

**CONTRIBUTION OF TRANSLATORS TO SPREAD  
THE 'LIGHT OF INDIAN SPIRITUALITY'  
(WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO YOGA TEXTS)**

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**Abstract**

*For long spirituality has been associated with religion. Performing religious rites or rituals and following one's religion was considered as spiritual. But in new age, people like to keep these two things separate, often called as SBNR, Spiritual But Not Religious. Many believe religion is one way of reaching spiritual goal. That is to discover the essence of one's existence and the deepest values and meaning by which one lives. It is believed that there are different spiritualities or spiritual paths. One has to choose ones own path and walking on it can have three principal aspects:*

- a) Practice of various spiritual disciplines e.g. fasting, prayer, meditation,*
- b) To seek guidance of spiritually able person, preceptor, GURU*
- c) Reading and contemplating on the thoughts in sacred texts.*

*One has to remember that they are not water tight compartments. Religious and spiritual movements believe that their sacred books are divine, supernaturally inspired and not the works of man. Since ancient time people are studying them, mainly to understand them and to do comparative study. In Indian philosophical system, one can criticize, raise doubts and can put forward ones own views while studying the different philosophical systems.*

**Keywords:-** science and technology, religious, Yoga,

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**Need of Spirituality :**

**A**s we all know the science and technology has changed our life. It has reduced human efforts, physical suffering and made our life more comfortable. Some fear that this material prosperity is threatening the very core of what it means to be human. No doubt, human civilization is passing through a crisis. The term “Spirituality” exerts a certain seductiveness for many thinkers, esp. Indian spirituality in which it has been shown that a quest of ultimate truth automatically leads to good and meaningful human life.

**Spirituality and religion:**

For long spirituality has been associated with religion. Performing religious rites or rituals and following one's religion was considered as spiritual. But in new age, people like to keep these two things separate, often called as SBNR, Spiritual But Not Religious. Many believe religion is one way of reaching spiritual goal. That is to discover the essence of one's existence and the deepest values and meaning by which one lives. It is believed that there are different spiritualities or spiritual paths. One has to choose ones own path and walking on it can have three principal aspects:

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Religious and spiritual movements believe that their sacred books are divine, supernaturally inspired and not the works of man. Since ancient time people are studying them, mainly to understand them and to do comparative study. In Indian philosophical system, one can criticize, raise doubts and can put forward ones own views while studying the different philosophical systems.

### **Philosophical and practical aspect of Yoga:**

Yoga is one of the six systems of Indian philosophies ( Darshanas). Patanjali's Yoga Sutra is one of the earliest treatises amongst them. His Yoga aphorisms deals with mind and its fluctuations, showing the way to control it and how complete mastery over the mind can lead to cessation of misery and attainment of peace leading to salvation, the highest spiritual goal. Apart from its spiritual aspect, the philosophy of Yoga has practical utility in our daily life.

The Yoga text can be divided into two, one part elucidated philosophy and other, its practical application, which includes different types of Yogic practices namely asanas, pranayams, bandhas, mudras, shuddikriyas and meditation techniques. The Patanjali's Yoga Sutra text ( around 147 B.C. ) is compiled information about Yoga, which was scattered in different Upanishadas and Vedas ( 4000 -5000 years old ).The information is written in Sutra form i.e. short one or two lines aphorisms. The explanation of these sutras is done in commentaries ( Bhasya) by many sages in Sanskrit.

Vyasa Bhasya ( 400 A.D.) is the most important commentary of Yoga Sutras. Many have written independent treatises ( karikas) to explain the principles mentioned in original text and long dissertations and general observation ( vrittikas). Works of Raja Bhoja, Vachaspati Mishra, Vijyana Bhikhu are authoritative( 1-5 century A.D.)

### **The systems of Indian Philosophies and Buddhism:**

The Indian philosophical systems are of two types 1. Astik (believing in Vedas, Upanishads and upholding its divine nature) and 2. Nastik (which don't believe in authorities of Vedas. Buddhism, Jainism and Charvak's Philosophy are Nastik systems. All the Astik systems developed somewhat at the same time, nastik developed little later.

Buddhism was wide spread and gained lot of popularity in ancient India. King Ashoka became follower of it. There were thousand of students studying in most famous ancient universities of India, such as Nalanda, Takshshila, Vikaramshala and Jagaddala. In the travel account of Hieun Tsang ( 603-664 AD) and I-Tsing it is clearly mentioned that the students learnt, Principles of different kinds of Buddhism as well as six systems of Indian philosophy. At that time, the Sanskrit texts were translated to Tibetan, Chinese, Pali and other languages.

### **Yoga and Buddhism:**

Certain Taoists practiced some movements very similar to Asanas of Hindu Yoga. Tibetan Yoga and Tantric Buddhism have great influence of HATA YOGA and Tantric Yoga practiced in India. Yogacara Buddhism developed in Indian Mahayana Buddhism was

spreading in China, Tibet, Mongolia and Japan. Xuanzang,( 589-618 AD) a student at Nalanda and exponent of Tantric Buddhism translated some part of Yogacharabhumi Shastra written by Asaga and wrote a treatise of around 3000 verses in Sanskrit, citing the difference between Mahayana and Yogacara Buddhism. Sage Padmasambhva also known as second Buddha was great exponent of Tantric Buddhism.

### **Travel of Ancient Indian philosophical texts:**

During first invasion of Muslims in Sindh by Mahmud of Gazi, many temples in north India were destroyed. The account of this destruction is written by Alberuni( 973-1048 Ad) a Muslim scholar who came at the same time. He was also mathematician, astrologer, philosopher and master of Greek, Latin, Persian and Arabic. He studied Sanskrit and traveled extensively in India. He wrote around 138 books. He translated Sanskrit texts into Persian. He wrote 'Kitab Patanjali' and also translated some Sankhya doctrines in Persian. He did comparative study of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. He wrote his observations about cross cultural understanding in his two well known books namely ' Indica' and 'Tarikh al-Hind' ( chronicles of India).

Ancient Indian Philosophies found their way along trade routes. The Arab and Iranian traders took many Sanskrit texts and their translations in Arabic to Persia-Mesopotamia-Syria- then it came in contact with Greeks and Egyptians and along Mediterranean it went to Spain and Western Europe. The Europeans became aware of Indian mathematical concepts esp of Algebra and Algorithm and that of zero which were originally from Bijaganitam and Rekha ganitam of Gupta period.

Before even Mughal rule in India, there were fortified trade centers of Portuguese, Dutch, French and British in India. Many of them were interested in Indian philosophies, culture and art. They collected manuscripts of various ancient Sanskrit texts and send them to their Head Quarters.

East India Company had many of such ancient texts, which were sent to Royal British Library. Lot of foreign scholars, Indologists and orientalist studied Indian philosophies and Hinduism using these texts in India and in Briton.

### **Translations of Spiritual Texts in Mughal Period:**

Akbar, the great Mughal Emperor was one of the most tolerant and powerful ruler of 14 the Century. He began series of religious debates. He got many Sanskrit text translated into Persian and Arabic. His own religious cult Din-I- Ilahi ( Divine Faith) included teachings of all religions of the world.

Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Shah Jahan, was a religious man. He interacted with people of all faiths. He translated 50 Upanishadas from Sanskrit to Persian( around 1657 AD). His books, *Sirr-e- Akbar*( The greatest Mystery),*Quran- Kitab-al-Makun* ( Hidden Book) and *Majma- ul- Bharian* ( Mystical and pluralistic affinities between sufic and Vedantic speculation) show great influence of Upanishadic thought. Sir Willam Jones ( 1766-1794) was attracted towards the said translations done by Dara Shikoh. Sir Willam, knew 13 languages including Sanskrit. Just like Sir Willam, there were quiet a few western scholars who were in India for many years. They studied Sanskrit and translated the spiritual texts in English, German and French with the help of Indian scholars. Many of these indologists and orient lists were working in East India Company and later for British rulers. Following are few extraordinary people who contributed in popularizing Indian spiritual thought as well as Yoga.

**Some well- known British Indologists and translators are:**

- Sir, Willam Jones (1766-1794), Founder of Asiatic Society at Calcutta. Wrote many articles on Vedanta and Indian Philosophy.
- Horace Hayman Wilson (1819) prepared first Sanskrit-English dictionary.
- Sir John Woodroffe (1865- 1936), was Judge and expert on British Indian Law. He translated 20 Sanskrit texts under name Arthur Avalon. Pioneered modern academic Tantric Yoga in the west. Wrote 'The Serpent Power' book on Kundalini Yoga, 'The secrets of Tantric and Shaktic Yoga' and 'Garland of Letters'. TMP Mahadevan wrote about Sir Woodroffe that "His studies showed that the religion and worship had profound philosophy behind it and there was nothing irrational about the technique of worship it recommends."
- Ralph Griffith (1826-1906), E.B. Cowell, Weber translated Vedic scriptures in English mainly hymns in 4 Vedas.
- A.B. Keith wrote 'A History of Samkhya System'
- Henry Thomas Colebrook (1765-1837) Studied Sanskrit and wrote a book on Sanskrit grammer in English. Wrote many essays on Vedas.
- J.H. Woods of Harward university translated Patanjalis Yoga Sutras from Sanskrit-English. Also translated philosophical treatise on Samkhy system..
- Dr. Seal's "Positive Sciences of Ancient Hindus" has illuminating exposition of the subject and he has shown how ancient Hindu philosophies found their way along the trade route.

- Paul Burton wrote an extraordinary account of his quest to find spiritual Guru, namely 'A Search in Secret India'( 1934). He introduced Yoga and meditation techniques to present west.
- Edwin Bryant has published his translations of Patanjalis Yoga Sutras in 2009.

**Some noted French indologists and translators are:**

- Anquetil Duperron (1731-1805) Studied Persian and Sanskrit. Translated Persian Oupenk'hat (Upanishads) was a mixture of Latin, Greek, Persian Arabic and Sanskrit. Wrote 'L'Inde en rapport avec l'Europe' (2 vol.) which was an excellent reference book for other indologists who studied Indian culture and religion and did its comparison with European culture and religion.
- Eugene Burnouf (1801-1852), Translated Bhagvat Purana in French.
- Sylvain Levi (1863-1935) Taught Sanskrit at Sorbonne. Wrote many articles about Eastern religion, literature, history esp. Indian theater and particularly known for his dictionary of Buddhism.
- Louis Renau( 1896-19650) , wrote books on Sanskrit Grammar ( Panini), Vedanta and about religion in French.
- Louis Jacolliot (1837-1890) Was French barrister, colonial Judge. Collected Sanskrit Myths. His translation of ' Manu Smriti' influenced Friedrich Nietzsche.
- Jean Filliozat ( 1906-1982), Doctor and author of books on Indian Medicine. Studied Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, Tamil. Translated 'Yogasataka' of Nagarjuna in French.
- Alain Danielou(1907-1994) great musicologist, studied Indian classical music. He also studied Yoga and tantra and wrote many articles about it.

**Some eminent German indologists and translators are:**

- Max Muller (1823- 1900). He had mastery in Greek, Latin, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit and English. 50 Volumes of English translations of 'Sacred Books of East' were prepared under his direction. He wrote books in German translating Vedas, Upanishadas, Bramhanas. He also edited commentaries on all parts of Vedas, written by Sayan (1387) Minister of King Bukka of Vijaynagar Empire of south India.
- Schopenhauer (1788-1860) German philosopher studied French translation of Oupenk'hat ( Upanishada) by Anquetil Duperron and translation of Sirre- Akbar in Latin. He was so impressed by the highest thought that they occur very frequently in his well known philosophical work ' the World as Will and representation' (Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung).

- Leopold Von Schroeder (1851-1920) first translated 'Bhagwat Gita' in German.
- Buhler wrote Bombay Sanskrit Series and translated many ancient texts.
- Lorenz Franz Kielhorn (1840-1908) did monumental work of cataloging Sanskrit scripts and translated Vasyana's sutras and Patanjali's Grammar sutras in German.
- Rudolf Von Roth (1821-1895) translated works of Kalidas in German, wrote book on literature and history of Vedas which is considered ground breaking. He also prepared first Sanskrit Worterbuch (Sanskrit to German dictionary) with the help of Albrecht Weber.

#### **Some renowned Indian Yoga Exponents and Translators are:**

- Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) Modern Saint, who took principles of Hinduism and Sanatan Dharma to newer heights in west. His commentary on Yoga Sutra of Patanjali is a guiding torch for the yoga practitioner.
- Krishnamacharya (1888-1989) translated Yoga Tarawali of Adi Shankaracharya and Nath Muni's Yoga Rahasya in Tamil from Sanskrit, which were later translated in English by his son TVK Desikachar. He is also a well known Yoga Teacher.
- The Yoga Sutra Translations of Swami Shivananda, Yogendraji, BKS Iyengar, Swami Kuvlyananda, Jiddu Krishnamurti and D. S. Dasgupta in English are some exemplary works. Translation in Marathi by Krishnai Kolatkar and Sage Hariharnanda Aryana in Bangali are also well known.

#### **Yoga Text and personality development**

By looking at volumes of translations of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras in many Indian and foreign languages, we can say that Yoga sutra is an unique spiritual text which is the most read and translated among the ancient texts on Indian spirituality. These translations have helped the Yoga practitioner tremendously at social, personal, emotional and mental level. The philosophy and practical aspect of Astanga Yoga of sage Patanjali helps to develop an integrated personality. It brings out the total positive change at all levels. The eight limbs indicate the path that a person should take to know the ultimate reality and to have peaceful and blissful life.

#### **Conclusion**

As it is said by a Tamil translator Pr. Ganapathy, no translation of sacred texts can convey the literal sweetness of the original text and its wonderful philosophical concepts. The mystical emotions, which carry one away from life, are most difficult to translate. But when we go through the biographies and works done by some of these translators in India or

abroad, we can say that they gave their life for this monumental task. They were not mere translators but they themselves lead very spiritual life. They did these translations without prejudiced mind but with balanced and rational approach. They tried to give the solutions for the problems faced by people and showed the way to spiritual and all round development of a person, thus bridging the gap between different religions and to establish social harmony. Their valuable work is inspirational and it enlightens the reader about highest reality.

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