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THE EXPOSITION OF PATANJALI YOGA SUTRA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASTA SIDDHIS TO YOGA PRACTICES

KEY WORDS: Asta siddhis, Pancha Bhutas, Pancha Tatvas, Jnanendriya dharana, dhyana, Samadhi

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ABSTRACT

This paper explains the art of integration through concentration, meditation and profound absorption and also attainment of supernatural powers. Secondly, I have tried to analyse the Pancha Bhutas that affect the *Indriyas-5* senses which in turn transmit the physical vibrations into sensations, only to recall the basic stages of the Pancha Bhutas out of which the whole of the manifested universe is an emanation of the self. Thirdly, an attempt in made to describe the attainment of *Asta Siddhis* as a result of – bhuta-jaya perfection of the physical body through **Anima, Mahima, Laghima, Garima, Prapti, Prakamya, Ishatva** and **Vasitva**. And Finally, I have tried to explain that these Asta Siddhis (Eight Powers) are not the ultimate goal of yoga but only to an indication of the first path of the yogi and hence he need not feel pride in possession of Eight Powers.

Patanjali speaks of the properties of Yoga and the art of integration through concentration, meditation and profound absorption. The practitioner concentrates to particular points within and outside the body to be used by the seeker for concentration and contemplation. When this dharana is (maintained) steadily, it flows into dhyana leads to Samadhi. Thus, dharana, dhyana and Samadhi are interconnected. On this innermost quest, supernatural powers come naturally to a yogi who has integrated his body, mind and soul. There is a danger that he will be seduced by these powers. He has to bypass them in order to pursue his practice as far as *kaivalya*, the height of indivisible existence. *Samyama* explains the disciplines necessary to both living in the natural grace of yoga, and to attain supernatural powers(Siddhis). These powers are extraordinary. The appearance of any one of them indicates that the practitioner has followed methods appropriate to his evolution. But he should not mistake these powers as the goal of his search. For onlookers they may seem to be great accomplishments, but for the sadhaka they are hindrances to Samadhi. Even celestial beings try to seduce the practitioner. If he succumbs to these temptations, misfortunes overwhelm him.

If a yogi gets carried away by supernatural powers and uses them for fame, he fails in his practice. He is like a man who tries to save himself from the wind only to get caught up in a whirlwind. A yogi who attains certain powers and misconstrues them for his goal is caught in their effects and exposes himself to their afflictions. Therefore, Patanjali warns the practitioner to renounce these accomplishments, so that the gates of everlasting bliss may open for him. He is counselled to develop non-attachment which destroys pride, a cardinal pitfall for those who acquire powers. Mastery over the *Pancha Bhutas* by adhering to *Samyama* on their gross, constant, subtle, all-pervading and functional states. The pancha bhutas are also called Panca - Tattvas and it will help us to understand the nature of the five Elements (Panca – Bhutas). A Tattva may also mean a principle which is embodied in a number of things in different degrees which acquire on this account, a sameness of nature in certain matters though differing in degree and mode of expression.

The external world is cognized through our five Jnanendriya (Sensory organs). We can know the things which exist outside us only as they affect our sense-organs. Now, the things around us have innumerable qualities which are shared by them in different degrees and manners. These qualities which form a jungle of sense impressions can be classified scientifically. The Seers who dived through the practice of Yoga into the inner and essential nature of all things and whose main objective was to unfold the innermost mystery of life adopted a perfectly scientific and yet very simple method of classifying these qualities. This consisted in dividing them into five groups based on how they affected our five sensory organs. All the multitudinous qualities through which all objects of the external world are cognized are classified under five heads and

these five modes in which all things affect the mind through the five sense-organs are called pancha-bhutas or Pancha Tattvas. Thus Tejas is that all-inclusive quality which in one way or another affects the retina of the eye, *Akasa(sky)* is that quality which affects the ear and so on.

The pancha-bhutas by their peculiar action affect the Indriyas which then transmute the purely physical vibrations into sensations. The sensations are the raw material from which the mind elaborates the world of ideas by a process of integration, reproduction and rearrangement of the component images. But the mind also, according to Yogic psychology, is Jada and it is the illumination of the *Buddhi* which imparts to the mechanical work of the mind, an element of intelligent understanding. But, as this question has been dealt with thoroughly elsewhere, let us now pass on to the problem with which the present Sutra deals, namely, the mastery of the Bhutas.

All forces of nature have been brought under the control of man by the discovery of laws which determine the action of these forces. If we understand what these different stages through which the Bhutas are in their involution are, we will again have to recall the basic doctrine of the Yogic philosophy, according to which the whole of the manifested Universe is an emanation of the Self. It is the Self which has become the Not-Self through a progressive involution of a part of itself. The characteristic of the gross forms of elements are solidity(Prudi), fluidity(jala), heat(Agni), mobility(Vayu) and volume(Akasa). Their subtle counterparts are smell, taste, sight, touch, and sound. Their all-pervasiveness or interpenetrations is the three *gunas*, and their purpose is either worldly enjoyment or freedom and beatitude. The earth element has five properties of sound, touch, sight, taste and smell. Water has four: sound, touch, sight and taste. Fire has three: sound, touch and sight. Air has sound and touch. Ether has only the one quality of sound.

According to Hatha Yoga Pradipika the names of mahasiddhas who attained Siddhis by the practice of Hathayoga and they are still roaming about the universe having conquered time (Death) itself. Those are:- Sri Adinath, Matsyendranath, Sabara, Anandabhairava, Chaurangi, Mina, Goraksha, Virupaksha, Bileshaya, Manthana, Bhairava, Siddhi, Buddha, Kanthadi, Korntaka, Surananda, Siddhipada, Charapation, Kaneri, Pujyapada, Nityanath, Niranjan, Kapali, Bindunath, Kakachandishwara, Allama, Prabhudeva, Ghodacholi, Tintini, Bhanuki, Naradeva, Khanda, Kaplika. These mahasiddhas, having accomplished the goal of yoga, have released their own personalities from the cycle of birth and death in the physical world. Being jivanmuktas, liberated while still in the confines of Prakriti, their will is sufficiently strong to enable them to do anything, anywhere and at any time¹.

¹Swami Muktibodhananda, Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Bihar school of

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Mahasiddhas are great beings who attained powers through the perfection of sadhana. There are so many siddhis. As far as siddhis go there are eight major ones which a sadhaka has to master before he is called a Asta siddhis. Thence, for the attainment of Asta Siddhis, perfection of the body and the non-obstruction of its functions by the powers. The three results of the mastery of the Panca – Bhutas. The first is the appearance of the well-known group of eight high occult powers known as Maha-Siddhis. **Anima** – the ability to become as small as an atom; **Laghima** – the ability to become weightless; **Mahima** - the ability to become as large as the universe; **Garima** - the ability to become heavy ; **Prapti** – the ability to reach any place; **Prakamyā** –the ability to stay under water and to maintain the body and youth; **Vasitva** - control over all objects, organic and inorganic; **Isatva** - the capacity to create and destroy at will. The second result of **Bhuta-Jaya** is the perfection of the physical body.

The third result is the immunity from the natural action of the *Panca Bhutas*. Thus the yogi can pass through fire without being burnt. His physical body can enter the solid earth just as an ordinary person can enter water. These powers attained by mastery over the *Bhutas* appear most extraordinary and almost unbelievable. But they are known to be real as the Yogi tradition of thousands of years and the experiences of those who are in touch with higher order Yogis show. The previous discussion on the nature of the *Panca-Bhutas* and the way they are mastered will give some indication as to how such extraordinary results can follow from such a mastery. The whole of the phenomenal world is a play of the *Panca-Bhutas* and anyone who has acquired complete control over them naturally becomes master of all natural phenomena. The student will recall that the *Anvaya* state of the *Panca-Bhutas* is related to the three *Gunas* which lie at the very basis of the manifested Universe. Mastery of the *Panca-Bhutas* thus means becoming one with the Divine Consciousness upon which manifestation is based and therefore gaining the capacity to exercise Divine powers which are inherent in that Consciousness. This does not mean that such a Yogi can do whatever he likes. He has still to work within the framework of natural laws, but his knowledge is so vast and his powers, therefore, so extraordinary that he appears capable of doing anything. More important that the extraordinary nature of these powers is the question of the nature of this manifested Universe which the existence of such powers raises. The essential nature of the Universe is such powers. The mystery of life, matter and consciousness appears to deepen and acquire a new significance and we seem almost forced to the conclusion that all phenomena, even those which seem to have a solid material basis, are a play of consciousness. The Vedantic doctrine 'verily, all is Brahman' seems to be the only plausible explanation.

From *samyama* on the elements, their counterparts, form conjunctions and fruits, the yogi develops the eight supernatural powers and gains perfect wealth of the body without falling victim to the obstacles posed by the elements. This is said to be the best wealth of the body: perfection and freedom from all hindrances.

This sutra indicates that by the conquest of the elements a yogi gains mastery in three fields. The first is the acquirement of the eight supernatural powers. The second is perfection of the body, which means that earth does not soil him, water dampens him, or fire burn him. Wind cannot move him and space can conceal his body anywhere at any time. The third is immunity from the play of the elements and their characteristics, and from the obstructions and disturbances which they create.

These are the eight powers which come unbidden to the yogi. Although they indicate that his sadhana is on the right path, they are also capable of catching him up with the force of a whirlwind to bring his sadhana crashing down. Such siddhis must be ignored and the ultimate goal of freedom and beatitude maintained. Pride in siddhis and preoccupation with them lead to disaster and chaos. They create attachment and affliction, and that is why Patanjali holds them to be obstacles to *dhyana* and *Samadhi*. They are only

of use if one has forgotten the aim of yoga. 'Discard them' he says, 'and devote all energies to the realization of God.'

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