

AṢṬĀṄGAMĀRGA OF BUDDHA AND AṢṬĀṄGAYOGA OF PATAÑJALI: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

K. RAJESH KUMAR
Senior Research Fellow,
Dept of Philosophy,
Osmania University, Hyderabad, Telangana, India.

Abstract: *The highest humanity is reached in India, the land of Ṛṣis, with their vision. 'Ekam sat; viprā bahudhā vadanti' the truth is one; the sages call it variously, this dictum of Vedās had been the source of Indian philosophy. Every great philosopher and their philosophy stressed upon the realization the eternal truth and laid down various methods which are suitable to different people. Methods laid down by Buddha with his Aṣṭāṅgamārga and Patañjali with his Aṣṭāṅgayoga. Though they belong to different schools, their aim is to end the sufferings of humans, for this, they declared that the 'Nirvāṇa and Nirvikalpasamādhi are the only ways to be liberated. For this they emphasized on the character of the practitioner (sādhaka) and cautioned that one must be careful and struggle for one's own salvation. Here I am going to give some similarities between the two paths and can say that the 'goal is same' however the paths may seem different. One can follow any of the methods with concentration and you will reach the same goal 'liberation' from the cycle of Saṃsāra.*

Keywords: *Buddha, Aṣṭāṅgamārga, Patañjali, Aṣṭāṅgayoga, cycle of Saṃsāra.*

INTRODUCTION

Almost all Indian philosophies put forward four puruṣārthas - Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa as the goals of human life. The term puruṣārtha literally means the human goal.

a) Dharma: righteousness, moral order.

b) Artha: wealth and prosperity.

c) Kāma: desires and gratification.

d) Mokṣa: liberation or final release. Hinduism states that Mokṣa is a state of supreme bliss. Indian philosophy which is based on values considers Mokṣa as the highest spiritual value.¹ It is the cessation of births and deaths and the realization of one's own self. Though the first three goals are given importance, the final goal Mokṣa is given more importance and considered as the ultimate goal of human being.² Different schools of Indian philosophy put forward different paths to get liberation and to realize the supreme reality. Though we found references to yoga before Patanjali, he is the first person who codified the essence of yoga in the form of aphorisms (Sutra) which we have been calling it as "Patanjali yoga Sutra". He is considered as the "father of Raja Yoga" and it occupies a prominent place among six schools (*Śaddarśanas*) of Indian philosophy as Aṣṭāṅgayoga (eight limbed yoga). Gautama Buddha who is a revolted child of Hinduism also established a path to realize our self. The Buddha's philosophy is one of the most rationalist philosophies of the world. He, like Patanjali, also emphasized the cessation of sufferings and to attain Nirvana. With his deep search, rational intellectuality, with the help of Dependent Origination (*Pratītyasamutpāda*) he declared that 'ignorance' is the cause of all sufferings and by attaining Samadhi one can end them. He says that attaining Samadhi is the only way to end the sufferings. The teachings of Buddha occupies a prominent place within the heterodox (*Nāstika*)³ schools and also hailed by the orthodox (*Āstika*) schools because as the Āstika schools believes in Samadhi, Buddha also said that the goal of the human struggle to attain Samadhi. The similarity is more with the Patanjali teachings, now we can compare these two schools of Patanjali and Buddha and can conclude that the two schools are more similar than they differ.

CHARACTER: THE BASE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

The path of spiritual life is like an edge of a razor and it is hard to go by.⁴ It is the reason that's why every Guru, Āchārya, philosopher stressed upon the character of a seeker of truth. Character indicates the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual. It reflects one's personality and nature. It also reflects one's psychological

thinking It is a group of features that make up and distinguish an individual.⁵ Gotham is distinguished as the 'Buddha' because of his character. In his teachings he emphasized on character many times. If we assume that the body is a ship, then the character will be like compass which can lead us to the shore in this ocean of Samsāra (the cycle of births and deaths). We don't have any evidence that a characterless man or woman attained Nirvāṇa or kaivalyam. While teaching about character (*śīlam*) Buddha says;

Ācarācasya viśvasya yathā- dhāro vasumdhārā

Nikhilānām guṇānām ca tathā śīlam śubhāśrayaḥ

“As the mother earth is the base for all creatures upon it, so the character (*śīlam*) is the base for all virtues”⁶

Patañjali in his *Aṣṭāṅgayoga* also emphasizes on character building. In his eightfold yoga method, the first two *Yama*⁷ (non-violence, truthfulness, honesty, celibacy and non acceptance of gifts) and *Niyama*⁸ (external and internal purification, contentment, austerity, study and devotion to God) are the base to attain kaivalyam. He also says that anybody irrespective of gender, age, caste and religion can follow these ethics at any time.⁹ A doubt, however, will arise that how, the character will be useful in spiritual life? the answer is this; that, when we think about something that makes an impression on our mind. It becomes our thought and whatever we think, we speak and whatever we will speak, will become words and also indicates our deeds. The repeated actions make our character. If we think, speak and act properly, the mind will be purified through which an individual soul is reflected as it is. So if one wants to attain the Nirvāṇa of *Aṣṭāṅgamārga* and the Kaivalyam of *Aṣṭāṅgayoga*, one must develop character, as the base of spiritual life. We can find the similarities of ethical preparation before starting spiritual life, in the teachings of Patañjali and Buddha as follows;

Aṣṭāṅgamārga of Buddha	Aṣṭāṅgayoga of Patañjali
Samyak vachanam	Satyam
Samyak karma	Ahimsa, Asteyam

Samyak jeevanam

Brahmacharya, Aparigraha

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE TEACHINGS OF PATAÑJALI AND BUDDHA

Every Indian philosophy emphasizes on the control of mind as the basic preparation for Mokṣa, the words relating to ultimate release from the cycle of Saṃsāra are Mokṣa, Mukti, kaivalyam, Apavarga and Nirvāṇa. While reading the teachings of both Patañjali and Buddha I found some similarities from starting to end as follows; they both

- a) Accept that there is suffering and the cause is ignorance
- b) Accept that there is a path of cessation of suffering
- c) Emphasized on the controlling of modifications of mind
- d) Taught that character is the base of spiritual life
- e) Emphasized on individual effort to get liberation
- f) In the end both accept that Samadhi is the only way to conquer the cycle of Saṃsāra.

According to many Indian philosophical schools, Mokṣa, the last puruṣārtha, is considered as the final goal of every human being. The noble paths of Aṣṭāṅgamārga of Buddha and Aṣṭāṅgayoga of Patañjali, which start with the developing character (*śīlam*) and ends with Samadhi. Both gave importance to the controlling of modifications of mind and an individual effort towards liberation. They both advocate control over body, senses and mind. When mind is controlled through the paths of yoga and Mārga, the spiritual truth is realized directly. The etimological meaning of 'Nirvāṇa' is 'blown out'. It is often compared with the extinction of the flame of a lamp¹⁰ and is most commonly associated with Buddhism and represents its ultimate state of soteriological release and liberation from rebirth in Saṃsāra¹¹ and extinction of all desires, cravings and sufferings. The

etymological meaning of 'kaivalya' is the isolation of Puruṣa from Prakṛti. 'Kevala' means 'alone' 'isolated'. After the cessation of all modifications of mind, the individual self rests in its own svarūpa. Here the similarity can be found between the Nirvikalpasamādhi of Patañjali and the Nirvāṇa of Buddha. Both Aṣṭāṅgamārga and Aṣṭāṅgayoga highlight the cessation of modifications of mind to get a peaceful mind. They mention one should become the *witness* of the modifications and have to observe them time to time, they are endless like the waves of the ocean. In Mahāyāna teachings the Bodhisattva¹² must practice the following two, one is compassion (*karuṇā*: the result of non-violence) the other is insight (*prajñā*) to calm the mind. They are important to every Bodhisattva like the two wings of a bird.¹³ When all the modifications of Mind ceased, what remains is 'pure awareness'. Patañjali also starts with "Yoga is the cessation of modifications of mind" and also described the method¹⁴ of controlling the modifications. The *viveka* (discrimination) and *vairāgya* (renunciation) are considered as the two wheels of a cart to every Yogi. When the mind is completely purified the individual self rests in its 'svarūpa' (pure awareness) which is called *Samādhi*.

CONCLUSION

Patañjali and Buddha both of them declared that there is suffering and there is a cause for it, which is ignorance (*avidya*)^{15,16} about the reality of the world and individual self. This ignorance again leads to rebirth and cause sufferings. This world is like a mirage, we must prepare ourselves not to be cheated by the nature of Prakṛti. One should develop character of good conduct and lead a peaceful life, then only one can attain Nirvāṇa or Nirvikalpasamādhi. The great teachers say, there is no need to depend on anything like God; you are the sole cause of your own suffering and also to end it. The only way is to know that you are the pure awareness and nothing else in the state of *Samādhi*.

References

¹ Shastri, Y. S. *Foundations of Hinduism*, p. 115.

² Iha khalu caturvidheṣu puruṣārtheṣu mokṣa eva paramapuruṣārthaḥ, *Vedāntaparibhāṣa*, p.1.

³ Those who do not believe in the authority of the Vedas (*Nāstiko vedanindakaḥ*).

⁴ Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, 1.3.14.

⁵ Merriam Webster's dictionary.

⁶ Aṣvaghōṣa, *Buddhacharitam*.

⁷ Patañjali yoga sutra II.30

⁸ Ibid, II.32

⁹ Ibid, II.31

¹⁰ nibbanti dhīrā yathāyam padīpo- *Suttanipāta*, Ratanisutta.

¹¹ Chad Meister (2009), *Introducing philosophy of religion*. Routledge. P.25. ISBN 978-1-134-14179-1.

¹² A person who is able to reach nirvāṇa but delays doing so through compassion for suffering beings (In Mahāyāna Buddhism).

¹³ Bodha Chaitanya, *Prajñāparamitā* (Telugu Trans.). Dharma deepam Foundation, Hyderabad.

¹⁴ Patañjali yoga sūtra, I.12

¹⁵ Ibid, II.24

¹⁶ Second Noble Truth (*Praṭītyasamutpāda*)

