The Position of *Yoga* in Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s Practice Theory

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1. Introduction

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, a scholar of the Advaita Vedanta school active from the late 16th to the early 17th centuries, in his auto-commentary, entitled *Bhaktirasāyanaṭīkā* (BhRṬ), on his work on *bhakti* theory, the *Bhaktirasāyana* (BhR), present four *yogas* (practices), namely *karmayoga*, *aṣṭāṅgayoga*, *jñānayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga* as the purposes of human existence (*puruṣārtha*). These four practices are ritual practice, the yoga based on Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra* (YS), that for the acquisition of *brahmavidyā* in the Advaita school, and, finally that of *bhakti* (devotion) in the Bhāgavata school, one of the Vaiṣṇava schools.

So far, research on Madhusūdana has focused exclusively on the relationship between *jñānayoga* and *bhaktiyoga*, and has not systematically investigated all four *yogas* in the context of Madhusūdana’s theory of practice. Therefore, in this paper, I will consider the significance of *aṣṭāṅgayoga*, especially in its relation to *jñānayoga*, in Madhusūdana’s system of practice, in order to arrive at a systematic understanding of Madhusūdana’s theory of practice. In the BhRṬ, Madhusūdana included *aṣṭāṅgayoga* in *jñānayoga*, at the same time considered *aṣṭāṅgayoga* as the entry stage into *jñānayoga*. However, Madhusūdana did not offer a detailed discussion on *aṣṭāṅgayoga*. Rather, his *aṣṭāṅgayoga* theory can be found in his commentary on chapter 6 of the *Bhaṭgavadgītā* (BhG), *Bhaṭgavadgītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* (BhGGAD). This paper will focus on the discussion in BhGGAD on BhG 6.32 regarding the problem of the relationship between the occurrence of true knowledge (*tattvajñāna*), which is *brahmavidyā*, and Yoga.

2. The Result of Yoga practice

First, I would like to consider what Madhusūdana considered the result of Yoga. Madhusūdana defines Yoga via BhG 6.10–32. In BhGGAD on BhG 6.15 he mentions,
basing himself on the YS, that the yogin proceeds from samprajñātasamādhi to asamprajñātasamādhi and from there gains brahmavidyā. Furthermore, in BhGGAD on BhG 6.32, Madhusūdana explains the relationship between true knowledge, which is brahmavidyā, and Yoga. Madhusūdana interprets the phrase “the highest yogin” (paramo yogī), found in BhG 6.32, to indicate a person who make no distinction between the suffering and happiness of themselves and others because of being possessed of true knowledge, having eliminated the mind (manonāśa), and eradicated latent impressions (vāsanākṣaya).

BhGGAD on BhG 6.32 offers the following discussion of true knowledge, elimination of the mind, and eradication of latent impressions.

“True knowledge” is the knowledge that “all dualities are but the false imagining of māyā concerning brahman, I am none other than ātman who is being, knowledge, bliss, and non-dual.” “Elimination of the mind” means that the mind transforms into a state of suppression (nirodha) which excludes all activities by abandoning the transformations (pariṇāma) which render the activities actual. And “Eradication of latent impressions” means that when the latent impression of mental peace (cittapraśama), which arises from discriminating knowledge (viveka), becomes firm, then, even if there is an external cause, anger (krodha) and so forth, which result from the latent impressions, do not occur. In this way, “elimination” of the mind and “eradication” of latent impressions do not mean that the mind itself or the latent impressions themselves are lost. Rather, “elimination” of the mind means that the mental activities are suppressed, and “eradication” of latent impressions means that the latent impressions, which are the cause of anger and so forth, do not arise and this is the reason that mental peace occurs.

Furthermore, in BhGGAD on BhG 6.32 the means by which to attain true knowledge, elimination of the mind, and eradication of latent impressions are described. The means to attain true knowledge are hearing and so forth, that is to say, hearing (śravaṇa), thinking on (manana), and contemplating (nididhyāsana) the scriptures. The means to attain the elimination of the mind is Yoga. Finally, the means to eradicate a latent impressions is to give rise to a counter-impression (pratikūlavāsanā), for example, to give rise to a calm latent impression against that of anger. The above definition of the means for of the elimination of the mind as Yoga, in so far as it implies that mental activities are restricted, is consistent with the definition of Yoga given in the YS, which defines it as “mental restriction” (cittanirodha). Furthermore, it is consistent with the fact that asamprajñātasamādhi, which is
the final stage in the aṣṭāṅgayoga system elaborated in the YS, is the stage in which all mental activities are restricted and ceasing (nivṛttika), for which reason it is called the “samādhi of suppression” (nireddhamsamādhi). ⁶)

Asaṃprajñātasamādhi is a state in which all mental activities up to samprajñātasamādhi are restricted and ceasing. Additionally, in this samādhi, the latent impressions caused in samprajñātasamādhi are also restricted. However, since in asaṃprajñātasamādhi both the flow of the mental transformations in their suppressed form and the flow of the latent impressions resulting from them continue to exist, it is also called the remnant of the latent impressions. ⁷)

As mentioned above, because the mental activities are restricted in asaṃprajñātasamādhi, which is the final stage of aṣṭāṅgayoga, it is consistent with the understanding that Yoga is the means towards the elimination of the mind. In addition, it should also be understood that the eradication of the latent impressions is achieved in asaṃprajñātasamādhi, since in samprajñātasamādhi the flow of the latent impressions itself persists while those generated there are restricted.

3. Yoga is a requirement for the investigation of brahman

Now, as pointed out above, according to BhGGAD on BhG 6.32 the means towards true knowledge are hearing and so forth. This statement seems to be inconsistent with the description in BhGGAD on BhG 6.15 that brahmavidyā, that is to say, true knowledge, is caused by asaṃprajñātasamādhi. In the following, I would like to consider this point more closely.

Madhusūdana, quoting the Laghu yogavāsiṣṭha (LYV) 5.10.113, states that true knowledge, the elimination of the mind, and the eradication of the latent impressions are the cause of each other. In explaining why elimination of the mind is the cause of true knowledge, he elaborates as follows: when the mind is eliminated by Yoga, tranquility, self-control, and so forth are achieved (śamadamādisampatti). This gives rise to true knowledge. ⁸)

This “achievement of tranquility and self-control of the mind” is one of “four means” (sādhanacatuṣṭaya), which are among the requirements for the investigation of brahman in the Advaita school. ⁹) Therefore, Yoga in the present context can be considered to correspond to one of the means which are required for the investigation of brahman, namely the achievement of tranquility, self-control, and so forth of the mind.

Moreover, in BhGGAD on BhG 6.32, Madhusūdana classifies those qualified
(adhikārin) for brahmavidyā into those who perform worship (krtoṣṭi) and those who do not (akṛtoṣṭi). Those who do not perform worship, Madhusūdana states, can achieve the elimination of the mind without Yoga. This may imply that generally the elimination of the mind is achieved by Yoga. Furthermore, Madhusūdana also mentions that such a person achieves tranquility, self-control, and so forth after having achieved the elimination of the mind. Therefore, this can be considered an indirect confirmation that Yoga corresponds to one of the means required for the investigation of brahman, namely the achievement of tranquility, self-control, and so forth of the mind.

To continue, Madhusūdana also states that those who have achieved tranquility, self-control, and so forth, also achieve hearing, thinking on, and contemplating the Vedānta scriptures, and further acquire true knowledge by practicing them. Therefore, the following sequence is implied: 1) the practice of Yoga, 2) the achievement of the elimination of the mind, 3) the achievement of tranquility, self-control, and so forth of the mind, 4) the achievement of hearing, thinking on, and contemplating the Vedānta scriptures, and finally, 5) the occurrence of true knowledge by practicing them. In addition, according to BhGGAD on BhG 6.15 and so forth, the Vedānta scriptures are necessary for Yoga. Therefore, it seems clear that the order from 1) the practice of yoga to 5) the occurrence of true knowledge is the one Madhusūdana actually considered. Thus, Yoga is a direct means for the elimination of the mind, and indirectly, a means for the attainment of true knowledge through the achievement of tranquility, self-control, and so forth of the mind.

4. Conclusion

From the above considerations, the following conclusions can be drawn: Madhusūdana considered aṣṭāṅgayoga as a means to the elimination of the mind. In addition, because tranquility, self-control, and so forth of the mind, which are requirements for the investigation of brahman in the Advaita school, are achieved when the mind is eliminated, Madhusūdana regards aṣṭāṅgayoga as the means to their achievement. Thus, since true knowledge occurs following the order of, first, the achievement of tranquility, self-control and so forth, second, the achievement of hearing, thinking on, and contemplating the Vedānta scriptures, and Finally, putting them into practice, Madhusūdana considered aṣṭāṅgayoga as the indirect means for achieving true knowledge. These facts may indicate that Madhusūdana positioned aṣṭāṅgayoga as a preliminary stage for the investigation
of brahman. And this is consistent with the fact that aṣṭāṅgayoga is the stage preceding jñānayoga in the BhRT.

Notes

1) In particular, there has been little discussion of Madhusūdana’s interpretation of aṣṭāṅgayoga. To the best of my knowledge, only Saha (2014, 187–196) touches on this subject. On the issue of Madhusūdana advocating that Advaita scholars do not depend on Yoga even while discussing Yoga, Saha argues that Madhusūdana contextualized Yoga in the frameworks of the Advaita school by embracing the yoga theory of the LYV.

2) BhGGAD 294,22f. (on BhG 6.10).

3) For Madhusūdana, the terms “the mind” (manas), “intellect” (buddhi, dhī), and “heart” (citta) are synonymous.

4) BhGGAD 322,32–323,9 (on BhG 6.32).

5) BhGGAD 323,13–16 (on BhG 6.32).

6) BhGGAD 302,40f. (on BhG 6.15).

7) BhGGAD 301,16–35 (on BhG 6.15).

8) BhGGAD 323,9–13 (on BhG 6.32).

9) These “four means” are found in Śaṅkara’s (ca. 756–772) Brahmasūtrabhāṣya (BSBh) on Brahmasūtra (BS) 1.1.1. See Shima 1980, 39. In addition, BSBh does not explain in detail what is included in “and so forth” of “tranquility, self-control, and so forth” (śamadādi), and it seems that a unified view was established only gradually. In the end, the following six elements were included: “tranquility” (śama), “self-control” (dama), “ceasing” (uparati), “endurance” (titikṣā), “fixing the mind” (samādhāna), and “faith” (śraddhā). See Nakamura 1996, 225.

10) BhGGAD 301,40f. (on BhG 6.15), BhGGAD 306,21–23 (on BhG 6.20), BhGGAD 316,23–25 (on BhG 6.29). In addition, in BhGGAD on BhG 6.29–31, after passing through samprajñātasamādhi and asamprajñātātasaṃmādi, the object of the word “thou” (tvāpadārtha), the object of the word “that” (tatpadārtha), and the object of the sentence “thou art that” are confirmed.

11) The framework comprised of true knowledge, the elimination of the mind, and the eradication of the latent impressions can already found in the Jīvanmuktiviveka (JMV) of Vidyārāṇya (14th CE). Therefore, it can be said that Madhusūdana’s yoga theory is influenced by the JMV. I will discuss the impact of the JMV on Madhusūdana on another occasion.

Abbreviations

BhGGAD Bhagavadgītāgūḍhārthadīpikā (Madhusūdana Sarasvatī). Srimadbhagavadgīta with the Commentaries Śrīmadśānkarabhāṣya with Ānandagiri, Nīlakanṭhī, Bhāṣyotkarṣadīpikā of Dhanapati, Śrīdharī, Gūḍhārthadīpikā of Madhusūdana with Gūḍhārthatattvāloka of Śrīdharmadattaśarmā (Bhachchāśramā). Ed. Wāsudev Laxman Shāstrī Paṇśikar. 2nd ed. Bombay: Nirnaya Sāgar Press, 1936.

BhRṬ Bhaktirasāyanāṭipāṭhā (Madhusūdana Sarasvatī). Śrīmadbhāgavatamañcavatāpranītaṃ Śrīmadbhaktirasāyanam. Ed. and Com. Janārdhanaśāstrī Pāṇḍeya. Vārāṇasī: Motilal Banarsidas, 2018.

LYV Laghuṣyogavāsiṣṭha (Vālmīki). Laghuṣyogavāsiṣṭha: Text with the Sanskrit Commentary Vāsiṣṭha-Candrikā. Ed. Vasudeva Sharma Panasikara. Dillī: Motilal Banarsidas, 1985.
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