



COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELFLESSNESS IN VEDIC AND YOGIC LITERATURE

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Abstract

The statement "Vedas are apaurusheya" makes it clear that these scriptures are beyond any worldly creation. However, the reality is that these texts encompass all the knowledge needed to lead a life in the world. Simultaneously, these scriptures also elucidate the path to attain that ultimate state which liberates one from the worldly cycle. Nevertheless, Vedas have often been perceived as emphasizing predominantly ritualistic worship and prescribing actions with desires. Consequently, the real knowledge present in them has been consistently overlooked. In contrast, Yoga philosophy has been accepted by people as a path to liberation, even though it is commonly used by many in society for physical and mental well-being. Therefore, it becomes imperative to understand the facts by comparing the concept of selfless deeds (Nishkamta) in Yoga and Vedic literature, which talk about liberation. Hence, this article aims to present a comparative analysis of the notions of selfless deeds in Yoga and Vedic literature.

Keywords: Vedas, Yoga, Vedas and Yoga, Selfless deeds, Nishkamta, Nishkam Karma, Geeta and Veda, Yogasutra and Vedas, Success in Desire through Yajna

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The objective of this article is to conduct a comparative analysis of selflessness (Nishkamta) by:

- Examining the inappropriate misconceptions regarding the absence of selflessness in Vedic literature.
- Highlighting the practical utilization of paths outlined for selflessness in Yogic literature for worldly benefits.
- Consolidating the perspectives on genuine selflessness present in Vedic and Yogic literature.
- Obtaining a proper resolution by analyzing and comparing the descriptions of selflessness in Vedic and Yogic literature.

TYPE OF RESEARCH

This is review research, as the results derived from scholarly papers can be applicable in real life for students and the general public. This research aims to bring out the reality of selflessness and can contribute to connecting the concept of selflessness with classical knowledge in a way that is useful for modern society. This connection may assist in bringing refinement to contemporary society by integrating the concept of selflessness with foundational traditional knowledge.

PREFACE

There is nothing left about the subject of Hinduism that is not in the Vedas. The statement 'यन्नेहास्ति न तत् क्वचित्' (whatever is here is everywhere) is entirely applicable to the Vedas. The treasure of all subjects is filled in the Vedas. One can fulfill their desires by finding beautiful gems in the Vedas. The main aspect of the Vedas is Yajna



(sacrifice). In the Vedas, Yajna is explicitly described as the form of Vishnu, and it is clearly stated that through the worship of Yajna, a person can attain everything.

The ancient sages, royal sages, and great kings achieved incomparable powers and attained success in their respective endeavors through the worship of Yajna. The gods attained the title of 'Devatva' through Yajna, and Indra achieved the title of 'Devaraja' by performing a hundred Yajnas. King Janaka dispelled drought through Yajna, and King Dasharatha obtained a son through Yajna. The Yajna story of King Dilipa is famous, because he was content with only 66 Yajnas, and Indra, pleased with him, granted the results of 100 Yajnas. Even today, the Yajnas performed with devotion hold the same significance as in ancient times.

DESIRE FULFILLING YAJNA

In the procedures of Yajnas, many authentic regulations are prescribed, through which even today, individuals can attain various desires such as the acquisition of progeny, wealth, rainfall, success in litigation, victory in disputes, and liberation from all kinds of illnesses, among other aspirations, with ease.

To attain the desires mentioned above, a person should conduct Yajnas and other rituals under the guidance of a Vedic scholar who is well-established in the Vedic tradition. However, this is one perspective that motivates the performance of Yajnas for the sake of righteousness, wealth, and desires. In this context, the Bhagavad Gita categorizes Yajnas into three types based on the modes of nature – Sattvic (mode of goodness), Rajasic (mode of passion), and Tamasic (mode of ignorance). Yajnas performed with a selfless attitude are called 'Sattvic Yajnas' (Gita 17.11). Those performed with a desire for specific results are termed 'Rajasic Yajnas' (Gita 17.12). Yajnas performed against the principles of the scriptures are known as 'Tamasic Yajnas' (Gita 17.13). The Agni Purana also affirms the same.

यष्टव्यो विधिना यज्ञो निष्कामाय स सात्त्विकः ।

यज्ञः फलाय दम्भात्मा राजसस्तामसः क्रतुः ॥ (अग्निपुराण ३८१।४३)

"The fame achieved through actions performed with adherence to prescribed duties and a selfless attitude is called Sattvic". The Yajna undertaken with a specific desire is termed Rajasic, and the Yajna performed with hypocrisy is referred to as Tamasic.

The main purpose of a Sattvic Yajna should be centered around promoting purity. In the scriptures, the significance of a Sattvic Yajna is explicitly emphasized. The reason for the special importance of a Sattvic Yajna is that it is performed with a selfless attitude. Only a Yajna undertaken with a selfless spirit is fruitful and beneficial.

The Yajna performed with the intention of attaining specific results is termed 'Adhama' (inferior), while the one undertaken with a selfless attitude for the sake of pleasing the Supreme (with a mindset of surrendering to God, known as 'Ishwara-Arpana Buddhi') is termed 'Uttama' (superior). In the Vedas and other scriptures, the Nishkama Yajna, performed with a selfless attitude, is considered the highest and best among all Yajnas.

तस्मात् सुनिष्ठिताः पूर्वे सर्वान् कामांश्च लेभिरे ।

अकृष्टपच्या पृथिवी श्राशीर्भिर्वीरुधोऽभवन् ॥ (महाभारतम्, शान्तिपर्व २६३।१२-१३)

In ancient times, people, understanding their duties, engaged in Yajnas with devotion, and through those Yajnas, all their desires were naturally fulfilled. Without much cultivation, sufficient food was produced from the earth, and for the welfare of the world, with their auspicious intentions, trees, and vines bore fruits and flowers.

न ते यज्ञेष्व्वात्मसु वा फलं पश्यन्ति किञ्चन ।

शङ्कमानाः फलं यज्ञे ये यजेरन् कथञ्चन ॥

जायन्तेऽसाधवो धूर्ता लुब्धा वित्तप्रयोजनाः ॥ (महाभारतम्, शान्तिपर्व २६३।१३-१४)

They (those people in ancient times) did not have any personal desires or expectations from the Yajnas. Those individuals who engage in Yajnas with doubts in their minds about whether they will obtain any results or not are greedy, deceitful, and wicked. Such people are driven by the desire for wealth.



THE ESSENCE OF SELFLESS YAJNA

In the scriptures, those who perform Yajnas with desires have been criticized. A person engaged in desire-driven Yajnas does not receive the true fruits of those Yajnas because he does not receive the grace of Lord Indra. It is stated in the Vedas-

अतीहि मनुष्याविणं सुषुवां समुपारणे । इमं रातं सुतं पिब । (ऋग्वेद ८।३२२१)

Those individuals who perform Yajnas out of anger, Indra considers them blind and does not look towards them. Those who engage in Yajnas out of envy, Indra considers them deaf and does not listen to their pleas. Those who perform Yajnas for the sake of fame are viewed as cunning by Indra, and he treats them with deceit. Indra does not behave favorably with those whose worship is insincere. Those who speak harshly receive a curse from Indra, and for those who infringe upon the rights of others, Indra disregards their worship.

Therefore, acquiring someone else's land or home through illegitimate means, performing land worship or home consecration, or the Yajna for pacifying celestial bodies, yields no real results. This is proclaimed directly in the Vedas.

In ancient times, people used to perform Yajnas for the welfare of all, known as Bhagwatpreetyarth Nishkam Yajna (Sattvik Yajna). However, in today's era, people perform Yajnas not for the sake of divine devotion but with some desires in mind. Due to this, the true essence and benefits of Yajnas are not realized today. If the spirit of selfless action is not present in the Yajna, it becomes a futile show. The importance of 'Sattvik Yajna' is emphasized in the Bhagavad Gita (17.11). Therefore, in ancient times, sages and seers engaged in 'Sattvik Yajnas' for the welfare of the entire universe. Unfortunately, in contemporary times, there is a shift towards 'Tamasic Yajnas,' and as a result, the true fruits of Yajnas are not being realized. Hence, every individual who performs Yajnas should do so with faith and trust, following the path of Bhagwatpreetyarth Nishkam Yajna. The true significance of performing Yajnas with a selfless attitude for the pleasure of the divine is described in this manner.

ये विष्णुभक्ता निष्कामा यजन्ति परमेश्वरम् ।
त्रिसप्तकुलसंयुक्तास्ते यान्ति हरिमन्दिरम् ॥ (नारदपुराणम् ३६/६१)

Those individuals who perform Yajnas with a selfless attitude, worshiping the Supreme Being, lead themselves and their twenty-one generations to the abode of God (Divine Realm).

The great result of the Sattvic Yajna is that it brings welfare to the entire world. Even in such situations, the only reason for turning away from this Yajna is the desire to achieve one's interests independently. In recent years, those who have been practicing Yajna and other religious activities have shown symptoms of the disease of selfishness. Some deposit money in banks, some build temples and ashrams, some construct guesthouses, some establish schools and colleges, and some create dramatic plays in the form of Yajna to fulfill their objectives.

Some people have turned Yajna into a business-like enterprise for their own benefit. Such individuals, deviating from the scriptural Vedic Yajnas, have started performing 'Udarapurti Yajnas' in their own ways. Some perform Mental Yajna, some perform Chaturvedi Yajna, some perform Gayatri Yajna, some perform Krishna Yajna, some perform Indra Yajna, some perform Ganga Yajna, and some perform Yamuna Yajna, etc., using various names for their diverse Yajnas. In these invented and unscriptural Yajnas, considerations of the caste, status, and authority of the Yajamana (sponsor) and Brahmins are not relevant. In such Yajnas, ordinary people from society are induced to participate, and they are coerced into contributing money. Women are even made to wear the sacred thread and recite Vedic mantras like Gayatri during these Yajnas.

Those who perform Vidhiheen (unscriptural) Yajnas, driven by self-interest, receive the most support from scholars. Months before entering the Yajna out of greed for Dakshina (offerings), these scholars started circumambulating the residence of the Yajna supervisors and organizers. According to the verse "Sevadharmah paramagahano yoginamapyagamyah" (Bhartrihari Vairagya Shatakam - 55), due to the influence of the duty of service, individuals whose names are recorded in the list of those seeking service consider themselves and their ancestors extremely fortunate. Upon completion of the Yajna-related activities, once the Yajna supervisors have provided a small gratuity to the scholars (whether the scholars are satisfied or dissatisfied, paying no heed to this fact), they bid farewell to them at the Yajna site. The Yajamana (sponsor) personally seizes all the wealth contributed to the Yajna and fulfills their selfish motives using the Brahmana's share of offerings.



CRITICISM OF DISPLAY OF SELFLESSNESS

The rituals that are devoid of scriptural guidelines, known as Tamasic Yajnas, are strongly condemned in the scriptures. Through these Tamasic Yajnas, the welfare of the nation, society, and individuals is never possible. The people always suffer in various ways due to such rituals. **As per the Kalika Purana (20.16):**

न यज्ञाः सम्प्रवर्तन्ते न तपस्यन्ति तापसाः ।
आहारदुःखान्निश्रीकाः प्रजाः क्षीणा भयातुराः ॥

At this time, neither does the populace engage in Yajnas according to the prescribed rituals, nor do ascetics perform penances. Therefore, society is plagued by scarcity of food and financial difficulties, leading to fear and anxiety.

People consider Yajnas as a means of livelihood for Brahmins. However, upon careful consideration, it can be seen that Yajnas do not benefit only Brahmins; rather, everyone benefits. Yajna becomes a means of sustenance for those subtle beings whom we are now feeding with the smoke of petrol and diesel. Hence, sometimes droughts and excessive rainfall are observed. Yajna is an extremely sacred act. In this sacred act, the abode of almost all the divine entities is present. Participating in Yajnas is the duty of every human being. Those individuals who do not contribute in any way to Yajnas are deemed condemnable and deserving of scorn. It is mentioned in the Shatapatha Brahmana (2.3.1.20)-

'या वै प्रजा यज्ञे अनन्वाभक्ताः पराभूता वै ताः एवमेवैतद्या इमाः प्रजा अपराभूतास्ता यज्ञमुख आभजति'

Those subjects who do not contribute to the Yajna are deserving of contempt, meaning they are fit to be scorned. On the other hand, those subjects who provide assistance in the Yajna are worthy of acceptance, meaning they are fit to be acknowledged.

Confirmation of this matter is also made in the Ekpadi Kanda (3.1.20) of the Krishna Yajurveda.

Therefore, just as the Yoga Sutras discuss Karma Yoga, meaning selfless action and the path of non-attachment, the Vedas also emphasize the significance of the Yoga of non-attachment.

यो कामो निष्काम आसकाम आत्मकामो न तस्य प्राणा उत्क्रामन्ति ब्रह्मैव सन् ब्रह्माप्येति । (बृहदाहरण्यकोपनिषद् ४।४।६)

A person devoid of desires, or one who seeks only the desire of the soul, does not let the life force (prana) and senses wander. Such an individual attains the Supreme Brahman and merges with the Supreme Brahman.

IMPORTANCE OF SELFLESSNESS IN YOGA

The state of 'Nirodha' or 'Svarupa-sthiti' involves the yogi performing actions, experiencing the results, and withdrawing, all in accordance with the divine will for the well-being of all living beings. These actions are carried out with a sense of selflessness and are free from attachment, desire, and conditioning. Therefore, they do not generate imprints of enjoyment and bondage for future experiences. In the Bhagavad Gita, this state of being is referred to as 'Samadhi-sthiti,' and such a yogi is described as 'Sthita-prajna'—one with steadfast wisdom.

तपःस्वाध्यायेश्चरप्रणिधानानि क्रियायोगः ॥ (योगसूत्रम् २.१)

In this sutra, 'Ishwarapranidhana' means performing actions or sacrifices selflessly for the ultimate reality, i.e., the Supreme Being. The yogi remains dedicated to Ishwara, and endeavors to carry out all duties with a sense of selflessness and devotion, always offering the results of actions to the Supreme.

क्लेशमूलः कर्माशयो दृष्टादृष्टजन्मवेदनीयः ॥ (योगसूत्रम् २.१२)

The great yogis who have uprooted afflictions through seedless samadhi, their actions are selfless, meaning they are devoid of desires and are solely based on duty. Therefore, they do not enjoy the fruits of their actions. When the imprints of afflictions accumulate in the mind, then actions with desires arise. No activity is possible without the influence of Rajoguna. When Rajoguna combines with Satvaguna, there is an inclination towards knowledge, righteousness, renunciation, and divine actions. Conversely, when it combines with Tamoguna, there is a tendency



towards ignorance, unrighteousness, lack of renunciation, and actions leading to bondage. However, nowadays, yoga is often seen as a means for health or for display. Therefore, by not giving importance to such inept forms of yoga, encouraging selfless sacrifice and true yoga in society is beneficial for the welfare of society.

CONCLUSION

In movies and television series, yajna (sacrificial rituals) and yogic practices are often portrayed as selfish and influenced by ignorance, and society appears to be affected by such depictions. However, the Vedas and Yogic philosophy never advocates actions with desires. On the contrary, the foundation of the entire scripture rests on selflessness, which ultimately aids in attaining liberation or the ultimate state. Performing yajna for the welfare of society and engaging in yajna to alleviate the suffering of the needy are the duties of the practitioner. Utilizing the principles of yoga, starting from the Yamas, for the upliftment of society and showing everyone the path to liberation through yoga is the responsibility of yogis. Yajna and yoga encourage renunciation and dedication and consider the pursuit of worldly objects necessary only for the sake of righteous living.

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