenity of the self (*prasada-atma*).

In the *Yoga Sutra* (1.47) it is said that the inner serenity (*adhjatma-prasada*) is the result of serenity and absence of mental confusion.

Thus, in these examples we can see that there was a kind of overlapping of philosophical, yogic and religious meaning related to the same term.

3) Similar situation with the term faith - *sraddha* - which in the religious context means **faith in the given deity** or opinions of the given religion and efficiency of its rituals and sanctities, and in philosophy, yoga and meditation it means **faith in the given teachings and practice**, as well as guru's instructions.

In the *Yoga Sutra* (1.20) it is written that for achieving *asamprajnata samadhi* faith (*sraddha*), as well as hustle (*virja*), memory (*smrti*), *samadhi* and wisdom are needed, but that faith is not belief in a deity, but faith in one's own eligibility and efficiency of the yoga practice.

In this regard Eliade, when speaking about why yoga advocates for more specified spiritual practice (in addition to the knowledge and insight that philosophy of *sankhya* speaks about), says: *This is why Yoga practice is indispensable. For it is only after having oneself experienced the first results of this technique that one can gain faith (sraddha) in the efficacy of this method. Indeed, Yoga practice demands a long series of excersises, which must be performed successively, without haste, without impatience, without any trace of "individual desire" to obtain "conjunction" (samadhi) quickly (Eliade, 1969, p. 39).*

Here, belief is associated with an activist philosophy of yoga, i.e. with philosophy that - in contrast to *sankhya* - perceives that a certain practice, and not just philosophical knowledge and insight, is needed for liberation.

4) As the above terms, so the term *pranidhana* (devotion, dedication) can appear in the religious meaning and context, when it means commitment to the given divinity and religion, and in the

philosophical and yogic, when it means devotion and dedication to the certain ideas and spiritual practices.

5) *Shakti-pata* literally means lowering the power (*shakti*), and may indicate the transfer of spiritual energy from the guru to the student or another person, when it causes a significant improvement in the spiritual advancement or another betterment. In a religious context it can mean lowering the power, or the grace, from the God to believer.

Why yoga is not a religion?

Swami Bharati briefly explains why yoga is not a religion.

Yoga has no deity to worship.

Yoga has no worship services to attend.

Yoga has no rituals to perform.

Yoga has no sacred icons.

Yoga has no creed or formal statement of religious belief.

Yoga has no requirement for a confession of faith.

Yoga has no ordained clergy or priests to lead religious services.

Yoga has no institutional structure, leader or group of overseers.

Yoga has no membership procedure.

Yoga has no congregation of members or followers.

Yoga has no system of temples or churches.

(*Is Yoga a Religion?*, *Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati* - <http://swamij.com/religion.htm>).

Bhakti - in love with god

For the cultural historian it is interesting that in India (at the end of the old and the beginning of a new era) and in Europe, i.e. in Christianity (during the first centuries of the new era) are fully spread, and (in the broad classes) gain predominance the principles such as faith, worship, devotion and love (while knowledge remains the interest of philosophers).

Bhakti movement in India sometimes refers to the *Vedic* origins and tradition, and it is based (as some think, say - *Nirad Chaudhuri: Hinduism: A Religion to Live By, Oxford Un. Press, 1979, p. 257-8*) on the wrong interpretation of verses 2-5 in the 125th *sukta*, the tenth *mandala* of the *Rg-Veda* (X 125.2-5), where - according to these wrong interpretations - it speaks about personal devotion, and personally understood deity.

Therefore, religion historians believe that the root and the first text of *bhakti* tradition is *Bhagavad-Gita* (which is chronologically linked to the last centuries of the old or the first centuries of the new era), and not the *Vedic* tradition. The *Vedic* religiosity was developing in the millennium that preceded the *Gita*, with the different type of religiosity, where personal commitment to the deity wasn't important, but the implementation of the *Brahmin* rituals.

With some simplification, it can be said that the *bhakti* tradition was constituted as another type of religiosity, different from the *Vedic* tradition, and it (also) differs from the tradition of *tapas*, which was not religious.

a) *Vedic* tradition is based on the offering of the sacrifices to the Gods and the specialist knowledge of the ritual practice, which was a social monopoly of the *Brahmin* caste and the tradition had Aryan and caste discriminatory background.

b) *Bhakti* religiosity is based on a personal relationship to the deity, which is personalized, on the dedication and love for him, and in return one receives the grace of that deity and achieves union with him, that extends beyond this life.

c) The tradition of *tapas* (people who have practiced *tapas* were called *tapasa*) has an individual character and was open to everyone. Practicing *tapas*, i.e. Indian types of asceticism, brought the different powers (healing, transcending time and space constraints, etc.), including longevity, or immortality. *Tapasa* does not gain his powers and other gifts from the Gods but from the power of *tapas*, and sometimes even causes the envy of the Gods, who are trying to turn him from his way, or lead him to the temptation, in order to lose gained power.

It is believed that the *Bhakti* movement – at the transition from the old to the new era - the era of Hinduism starts, which conceived a new type of religiosity, quite different from the *Vedic* tradition, although it considers itself as its legitimate successor and heir. *Bhakti* movement is the most important aspect of Hinduism, in which appear and gain in importance new-old Gods like *Vishnu* and *Shiva* and Goddess like *Lakshmi*, *Uma* (or *Parvati*) and *Shakti*. They are sometimes connected, and sometimes are separately viewed, as same as *Vishnu* and *Shiva* are connected with the older *Brahma* in trinity - *Trimurti* - that is interpreted with the Hindu flexibility as one deity with three aspects: *Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva*.

As for the *Bhakti* movement, it has its own history and particular phases. For instance, the backbone of the *Bhagavad-Gita* makes the resolving of the moral problems of warrior *Arjuna* through the new type of religiosity: personal devotion to the deity that is understood and experienced as personalized. However, the *Bhakti* movement, as it develops, since the 8th century onwards, introduces some new factors, that became more important in the *bhakti* practice than the moral problem of the warrior caste, which *Gita* is dedicated to.

In Hinduism and *Bhakti* movement, there are different aspects involved - from the *Aryan-Vedic* heritage to the local fertility cults. Framing of the new type of deity and a new type of religiosity is important. Deity becomes personalized - but now not as transcendent deity with whom one communicates through religious rituals, but through various earthly incarnations (*avatars*), and religiosity emphasizes personal devotion and worship, which has a strong emotional color - love for God and faith in his omnipotence become backbones of that religiosity. This creates a specific subject - ideal *Bhakta* - whose whole life is dedicated and turned to the God and through that relationship he attains salvation by merging (unifying) with God, like a drop with the ocean.

Yoga also has an important place in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, but its meaning in *Gita* is significantly different than in Patanjali's yoga. Eliade, however, seems to overlook these differences and takes *Gita* as a common denominator, because he believes that *Gita* helps us to understand what function yoga had in the whole of Indian spirituality. Not only that – he takes the form from the *Gita* (the union of the human and the divine soul) as the general goal of yoga and on that grounds he considers it to be the mystical discipline (which he denied himself in the passage that we will specify later - in the same book on yoga, p. 28-9). In other words, in this section (entitled “The message of *Bhagavad Gita*”) he takes one type of Yoga - *Bhakti* yoga, affirmed in the *Gita* - as the general pattern or definition of yoga.

Thus, Eliade (*Yoga*, 1969, p. 153-4) explains that Yoga in *Bhagavad-Gita* is not the Yoga of Patanjali, but: *A Yoga adapted to Vishnuist religious experience – a method whose end is to gain the unio mystica.(...) Two conclusions follow from this observation: (1) Yoga can be understood as a mystical discipline whose goal is the union of the human and divine soul; (2) it is under this aspect – i.e. "mystical experience" – that yoga was understood and applied in the great popular "sectarian" trends, which are echoed in the Mahabharata interpolations.*

YOGA AND MYSTICISM

The extremes in interpretations

First, we would like to note that in this text we will use the word *mystic* and *mysticism* as synonyms, using them interchangeably in the given contexts.

In the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, East was often associated with mysticism. Such identification suited to some people from the East, because they accepted it with pride, as the important determinant of the cultural identity of the East, as opposed to “materialism” and “rationalism” of the West that they talked about with the same disgust as some in the West spoke about “oriental despotism” and “mystics” of the East.

Researchers of the mystic approached it with a very different point of view, often conflicting, and mystics sometimes also had different reviews. Some saw it as the sort of psychopathy (in the spirit of orthodox psychoanalysis), and the others saw it as the peak experience (particularly since the 1960's) - endpoint of the health in an unhealthy world. While some felt that there is a common core in all kinds of mystical experiences and all mystical traditions, others have suggested that both traditions and experiences are different (distribution on natural, monistic and theistic mysticism, on the secular sacred mysticism, etc.).

In order to briefly present variations and/or extremes in the interpretation and definition of mysticism, here are some typical polarities.

While some associate mystical experiences with the right, intuitive, irrational, non-verbal hemisphere of the brain, others believe that it occurs when the hemispheres are in perfect balance – equipotential.

Some believe that the mystical experience occurs during intoxication, stupefaction or starvation of the brain, when the so called higher centers are ineffective, others associate it with the greatest clarity, sanity, awareness or the highest state of mind (slang of the 1960's).

Some relate it to the regression and unconscious, the others to the transgression and subconscious. Some said that the mystics are half insane, or insane, at least from the point of view of normality - others have suggested that the mystics were “pretending to be crazy” when they were threatened to be burned by the normal, or they “pretended to be normal” (when they were threatened by madness of non-normal).

Some have argued that the mystical experience is the feeling of merging with the world, with universal, others have argued that it is the experience of not belonging, non-usurpation and non-adhesion to the world - the absolute observational separation from the entire cosmic drama. A third thought that comes to overlap (superposition) of the two "incompatible" experiences.

Some said that it is about the experience of fullness and sense, universal connectivity and integration of all the events in a higher harmony, others that it is a perception of complete futility (which has neither positive nor negative meaning) - the absence of any substance and permanence in anything.

Some have argued that it is based on the experience of infinite love and acceptance, others thought it was a knowledge that transcends every duality and understanding.

Some were convinced that this experience is attained by the active endeavor and unbreakable will, that it is the result of perseverance and the reward of wisdom, and others that it is possible only when all the will and effort are neutralized, that it is a gift, or a favor, to those who had given up reason, or forethought.

Some of them thought that it can be reached by those who have put the great personal effort into it, while others thought that it depends solely on God's grace.

Some of them thought that it was a consolation to those who have lost everything, or have never had anything, and others, that it is the highest good, regardless of what else a person has, or has had.

Some believed that it was reward to the diligent collecting of merits, and spiritual, and moral purification, and others that this is the result of the waiver of any merit and restore of authenticity. Some have argued that it is the outcome of the movement of the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, from sin to virtue, and the others that it foundling in filing or surpass (in the spiritual plane) contradictions and paradoxes of the life and world.

Some were convinced that it was part of the madness of the world, a way to spend time between birth and death, and the others that it is way out of madness and the only bearable way to live and prepare for death. Some of them thought that it was unspeakable, and others have added that it can be passed over without words.

On the one hand, there have been made attempts to show and explain the mysticism from tradition (East or West), and on the other hand, attempts to explain and show why it is this tradition important and relevant for both the modern individual and the interpretation of his/her potentials.

Types of mysticism

Independent of these polarities, the tradition of mysticism was inspiring in the interpretation of specific aspects of the human experience (in the past and at present), which did not fit into the current, everyday experience, and could be linked to the artistic, philosophical or religious context. So they created the divisions of mysticism, which on the one hand noticed specificities and differences of the mysticism from tradition, and on the other side, they gave a basis for understanding of the contemporary experiences.

One division of the mystical experience is as follows:

(1) Naturalistic mysticism is related to the experience of unity with the nature of the subject with nature, and a variety of sources talk about that - from religious, over philosophical, to art.

(2) Philosophical mysticism is associated with the experience of undifferentiated unity with the absolute (variously defined or designated) that transcends time and space. This type of mysticism we recognize in yoga, in the idea of *samadhi*, as well as achieving the identity in *atman*, *brahman* or *purusha*.

(3) Religious mysticism is related to the theistic experience, where there exists the starting duality of the subject (individual) and divinity (object), that is being overcome in the mystical experience of the union with the divine, and that is achieved by religious devotion, prayer and other acts of the believer, that is, grace, i.e. by responding of the deity to the believers devotion.

We see that in all three types of mysticism there is a common idea of unity, the pathway of unification and achievement of the unity. And this idea is also found in yoga, not only in the root *Yuj* in the word yoga (which means unification, spinning), but also in some of the main ideas of yoga.

(4) As the theoretical orientation or ambition, there appears comparative mysticism, which highlights and notes the analogies or similarities observed in the teaching about the being or totality - sometimes between the philosophy in different cultures and traditions, sometimes between the mystical traditions in different religions, and sometimes between philosophies and religions of different cultures and traditions. In these contexts mysticism appears as the connecting member (what is common) - or different philosophies, or different religions or philosophy and religion in all cultures.

On such basis appeared an idea that, by observing and recording of these analogies, there can be created some teaching that will go beyond the differences, and will represent some kind of universal philosophy (the perennial philosophy - *philosophia perennis*), or the universal religion or

teaching that transcends differences of both philosophy and religion, and it is defined as the universal spiritual teaching.

In this spirit, yoga was also often interpreted as a type of mysticism, and approach developed by Dasgupta is close to it (Surendranath Dasgupta, 1885-1952). Otherwise, he was a mentor or guru to Mircea Eliade, when Eliade worked on his PhD thesis on yoga in India (1928-1932).

Eliade in his book *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (London, 1969 - Belgrade, 1984), which was created on the basis of his doctoral thesis, approached yoga as a mystic teaching, in two meanings – one of them Eliade connected to the idea of liberation (*kaivalya*) in yoga (or “re-birth in an unconditional way of existence”), and the second one, when the yogi seeks the help of the Gods.

Regarding the first meaning, Eliade says:

- *To "free oneself" is equivalent to forcing another plane of existence, to appropriating another mode of being transcending the human condition. (...) it also necessarily implies a consequence of a mystical nature: rebirth to a nonconditioned mode of being. And this is liberation, absolute freedom* (Eliade, 1969, p. 4).

In the second meaning Eliade finds the mystical component in yoga when yogi doesn't count only on his own effort anymore, but he seeks help of the divinity.

However, as we have seen, a wider understanding of mysticism includes the other forms besides this religious mysticism, such as the naturalistic and philosophical, as the transcending experience of the unification appears here as the midfield member.

Mysticism of yoga

There are many books that approach yoga from the perspective of mysticism, and one of the most famous is the book *Mysticism of Hinduism* written by Surendranath Dasgupta (*S.N. Dasgupta: Hindu Mysticism, Open Court Publ. Co., Chicago, 1927*). Dasgupta is also the author of one of the most comprehensive reviews of Indian philosophy, written and printed in the range of about 30 years - *A History of Indian Philosophy (5 volumes), Cambridge University Press, London, 1922-1955*.

1) In the book *Hindu Mysticism* Dasgupta starts with mysticism as general guidelines in this key displays the different traditions, ranging from the Vedic period (this is called "sacrificial mysticism"), through the Upanishads, Yoga, Buddhism, and ended up with a display of what is called pious mysticism (devotional mysticism), traditional and modern.

In the preface to this book, Dasgupta first considers the difference between what he called the lower and higher form of mysticism. In fact, in his opinion, the lower form of mysticism would be a superstition that is associated with miraculous achievements, such as divination, necromancy, healing serious illness by amulets or blessing, and alike. This is a lower form of mysticism, because it is committed to the secular values. The higher form of mysticism would be connected with belief that the highest reality and fulfillment cannot be achieved by reason alone, but there are other ways to that, such as the control of will, development of proper feelings as the highest function of the mind. And that mysticism faces liberation of the spirit and achievement of the highest bliss.

The higher mysticism is associated with purity of spirit, striving for moral perfection, self-denial and concentration on God. But mysticism should be distinguished from the common belief that God often gives us a vision of himself in dreams or the faith in infallibility of the scriptures and alike, as it is often only manifestation of the tendency to believe the suggestions and may be associated with a lack of vigilance of the critical and synthetic intellect.

Dasgupta said that mysticism can be defined as belief or viewpoint, but that it means much more. In the mystic, beliefs represent a dynamic, dominant part of their personality. Therefore, mysticism is not an intellectual theory but formative, enriching and creative principle of life.

Mysticism means a spiritual grasp of the aims and problems of life in a much more real and ultimate manner than is possible to mere reason. A developing life of mysticism means a gradual ascent in the scale of spiritual values, experience, and spiritual ideals. As such, it is many-sided in its development, and as rich and complete as life itself. Regarded from this point of view, mysticism is the basis of all religions--particularly of religion as it appears in the lives of truly religious men (Dasgupta, 1927, p. IX).

2) In the chapter *Yoga Mysticism*, Dasgupta says that there are data that approximately 800-700 year BC people in India have tended to concentrate their mind on an object in order to stop the movement of the spirit and the senses. He believes that, in the beginning, they didn't do that in some metaphysical system, but it was concentration of the spirit and control of the breath in order to achieve peace of mind, as well as the miraculous powers that would appear. Dasgupta says the story from the Mahabharata about how Vipul was hypnotized by Ruji and concludes that there are many other stories that talk about the miraculous powers of yoga. So - unlike Eliade and some other authors - in Dasgupta's text this story is not a proof that yoga and hypnosis are separate things, but they are related. But as Dasgupta adds, now we will discuss implementation of the yoga practice to achieve absolute freedom of an individual, as described by Patanjali (who for the first time talks about how yoga can be applied for the emancipation of the human from the ties of the spirit and senses).

In addition, Dasgupta reminds that, according to the teachings of the *Upanishads*, there is self that cannot be seen by the eyes and mind, but that it is not connected to some ecstatic experience, and this understanding of self is the root of Indian mysticism. While thoughts and feelings are changeable, the light of this self is unchangeable. The ultimate goal of yoga is to separate ourselves from the feelings, thoughts and ideas in order to perceive that particular entity. At the same time, for the Indian sage that view wasn't only a matter of speculative philosophy, but connected with the practice of the liberation of true self from the ties of ideas, feelings and concepts. They were not unhappy with the world because it didn't have the pleasures to offer them, but because it is their intention to reach their true self was greater than the other desires.

Furthermore, Dasgupta points to one aspect of the mystic of yoga. In fact, people tend to liberate self that is free from the immemorial time, which is separated from all the mental functions and creations, but in their confusion people don't recognize their connection with the self, and then it seems to them that there are just thinking, feeling, desire, and the ultimate principle of consciousness is lost of their sight. So our spirit covers the view of the light of self, while the senses pursue the objects. Therefore, it is necessary to control the mind and stop all mental processes. It is the only way that the light of self will shine. Termination of all the mental states is yoga.

In the further remarks Dasgupta describes the practice of yoga in order to get back to the topic of yoga and mysticism, and he says that the basic characteristic of the mysticism of yoga on the negative side - *not only in a disbelief in the ability of sense-perception and logical thought to comprehend the ultimate truth about the absolute purity and unattached character of our true self; but also in a disbelief in the possibility of the realisation of this highest truth so long as the mind itself is not destroyed. On its positive side, it implies that intuitional wisdom is able to effect a clear realisation of truth by gradually destroying the so-called intellect. The destruction of mind, of course, also involves the ultimate destruction of this intuition itself. So neither the*

intuition nor our ordinary logical thought is able to lead us ultimately to self-realisation (Dasgupta, 1971, p. 80).

Dasgupta says that therefore there are three levels of knowledge.

The first is sensory knowledge and logical thinking involved in the world, and which are worthless to reach the ultimate truth.

Another intuitive wisdom of yoga, after yoga practice, is when the spirit is able to blend with the object and when it stops all its movements. This wisdom gives the non-conceptual vision of the ultimate truth. In this intuitive wisdom all connections of the spirit and the world become clear, and as it gradually weakens the constitution of the spirit, the spirit ceases to be active and it is forever separated from the spirit or self (here Dasgupta thinks about separation of *manas* and *chitta* from *purusha*).

Thus we arrive - says Dasgupta - to the third level, when the spirit (*purusha*) shines released of the connections with our spirit that led to the adhesion. Therefore, this truth is non-conceptual and irrational, but also non-intuitive and beyond feelings. It is self-shined (see: Dasgupta, 1971, p. 80).

Conclusion

Yoga was in an interaction with various teachings in the Indian tradition, and one type of yoga (Patanjali yoga, or samkhya yoga) was very close to samkhya philosophy. The basis of yoga is that a person can develop and improve one's own spiritual and physical capacities and using that as a starting point realize the ultimate goals, i.e. spiritual emancipation, which is variously defined in various teachings. In samkhya yoga it means the discriminating knowledge of *purusha* as the ultimate identity of a person, and halting of the spinning round in the sphere of everyday mind and attachments, i.e. in the *samsara* realm. However, some Indian authors, and authors in the West tried to relate and interpret in religious terms, and context. In particular, they wanted to condition and relate the spiritual emancipation - which is the goal of yoga - with the divine mercy and help, as an essential condition and support, asserting that without such help the yogi could not attain spiritual emancipation.

Within the Indian tradition - among other types of yoga - *bhakti* yoga was developed (in particularly promoted in the *Bhagavad-Gita*), which was based on such ideas, but the larger part of the yoga tradition did not include any particular relationship with the divinities. It developed an emancipation course, based on personal powers of the yogi, in which religiousness, religious rituals and divinities have no particular importance.

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Received: November 8, 2012
Accepted: November 28, 2012