Role of Yoga in Ancient Menstrual Ethics with special reference to concept of Citta śuddhi

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Abstract

One of the objectives of Yoga is to achieve and maintain purity of Citta. The entire practices of Yoga are intended to achieve purity of Citta by any means and ways, and in all conditions. It keeps working on its objective so that human beings would be able to achieve the state of supreme bliss or the state of ānanda.

To attain the level of antaḥ śuddhi, covering various aspects of Citta, one has to adhere zealously to yama and niyama with Haṭh Yoga or āṣṭāṅga Yoga then they would be able to reach the avacetana mana and after that they try to attain the level of Citta śuddhi.

Fortunately women are granted a great opportunity or a golden chance by nature in the form of menstrual phase which is known as Rajasrāva kāla whereby she has to do nothing from the practices of Haṭh Yoga or Rāja Yoga and she can just sit by herself and may try to choose any way to open up her inner self and reach the avacetana mana very quickly by practicing the dhāraṇa, dhyāna, mantra chanting and various relaxation techniques. She may thus work to purify her Citta at a greater speed and able to attain peace and bliss sooner, because there are certain ancient ethics related to the menstrual phase, like; isolation, keeping away from cooking, avoids mingling with other people, etc. These can actually be conducive to thinking and taking action for awakening the inner self, the true and ultimate purpose of life.

This research work is an attempt to throw light on some hidden phenomenon behind the ancient ethics related to menstrual phase, with guidelines and suggestions for women intended towards realising their real potential and leading them towards ultimate aim of life.

Keywords: Citta, Ancient Menstrual Ethics, Cittaśuddhi.

Introduction

Yoga: The word Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit verb Yuj which further contains three meaning saṁyama, samādhi, to join. Maharṣi vyāsasaidd Yoga is samādhi and samādhi is a universal attribute of the Citta. There are five grounds of Citta are kṣhipta (disturbed), mūḍha (somnolent), vikṣhipta (distracted), ekāgra (one-pointed), niruddha (controlled) (Arya&Rama H.H., 1986). First three are not suitable for state of samādhi. However, the state of wisdom ekāgra is known as samādhi of wisdom. Samādhi is a state of equanimity wherein everything is clear in mind

and it works with wisdom and wisdom results in samādhi.

Yoga is a lifestyle through which people may learn to live life with the highest levels of understanding following the path of wisdom. To attain this wisdom, there are many ways and processes described in detail with great authenticity in Haṭh Yoga, Rāja Yoga, ancient scriptures like Upniṣada, Veda and philosophical texts. When knowledge is combined with wisdom, it results in the form of solution which covers all the aspects of the question or problem because knowledge which is received through the outer

world through senses and accept it in the way it is received through senses without exploring its other aspects, but a practitioner of *Yoga* gets an entirely different perspective from a heightened intellectual viewpoint through higher level of concentration. If people could utilise more of their intellectual potential, they would be able to find answers to the same question or solve problems they face much easily, because they would be able to reach the most appropriate solution on the basis of thorough analysis.

Practices of *Yoga* not work only for wisdom, but also cover fitness of body and mind at the same time and help the practitioner move towards the ultimate goal of life, i.e. *Mokṣa*. Practices of *Yoga* are available in many forms. Philosophy of *Yoga* begins from *Yama-yiyama* and followed by *byāsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhārṇa*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*. *Mantra* chanting also a tool for *Yoga* which is known as *Mantra Yoga*. *Haṭh Yoga* includes the *ṣaṭkarma* and *mudrā*.

Citta: Philosophy of *Yoga* is based on *Citta* which said cessation of mental modification is *Yoga* (Arya & Rama H.H., 1986). It is elaborated in text of *Yoga* and *Upniṣada*. According to fifth verses of *Tri-śikhi-brāhmaṇopniṣada* *Citta* is part of *antaḥ karaṇa* and there are three parts of *antaḥ karaṇa* *Manas*, *buddhi* and *ahaṃkāra* along with *Citta*. According to fifth mandal verses one to three in *Maṇḍala- brāhmaṇopniṣad* *Citta* which is in state of functioning bound with outer world and *Citta* which is in state of non-functioning move towards the liberation. *Citta* in thinking process get stuck with illusion and when it reduce the thinking process and remain in the non-functioning state which is possible with practices of *Yoga*, and then it becomes easy to attain the purified state and move towards the *Unmani* state where *Nir-vikalpa-samādhi* happens and *Citta* is able to dissolve itself in supreme. According to *Yoga-cūḍāmany-upaniṣad* *Citta* is the seat of thought where time to time all thoughts come and go. Some stay and become cause of action, some are helpful in practice and some disturb the peace of mind.

According to the philosophy of *Buddha*, there are mainly four types of *Citta* which are further divided into sub parts, and there are 121 types of *Citta* in total, and it includes 54 *Kāmāvacaraṃ Citta* which further divided in 12 *akusala Citta* (it divides into sub parts: 8 *lobha mūla Citta*, 2 *dosa mūla Citta*, 2 *moha mūla Citta*, 15 *Rūpāvacara Citta*), 18 *ahetuka Citta* (which further divided into sub parts 15 *vipāka Citta* where it divided into sub parts: 7 *akusala vipāka Citta*, 8 *kusala vipāka Citta* and 3 *kiriya Citta*), 24 *kāma sobhaṇa Citta* (8, *maha kusala Citta*, 8 *maha vipāka Citta* and 8 *maha kiriya Citta*), 15 *Rūpavacaraṃ Citta* (further divided into sub parts 5 *rūpavacara kusala Citta*, 5 *rūpavacara vipāka Citta* and 5 *rūpavacara kiriya Citta*), 12 *Arūpavacaraṃ Citta* (4 *arūpavacara kusala Citta*, *arūpavacara vipāka Citta* and 4 *arūpavacara kiriya Citta*), 40 *Lokuttaraṃ Citta* (20 *magga Citta* and 20 *phala Citta*) (Narada, 1979).

Kāmāvacaraṃ: means that which mostly moves about in the sentient realm, or that which pertains to the senses and their corresponding objects (Narada, 1979).

Rūpavacaraṃ and *Arūpavacaraṃ*: respectively mean either that which pertains to *Rūpa* and *Arūpa* *Jhānas* (ecstasies) or that which mostly moves about in the *Rūpa* and *Arūpa* planes.

Lokuttaraṃ: It is the supra-mundane consciousness that enables one to transcend this world of mind-body (Narada, 1979).

According to texts of *Patanjali*, a practitioner of *Yoga* can divide one *Citta* in to many *Citta* to experience the fruits of all previous *karma* together. This process is known as *nirmāṇa Citta* which is possible through the *asmitā* (egoism). With the help of these *nirmāṇa Citta* practitioner work on different dimensions of consciousness (Vivekanand, 2019).

Grounds of *Citta* and solutions for *Cittaśuddhi*

There are three *gunasatva* (cause of lightness), *rajas* (cause of movement) and *tamas* (cause of inertia). *Satva* represents itself by those actions

which consist of divinity, piety, good deeds for others, devotion, detached and right deeds at the right time and right place. *Rajas* consists of those action or represents itself by those deeds which are done for egocentric consideration, seek name and fame. *Tamas* represent those actions which done in ignorance, without consciousness and awareness and which are not in nature of piety (Bhavanani, 2006). These three *guna* are well explained in philosophy in *Sāṃkhya* and in *bhāgavata gītā* by Kṛṣṇā. These *guna* influence and control our thought, events related with life, our action and reaction, and these are changeable. Imbalance in *guna* affects the state of mind and it appears in the behaviour of every creation of nature. Whichever *guna* is at its peak, it influence and controls other *guna* and then the mind and body simultaneously behave accordingly, under the influence of that very *guna*. There are some circumstances that are explained by *maharṣi Vyāsa* known as ‘grounds of *Citta*,’ which further provides insight into the state of human being, describe their characteristics of personality as per ancient aspects, and also explore their conditions to enter into the path of *Yoga* (they are eligible or going to be eligible or not eligible for *Yoga*).

***kṣhipta* (disturbed):** In this situation, a person is in the state of *rajas* (Jha, 1935) wherein *satva* and *tamas* are not in active state, or it may be said that they are slowed down by the *rajas* as it dominates both the other *guna* (Arya & Rama H.H., 1986). Due to this, the person behaves under the influences cast by *rajas*, and it is in this state, a normal person remains wakeful (Arya & Rama H.H., 1986). As a quality which is related with desires and enthusiasm, it manifests as greed, attachment and actions with desires of fruit (Shrivastava, 2012). This ground is not suitable for *Yoga* because the person may not be able to concentrate on one task for long, but his mind jumps from one goal to another in an erratic manner. *Citta* is indulge in desires which connected with *rāga* and due to this situation *Citta* involved in worldly aspects rather than spiritual aspects.

***mūḍha* (somnolent):** In this situation, *tamas guna* is in active form and the rest of two *guna* remain dormant, and *tamas* thendominate the other two *guna*. This ground is also not suitable for the practitioner of *Yoga*, because in this state, people prefer to live in dark (without knowledge and wisdom), and they do not even think about ethics because the *Citta* involved highly in state of *rāga*, and the cause of *rāga*, which consists of illusion and ignorance. In this state, people ignore the path of *dharma* and are also not involved much in activity (right actions) due to lethargy and dullness of body (Bhavanani, 2006).

***vikṣhipta* (distracted):** In this situation, *satva guna* is not in active form or remains dormant as it gets influenced by *rajas guna* and *tamsa guna* from time to time. This ground is suitable for beginners of spiritual practices, for journey of *Yoga*. It may be said that it is mixed state for *Citta* where it is involved in both kinds of practices related with good deeds (spiritual practices, serves society, serves humanity), but due to *rajas guna* attachment to fruits dissipates the best results of good deeds. A person in such a situation remains involved in benevolent activities, but strives to achieve popularity out of those activities (Bhavanani, 2006).

***ekāgra* (one-pointed):** In this situation, *satva* is in active mode while *rajas* and *tamas guna* are in dormant stage, but still present. This situation is better for a practitioner of *Yoga*. Focus remains on the spiritual path, and the practitioner strives for knowledge and wisdom, and may even attain the state of *samādhi*. In this state, the practitioner conducts his life absolutely in accordance with *satva guna*, and also indulges in the activities of *dharma* which relate to good deeds for the benefit of society at large. Dedication of their life for humanity and spreading *dharma* become the objectives of his life. Here *Yogi* has to again take birth for his liberation because in this situation, if he gets the *samādhi*, still influenced by any of the *guna*, he may get the *samprajñāta samādhi* and *vivekaja jñāna*.

niruddha (controlled): in this ground there is no influence of any *guna* and this is the best state for practitioner of *Yoga*. This is the ground where

liberation may occur, the state of knowledge with wisdom and finally achieves the *viveka khyāti* and *asamprajñāta samādhi*.

***Cittaśuddhi* according to the state of the practitioner (Sarasvati, 2012)**

grounds	<i>kṣhipta</i>	<i>mūḍha</i>	<i>vikṣhipta</i>	<i>ekāgra</i>	<i>niruddha</i>
practices	<i>bhakti Yoga, japa Yoga</i>	<i>haṭha Yoga,</i>	<i>kriya Yoga, satsaṅga, dhāraṇā</i>	<i>rāja yoga</i>	Practice of <i>samādhi</i>

Table 1

Apart from above practices, a practitioner should take care of the food intake, with a focus on *sātvika* food. Food which consists of life force energy and provide health, happiness, strength and satisfaction and also it should be fresh, juicy, pleasing to heart, wholesome and fatty (Bhavanani, 2006). follow the path which *Guru* showed and keep faith on him, read scriptures and practice it on regular basis till the wisdom and the knowledge deeply felt from out to inner self, practices of *mantra* should be try to maintain for long run and keep patience, have faith in celestial sounds of *mantra* it works on *Citta* and purify at a level however after one level practitioner has to move on and stay on the state of *dhyān* and *samādhi*. Then practitioner may be able to achieve

the state of *Yoga* and found himself in *niruddha* state where it is just some steps are far away from the state of liberation.

During menstrual phase the solution of *Cittaśuddhi*: If a woman practice and follow the path of *Yoga* before and after the menstrual phase then she is allow to do some soothing practices of *Yoga* during her menstrual phase. Here are some practices of *Yoga* listed for women to perform during menstrual phase and keep herself calm and relaxed and give a chance to find herself, her own values, her own views about her life and time to search new ideas for her upcoming life. The list of practices is as follows: brief description in below table two.

<i>Āsana</i>	<i>prāṇāyāma</i>	<i>Dhyāna</i>	<i>mantra</i>	Relaxation
<i>tāḍāsana</i> <i>kaṭicakrāsana</i> <i>vajrāsana</i> <i>mārjārī</i> <i>śaśāṅka</i> <i>kaṁdharāsana</i> <i>supta</i> <i>kaṭicakrāsana</i> <i>śvāsana</i>	<i>nāḍi śodhana,</i> <i>ujjāyī,</i> <i>bhrāmarī,</i>	<i>cidakāśa</i> <i>dhāraṇā,</i> <i>so'ma</i> <i>dhyāna,</i> <i>antarmauna</i>	<i>Ajapājapa, om</i> chanting, <i>gāyatrī mantra</i>	<i>yoga nidrā</i> mainly focus on abdomen and count the breathe

Table 2

Alongwith above practices before and after menstrual phase women should perform the practices of *sūrya namaskāra, jala neti, kunjala, vyāghrāsana, bhujāṅgāsana, śalabhāsana, dhanurāsana, cakrāsana, paścimotānāsana, matsyāsana, ardhamatsendrasana, pāda-hastāsana, hanumānāsana, viparītakaraṇī mudrā,*

Yoga-mudrā, pāśinimudrā, aśvini, sahajauli and *mūla bandha* (Saraswati, 2013) to spend a smooth time with herself and feel the eternal bliss during her precious days. It may be noted that inverted postures like *sarvāṅgāsana, śīrṣāsana* should not perform (Saraswati, 2013).

Ancient Menstrual Ethics

Menstruation ethics are topic for debate some group of people stands for the ethics and some group of people are rejects it by roots. When open the door of history which is related with the menstrual ethics then it may found that there are number of reasons lies behind these ethics. Time changed and now it is necessary to understand the reasons of menstrual ethics and according to the necessity of time adopt it or reject it.

According to ancient Indian texts Menstrual ethics and related facts are listed below:

Rituals: In *Andhra Pradesh* there is a temple named by *devīpūrama* followed the tradition of *śāktatantra*. *devīpūrama* Temple made in a form of *śrīcakra* and there women perform all rituals as a priest and this is the temple where people allow women enter in to the temple, stay in the temple during her menstrual phase. It is also believed that women become so pure during her menstruation and all the spiritual power enter into her which lie in the statue of the God/Goddess of the temple so she don't need to touch them because she already in form of deity of the temple or supreme spiritual energy. But in the present era or many years ago this things diverted in a wrong way and just opposite meaning understood by the society and people started discrimination in form of untouchability. Women become pure during her menstruation she just need is what. It is just a rest in form of time for self-awareness and personal spiritual growth.

Celebration of menarche: In Hindu tradition of India there are many states people celebrate the first menstruation of their daughter or female member of the family like a small marriage. The celebration occurs mainly region of South India and north east. In *Kerala* the celebration known as *Kaniyans*, in *Karnataka*, *Keral* and *Andhra Pradesh* there are similarities in celebration where *sumangalī* (married) women perform *ārati* and celebrate with songs and then give the *chigali unde* (a dish with the combination of jaggery and sesame seeds) to the menstruating girl. In

Tamilnadu celebration known as *manjal neerattu vizha* (bath with turmeric) (Sridhar, 2019).

Isolation: isolation is biggest part of these ethics which related to spiritual growth (Sarawati, 2013), emotional stability, rest (Sridhar, 2019) of body and mind and give some space to explore the hidden ideas within self. Isolated time is valuable and available for self-purification (Sridhar, 2019), self-justification, self-judgement, and self-protection. Growth of self in different ways and it happens with mind to body and body to mind.

It is necessary for every human being and women is also human being she can-not be taken granted, she made the biggest part of society then how could be she ignored by the ancient Indian culture that is the reason behind to provide her isolation (time for complete rest and holidays). Ancient Indian tradition enough aware about the menstruation process that it is phase of austerity and time for self-purification and women should live alone and follow her practices in solitude because austerity needs solitude (Sridhar, 2019) to mature itself and whether men or women follow it both needs isolation for their spiritual development so this is just for the sake of women and for their empowerment.

Era changed, thinking process demolished, care and respect replaced by doubts, myths, some mythological stories, fear of untouched, fear of impurity, even fear of death or illness (not the women but who spend time with the menstruated women). Somehow women forgot to respect herself and somewhere people forgot their personal and social responsibility to secure the precious dynamic moments of women's life.

Aśauca: People consider menstruation is an impure process and believe that women are not in a clean condition during this period, and even use the word *aśauca* for it, which means impurity. This is a taboo which was actually created to protect women from the burden of responsibilities of her household and family (Muktanand, 2014) and set

her free to take rest without having to work in the kitchen and otherwise mandatory religious practices and rituals. These, actually take away a lot of time and energy. In this condition never ending household work of large joint families of yore were totally depended on the toil of women. Moreover, the times gone by were not like the mechanical era of today, when numerous gadgets have replaced much of the rigorous manual work. In those days, all household work was done by hands and most of the household work was only done by women, while men worked outside the home, in the field. So, the intent behind this word *āśauca* was intended to keep away from work pressure and save women from her daily routines of working hard to maintain her family members. In this case, it was a good idea, except that it forced the women to keep away from their family members, in times when they badly needed emotional support. Family members of menstruating women used to stay away from them owing to the fear that *āśauca* may influence the family members due to which they may attract bad luck or may encounter mishappenings in their life. Hence they started treating women as 'untouchable' beings which was certainly unethical and cruel. The key facts behind the reasons why mingling with menstruating women was forbidden because during these awakened days, which enhanced *Cittaśuddhi*, and why was this thought spread in the society without any scientific justification, still needed to be resolved.

Kitchen: In India, most families allow women to take a break from kitchens and give complete rest to her body and mind, while availing the advantages of those days. But, in present scenario, the opposite is also being observed. Some women themselves totally ignore this age-old wisdom and forego rest, while in some families people ignore the pain of women and don't bother about providing her proper care and rest. In fact, many people tend to take this matter very lightly. Women who are dealing with small family are still in good condition, but in homes where women are working and looking after the family as well, or women who are living in joint

families, are often pushed by family members or circumstances to surrender themselves totally for the cause of the family and sacrifice their health while hiding or ignoring their pain. Such extreme sense of responsibility becomes a bane when it triggers stress, causing hormonal imbalance and even manifesting in the form of menstrual irregularities.

Food intake: Kitchen is associated with food and eating habits of women also, due to which they were also affected. Wrong food during menstruation is enough to trigger menstrual irregularities. Texts of *Āyurveda* describe the importance of proper diet pattern and ethics related with food which includes many a do's and don'ts. In present times, women are not conscious about following such rules on their own and even the ones who are aware tend to ignore the recommended way of life and diet pattern due to work pressure at home or in professional life.

So kitchen is not just a place in the home, it is also a place of elements of health. If kitchen and ethics related with kitchen are ignored, then health will be certainly affected. So, it is good to keep away from kitchen and take rest, and if it is not possible then at least take good diet and prescribed diet as per the *Āyurveda* so that the health of body and mind get at least some nutrition according to requirements of the body. It is not a good idea to do the entire kitchen work during this period. It should be taken as a time to share the work and give others a chance to become independent, so that they may also understand the value of the menstruating women. During this period, women still needs some sort of physical activity, but hard work should best be avoided.

Discussion

This paper is presented for ancient ethics related with practices of *Yoga* and menstrual phase. During menstrual phase/ *Rajaḥsrāva kāl* practices of some *Yogāsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *śaṭkarma*, *mudrā* are not allowed to do because of the health of reproductive organs. But still there

are some practices that are allowed for women to take part in. These should be part of her daily life, and during menstrual phase, it may become easy to practice it, and she should enjoy the bliss which she truly deserves during her precious days. It has been observed that pearl of wisdom and intellectual efforts come by easily during this phase, as compared to other days. Practices which are allowed during *Rajaḥsrāva kālāare dhāraṇa, dhyāna, prāṇā kriyā* without *kumbhaka, pratyāhāra*, chanting of *mantra* in form of *japa* or using the beads of *japa mala*. These are some tools to attain the state of wisdom where all doubts of life are removed one by one, and the realities of life, wisdom, and liberation appears before the practitioner.

The practices detailed above are helpful for purification of *Citta*, and support the women to enjoy the bliss which she may feel throughout her menstruation, and reach the destination of spiritual path by crossing the grounds of *Citta* to the higher ground and take advantage of these times to draw the best from life force with the help of greater awareness.

Menstruation ethics were developed smartly and carefully by our ancient saints so that the women may avail the opportunity to work on her physical health and mind set through rest, meditation, and increased awareness in a periodic manner. These are the periods when women can avail more time for self; starting from self-analysis to employ the time for self-care, self-acceptance, focus on future plans, practices of *Yoga* and focus on the growth in spiritual path, leading towards the ultimate goal of life, i.e. liberation.

In many parts of India it was the time of isolation, so female friends of a woman can meet her, serve her, care for her, while in some regions they even celebrate the menstruation in form of worshiping the girl, provide her gifts and jewellery and selected foodstuff to ease her flow and maintain her health. Utilising these special days for self-awareness is the key. Whether women working outside or being a homemaker,

there remains a need to look critically into the menstruation ethics, and make adjustments according to the changes times and the society. This is only possible in situations when the hidden truth about the menstruation will be explored, and the matter is freed from the concepts of shame and guilt.

Conclusion

When *Draupadi* invoked *Kṛṣṇā* during the *cīraharana* she was in her menstrual phase. Her purity level of *Citta* was so high and *Kṛṣṇā* provided her protection in form of long piece of cloth because at that time she was in a single cloth. This fact clearly explain that during menstrual phase women become purer and her *Citta* can be more pure when she develops greater awareness of her inner self through the practices of *Yoga*.

There may be a reason behind the development of menstrual ethics is *Cittaśuddhi* which matters most. Because practices of *Yoga* are sacred and need isolation, follow a *satvik* lifestyle which includes raw diet, proper rest, staying away from worldly life and just mediate to connect with the inner self. Objectives of the physical and material world does not matter for *Citta śuddhi* or for that matter any serious practice of *Yoga*. Had it mattered, *Draupadi* could never had invoked *Kṛṣṇā* during her menstrual phase, if she was really impure due to bleeding in menstruation, and God incarnate himself present in astral form would have appeared to help her, and protect her from the negative attitudes and actions of thousands of people.

This research is dedicated to the feminine divinity and acknowledges the high worth of female energy which surrenders herself and never asks for anything as price. This is the social responsibility and demand of this era that we revisit the ancient Indian menstrual ethics and return the bouquet of due respect to the womankind, and provide her space and time for her spiritual growth and *Cittaśuddhi*.

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