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Sucharita Adluri Ms.

Cleveland State University, s.adluri16@csuohio.edu

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Yoga in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa

Sucharita Adluri

Abstract Though scholarship on diverse methods of yoga in the Indian traditions abounds, there has not been sufficient research that examines the traditions of yoga in the purāṇas. The present paper explores yoga articulated in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (fourth century CE) and argues that what seems like a unified teaching is a composite of an eight-limbed yoga embedded within an instruction on proto-Sāṃkhya. An evaluation of the key elements of yoga as developed in this text as a whole, clarifies our understanding of the emergence of yoga and its relationship to epic formulations on the one hand and to the Classical System of the *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali on the other.

Keywords Proto-Sāṃkhya · Sāṃkhya Yoga · Eight-limbed Yoga · Purāṇic Yoga · Vaiṣṇava Yoga · Viṣṇu Purāṇa · Yoga

Viṣṇu Purāṇa on Yoga

Considered one of the earliest purāṇas, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (VP), comprised of six books, extols the supremacy of Viṣṇu as Brahman (Rocher 1986). In chapters Six and Seven of Book Six, sage Parāśara divulges to Maitreya the teaching of yoga as it was once taught to Khāṇḍikya by his brother Keśidhvaja. A close reading indicates that what is presented as a unified teaching on yoga is a composite of two distinct instructions: lodged within a proto-Sāṃkhya teaching is a practical regimen of an eight-limbed Vaiṣṇava yoga. Though an attempt is made to unify the two teachings, their ontological and soteriological underpinnings are insufficiently aligned. For

instance, VP 6.6.1–4 begins by describing yoga as a way to manifest *Puruṣottama*.¹ This understanding of the goal of yoga in sectarian terms is not discussed again until the middle of the next chapter, seven, some one hundred verses later when yoga as the eight-limbed practical regimen to achieve a Vaiṣṇava goal is introduced.² The lengthy intermediate section is devoted to the importance of discriminative knowledge that discerns the true reality of the self (*ātman*) as distinct from matter (*prakṛti*), which results in liberation. This philosophical reflection that leads to the realization of *ātman* as distinct from *prakṛti* is referred to in this paper as the first teaching and the practical regimen of eight-limbed Vaiṣṇava yoga is identified as the second teaching.

In the first teaching, the term ‘yoga’ is found six times in verses 6.6.5, 6.6.6, 6.6.13, 6.7.25, 6.7.97, and 6.7.100. Since yoga in VP 6.6.1–4 was defined in Vaiṣṇava terms one would assume that this context continues for these ensuing verses as well. However, this is not the case. The first two instances (6.6.5–6) introduce yoga as the topic to be deliberated. Subsequently, in 6.6.13 one of the brothers, Keśidhvaja, is characterized as the best among the knowers of yoga (*yogavidāṃ vara*) and as engaged in yoga. These verses 6.6.5–6 and 6.6.13 frame the discussion (6.6.7–12) where Keśidhvaja and his father are declared as well-versed in the knowledge of the supreme self/*ātman* and as continually reposed in the knowledge of the supreme self—*sadādhyātmarati* (6.6.7, 9). Taken together the verses from 6.6.5 to 6.6.13, point to yoga as the way to realize the true nature of the self very different from the understanding of yoga as apprehending *Puruṣottama*. In 6.7.25, yoga is said to be the way by which one realizes, through true knowledge, the nature of the self as distinct from matter (6.7.11–24). Here, worldly afflictions which are a result of ignorance of the true nature of the self are said to be removed only by means of yoga. Finally, in 6.7.97 and 6.7.100 which are part of the first teaching, yoga is mentioned as the means to destroy ignorance that obscures the distinction between self and matter. All these references to yoga in the first teaching as a gnostic practice bear resemblance to what is identified as proto-Sāṃkhya Yoga.

Larson has shown that such pre-Classical formulations of yoga emphasize the discipline of knowledge and are part of the “undifferentiated Sāṃkhya Yoga complex of traditions” found in texts such as the *Kaṭha*, *Śvetāśvatara*, and *Maitri Upaniṣads*, the *Carakaśaṃhitā*, the *Buddhacarita*, the *Mokṣadharmā* of the *Mahābhārata* (MBh) and the *Bhagavadgītā* (BhG).³ For instance, BhG 3.3 mentions two types of yoga one philosophical and reflective and the other involving a more practical method.

O’ faultless one, in this world, a two-fold devotion was declared by me, previously:

¹ In addition to yoga or *samyama*, mantra recitation (*svādhyāya*) is also considered efficacious. The study of Veda or mantra recitation is mentioned in *Yogasūtras* 1.28, 2.1, 2.32 and 2.44. Vyāsa in his commentary on YS 1.28 cites VP 6.6.2 as support (Woods 1966, p. 62). For more on mantra recitation and *svādhyāya* see Carpenter (2003, pp. 29–34).

² The second teaching begins with verse 6.7.26; however, yoga as a means to reach Viṣṇu is not mentioned until 6.7.54.

³ Larson (1998) calls these Proto-Sāṃkhya speculations (p. 121; also, 195–134; 288–289).

by the yoga of knowledge of Sāṃkhya-s and by the yoga of action of Yogin-s.⁴

The yoga of the Sāṃkhyas of this BhG verse is similar to the first teaching in the VP and is one of the many “divergent trends within the context of a general, undifferentiated Yoga tradition.”⁵ If there was a practical method associated with these proto-Sāṃkhyan speculations of the first teaching in the VP, they have been replaced with what seems to be the practical regimen of the eight-limbed Vaiṣṇava yoga. Hence, though the purāṇa mentions the term ‘yoga’ a few times in this first teaching as realization of self as different from matter, it is not a systematic practical method.

The second instruction, on the eight-limbed spiritual practice to realize Viṣṇu, mentions the term ‘yoga’ and its grammatical derivatives twenty times⁶ and exhibits certain similarities, except for its Vaiṣṇava framework, to the eight-limbed yoga articulated in the Classical system of the *Yogasūtras* (YS).⁷ If as mentioned above, we consider such early formulations of Sāṃkhya Yoga, though the practical aspect is missing, as precursors to the more systematized Classical form of Yoga, then the VP’s instruction on yoga is a synthesis of two teachings from different sources. Such incorporation of several forms of yoga to present it as a synthetic teaching is not unknown in the Indian context as Patañjali’s YS itself illustrates such a textual practice.⁸ The entire structure of chapters Six and Seven mapped in accordance with these different ontological and metaphysical frameworks relating to yoga is as follows

First Teaching: Proto-Sāṃkhya Speculations

- 6.6.5–49 the path of action versus the path of knowledge
- 6.7.1–25 nature of ignorance
- 6.7.97–100 liberation through the path of knowledge
- 6.7.104–105 liberation through the path of knowledge

Second Teaching: Eight-limbed Vaiṣṇava Yoga

- 6.6.1–6.6.4 yoga as union with Puruṣottama
- 6.7.26–96 control of the mind with eight-limbed yoga
- 6.7.101–103 liberation through practice of eight-limbed yoga

The rest of this paper examines the specific elements and overall character of these two teachings in VP 6.6–6.7, to illustrate that two distinct instructions on

⁴ *loke’smin dvividhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayā ’nagha jñānayogena sāmkyānām karmayogena yoginām* (BhG 3.3).

⁵ Larson (1998, p. 122).

⁶ VP 6.7.26, 31–33, 36, 42, 44, 55, 69, 73–74, 76, 85, 96, 100, 102.

⁷ The same eight auxiliaries as Classical Yoga is referred to here also, with the same *yama*-s and *niyama*-s. However, there are differences in the discussion of *prāṇāyāma*, the visualization techniques of *dhāranā* and *dhyanā* and the three modes of apprehension (*bhāvanā*).

⁸ There are four different structures of yoga evident in the YS according to Oberhammer (1977). The four groups of verses are YS 1.2 and 1.12–1.22; YS 1.23–28; YS 1.41–50; YS 2.54–3.7.

liberation are coupled to yield a complex doctrine of yoga even as fundamental differences persist.

First Teaching: Proto-Sāṃkhya Speculations

VP 6.6.5–49; 6.7.1–25; 6.7.97–100; 6.7.104–105

Keśidhvaja's first teaching is rooted in the distinction drawn between the paths of knowledge and action. Concepts important to such discrimination include the distinct nature of knowledge and action, the redefinition of dharma as the quest for liberation rather than the practice of one's duty (*svadharmā*), the exclusivity of the path of knowledge from that of action, the fundamental difference between the self and the body/matter, and the misidentification of the self with the body due to ignorance. The form of proto-Sāṃkhya presented in this first teaching is not as well-developed as in other texts such as the epics. For example, the purāṇa goes only so far as to admit the duality of self and matter and correct discernment as liberative. It does not develop this in any great detail as it is silent on the elaboration of evolutes (*tattva*) and/or qualities (*guṇa*) of matter that accompany the experience of yoga in some texts that espouse such traditions. More importantly, a practical method associated with this particular view of reality is missing. The following sections analyze the above-mentioned features of the first teaching as proto-Sāṃkhya that render it distinct from the second teaching of the VP.

The Two Paths

One of the distinguishing features of the initial discussion is the conceptual framework in which it is embedded. Two paths, the path (*mārga*) of action or ritual (*karma*) and the path of knowledge of the self (*ātmavidyā*) are mentioned with yoga identified as the latter. In fact, this is one of the first distinctions set up in the narrative of the two brothers introduced as grandsons of King Janaka—Khāṇḍikya and Keśidhvaja

*Khāṇḍikya was known on earth as most skillful in the path of works
While, Keśidhvaja was supremely learned in the knowledge of the self⁹*

After his brother usurps Khāṇḍikya's kingdom, exiled, he wanders about in the wilderness. Keśidhvaja on the other hand

*Having been established in the knowledge of Brahman, even while depending
on knowledge, he performed many sacrifices to cross over death by means of
ignorance¹⁰*

⁹ *karmamārge 'ti khāṇḍikyah prthivyām abhavat kṛtī
keśidhvajo 'py atīvāsīt ātmavidyāvīśāradah* (VP 6.6.9).

¹⁰ *iyāja so 'pi subahūn yajñān jñānavyapāśrayah
brahmavidyām adhiṣṭhāya tartuṃ mṛtyum avidyayā* (VP 6.6.12).

That is, though characterized as the best among the knowers of yoga (*yogavidām vara*) Keśidhvaja is said to engage in the performance of sacrifices as a sovereign, which suggests that at this point in the text the two life-styles are not necessarily exclusive.

The path of action and the path of knowledge represent the contrasting ideologies of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* with the householder and ascetic as exemplars (Bailey 1985, pp. 17–22). *Pravṛtti* embodies a life dedicated to the performance of requisite rituals and a general orientation that is this-worldly. The goal here is the accumulation of merit (*puṇya*), success in life and the eventual attainment of heaven (*paraloka*) upon death. The disenchantment with ritual and its results in the context of new theological concepts such as karma and rebirth led to a move away from ritual activities. (Olivelle 1993, p. 63) *Nivṛtti* ideology embraces renunciation, contemplation and the escape from *samsāra* through the realization of the identity with the ultimate reality Brahman. This is best exemplified in the many dialogues of the upaniṣads such as the discussion between Yama and Naciketas in *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2–4.¹¹ In the MBh also, Veda is said to enumerate two distinct paths. As Vyāsa notes—*I will explain these two (paths), consisting of action and of knowledge, which are perishable and imperishable; by action a creature is bound, but by knowledge he is released.*¹²

Coming back to the narrative of the two brothers, subsequent to the usurpation of Khāṇḍikya’s kingdom by Keśidhvaja, certain events transpire that result in two encounters between the brothers. Requiring assistance to atone for a ritual infraction, Keśidhvaja in the garb of a religious student, approaches his brother who is well-versed in rituals. Enraged, Khāṇḍikya accuses him of having foolishly robbed him of his kingdom (VP 6.7.24). However, having explained the purpose of his visit, Keśidhvaja implores his brother to teach him the requisite expiatory rite. Khāṇḍikya’s counselors urge him to reclaim the kingdom by slaying his vulnerable brother and dispatching him to *paraloka*—heaven (VP 6.7.29).¹³ This assumes of course that Keśidhvaja, though conversant in the way of knowledge, was performing all the requisite rituals as a monarch and therefore his death while in pursuit of an expiatory ritual would surely guarantee him a place in a heavenly world. Khāṇḍikya reasons that if he indeed slays his brother and gains the earthly kingdom, Keśidhvaja would achieve heaven and he does not find this entirely satisfactory since

*conquest of heaven is eternal, while the conquest of earth short-lived
Therefore, I will not kill him, but that which he requests I will tell him*¹⁴

Against his counselors’ advice, Khāṇḍikya decides to impart to his brother the specifics of the appropriate rite. In the context of *pravṛtti*, engagement in ritual activities in accordance with one’s dharma assures one a place in heaven upon

¹¹ Olivelle (1998, pp. 381–395).

¹² *karmavidyāmāyāv etau vyākhyāsyāmi kṣarākṣarau* (MBh 12.233.3 cd); *karmanā badhyate jantur vidyayā tu pramucyate* (MBh 12.233.7ab).

¹³ See Gonda (1966) for semantic development of *loka* and heaven, pp 73, 83–88, 103–106.

¹⁴ *paralokajayo ’nantaḥ svalpakālo mahījayah
tasmād enaṃ na haniṣye yat prechati vadāmi tat* (VP 6.6.30).

death. From the point of view of *nivṛtti*, such a goal is temporary and rebirth on earth is eventually unavoidable as one uses up one's accrued merit in heaven. The fact that *paraloka* here is identified as *ananta* or 'eternal' contrasting it with earthly prosperity as temporary or short-lived (*svalpakāla*) renders the meaning of *paraloka* ambiguous as its eternal nature might in fact suggest liberation. Regardless of the exact meaning of *paraloka*, it is certain that though overcoming an enemy to regain his kingdom would fall under the purview of his dharma as a warrior and the path of action, Khāṇḍikya rejects the satisfaction of sovereignty due to its transitory nature. Characterized as an adept in the path of works, Khāṇḍikya seems wise enough to distinguish between the temporary and the eternal and in doing so redefines the meaning of dharma, further exemplified as the narrative continues. This concludes the first encounter between the brothers.

Redefining Dharma

In addition to the path of ritual/action as opposed to knowledge/yoga, a second discrepancy between the two teachings is the preoccupation with the redefinition of dharma in this first teaching. Keśidhvaja having performed the necessary rite to expiate his transgression returns to bestow on his brother the gift that is due a teacher after instruction (*gurudakṣiṇā*). Khāṇḍikya once again consults with his ministers as to what he should request as remuneration from his brother. They of course urge him to request his kingdom. Khāṇḍikya accuses his advisors of lacking discrimination (*vicakṣaṇa*) between worldly matters (*artha*) and the supreme truth (*paramārtha*)

*Surely, you are competent counsellors in the acquisition of wealth here.
However, who or what is the supreme truth? In this, you are all not wise*¹⁵

Rejecting the dharma of a warrior, Khāṇḍikya chooses the path of knowledge over the path of action or dharma as he desires instruction on the true nature of the self from his brother. Surprised at Khāṇḍikya's request, Keśidhvaja responds

*Why was my kingdom, which is without impediments, not requested by you?
Except the acquisition of kingdoms, what else is dearer for warriors?*¹⁶

Khāṇḍikya does admit the way of *svadharmā* as legitimate.

*The duty of warriors is to protect subjects and slay,
in just war enemies who are in the way of sovereignty*¹⁷

However, he also upholds the path of knowledge as vital to liberation. Contrary to his earlier assessment of his brother as a villain, Khāṇḍikya now claims that his

¹⁵ *evam etad bhavanto 'tra arthasāadhanamantriṇaḥ
paramārthaḥ kathaṃ ko 'tra yūyaṃ nātra vicakṣaṇāḥ* (VP 6.6.46).

¹⁶ *na prārthitam tvayā kasmān mama rājyam akaṅtakam
rājyalābhād vinā nānyat kṣatṛiyāṇām atipriyam* (VP 6.7.1).

¹⁷ *kṣatriyāṇām ayaṃ dharmo yat prajāparipālanaṃ
vadaḥ ca dharmayuddhena svarājyaparipanthinām* (VP 6.7.3).

brother is not at fault for seizing the kingdom, especially since he had been powerless (*aśakti*) as a king to defend it. He further defines his prior royal duties as burdensome (*bandhāya*) and that in fact he is grateful to Keśidhvaja for having annexed his kingdom and thereby releasing him from the bonds of ignorance (VP 6.7.4). Sovereignty as Khāṇḍikya understands it was his lot only due to his birth as a warrior and the appeal for his kingdom now, from Keśidhvaja, he recognizes as motivated by ignorance.

*The unwise whose mind is seized by mine-ness, intoxicated on
the strong drink of egotism, they strive for kingdoms, not one such as I*¹⁸

Two points are significant in this passage: the redefinition of dharma and the nature of ignorance. Pursuit of dharma as dictated by one's caste and stage in life binds one within the cycle of rebirth because ultimately all dharmic actions whether the slaying of a vulnerable foe to reclaim one's kingdom or requesting a kingdom as part of a gift that is due a teacher fall under the rubric of the path of action. First, Khāṇḍikya claims that the desire of others (such as his counselors) originates from human faults or weaknesses (*doṣa*) and as such it is incompatible (*na anurudhyate*) with the dharma of liberation (VP 6.7.5). Second, lack of knowledge, or ignorance, is identified as selfishness of the mind and inebriation caused by egotism and such a characterization of ignorance (*avidyā*) is not found in the second teaching of eight-limbed yoga.

Rejecting the advice of his ministers yet again, Khāṇḍikya requests of Keśidhvaja the spiritual knowledge that comprehends the higher self.

*If remuneration due a teacher is to be given to me by you, then
proclaim those actions that lead to the cessation of afflictions*¹⁹

Knowledge of the self is an antidote for afflictions (*kleśa*) so one can achieve liberation through the destruction of these faults.²⁰ Thus far, ignorance understood as bondage in *samsāra* is due to afflictions such as egotism in 6.7.7. The proto-Sāṃkhya path of the knowledge of the self, in contrast to the path of action or ritual brings about the cessation of such afflictions. In response to Khāṇḍikya's request Keśidhvaja launches into an explanation of ignorance as selfishness and egotism.

Exclusivity of the Two Paths

The question as to whether the path of action and the path of knowledge are mutually exclusive is not easily answered. There are three instances where the purāṇa deals with this issue and in all cases the text vacillates. First, Khāṇḍikya's

¹⁸ *rājye grdhmanty avidvāṃso mamatvāhrtacetasaḥ
ahaṃmānamahāpānamadamattā na mādrśāḥ* (VP 6.7.7).

¹⁹ *yadi ced dīyate mahyam bhavatā guruniṣkrayaḥ
tat kleśapraśamāyālam yat karma tad udīraya* (VP 6.6.49).

²⁰ According to YS affliction is five-fold and comprised of ignorance (*avidyā*), egoism (*asmitā*), passions (*rāga*), hatred (*dveṣa*), will to live (*abhiniveśa*). Moreover, ignorance is the field (*kṣetra*) in which the other afflictions thrive and is as such the most significant of all the other afflictions: *avidyāsmītārāga-dveśābhiniveśāḥ kleśāḥ* (YS 2.3); *avidyā kṣetram uttareṣāṃ prasūptatanuvicchinodārāṇām* (YS 2.4).

earlier diatribe against dharmic actions suggests that the path of knowledge might indeed require renunciation. This notion is complicated by the fact that Keśidhvaja though well-versed in higher knowledge usurps Khāṇḍikya's kingdom and establishes himself as a sovereign while he continues to practice yoga. This suggests that one can engage in the path of yoga even while fulfilling dharmic obligations without renunciation of any kind. Second, the incompatibility between the pursuit of actions required by one's dharma and the pursuit of liberation however, is illustrated in Keśidhvaja's own experience as a sovereign. He confides to his brother

*Though I desire to cross death by ignorance, I govern
and by enjoyment of various rites therefore, reduce merit²¹*

Administering the kingdom entails the exercise of regal power which is contrary to merit (*puṇya*). If we consider the mechanics of transmigration thus far, ignorance or egotism characterizes the path of action and is an obstacle to liberation, which is the cessation of afflictions. Now, Keśidhvaja claims that he is unsuccessful in overcoming ignorance by virtue of his dharmic obligations suggesting that the two paths may indeed be exclusive. Though he is equipped with the knowledge of the self, he understands his merit as decreasing through his involvement in royal duties. The mention of merit and demerit (*pāpa*) in this context might be an archaic formulation where increase in *puṇya* increases the fruits one will enjoy either in this world or the next, though its efficacy in granting liberation is doubtful.²² The concept of *puṇya*, which is merit or good karma, has no place in the context of the path of knowledge as one is meant to transcend both *puṇya* and *pāpa*. In Early Sāṃkhya also, the mechanics of transmigration dictate that only demerit or *pāpa* warrants transmigration whereas in later developments every type of karma good or bad is to be transcended (Johnston 1974, p. 79, fn 1). As Bhīṣma in reply to Yudhiṣṭhira's query on the means to liberation remarks in MBh 12.267.37, *when the body that is of the nature of merit and demerit, due to the accumulation of karma is discarded, the embodied soul (dehin) rid of the body, once again attains the state of Brahman.*²³ When Keśidhvaja, described earlier as well-versed in the teachings of the higher truth, engages with the world it weakens his ability to advance towards liberation. This suggests that liberation may be best pursued outside the confines of society.

Third, the concluding section to this first teaching (VP 6.7. 104–105) notes that Keśidhvaja, expecting decrease in his own karma (*svakarmakṣapanonmukha*) while living in the world and performing rituals, reduces his demerit (*kṣīṇapāpa*) since he views these actions as inauspicious (*akalyāṇa*). Following this, he attains liberation, which is described as the absolute cessation of sorrow (*atyantatāpakṣaya*). Hence, salvation results without renunciation as worldly activities are undertaken but with

²¹ *aham avidyayā mṛtyuṃ tartukāmaḥ karomi vai
rājyaṃ yāgāṃś ca vividhān bhogaṃ puṇyakṣayaṃ tathā* (VP 6.7.9).

²² BhG 6.41 claims that following one's dharma leads to heaven, which is referred to as *puṇyakṛtām lokān*—worlds of those who do good.

²³ *puṇyapāpamayaṃ deham kṣapayan karmasaṃcayāt
kṣīnadehaḥ punar dehī brahmatvam upagacchati* (MBh 12.267.37).

detachment. This is a type of *karma yoga*, though different from that of the *Bhagavadgītā*, but akin to that in the narrative of King Janaka mentioned in the MBh (12.211–212) as fluent in the knowledge of the higher self even while being a sovereign. Janaka’s practice of detachment with knowledge however, is assessed by the nun Sulabhā (12.308) as a type of *karma yoga* that is ineffective in the pursuit of liberation (Fitzgerald 2002). Thus, as far as the exclusivity of the path of action and the path of knowledge, the purāṇa in the context of the first teaching suggests that renunciation is not necessarily required for the path of knowledge so long as a kind of *karma yoga* is undertaken.

Ignorance

Though the term *avidyā* occurs throughout the two teachings, what it denotes is vastly different in each case. Earlier, Khāṇḍikya voiced the opinion that desire for kingdom, even though acceptable from the point of view of dharma, is colored by ignorance, that is, egotism (*ahammāna*) and selfishness (6.7.7). Keśidhvaja further elaborates on ignorance as rooted in the wrong notion of ‘I’ and ‘mine’.²⁴ This is one of the characteristic features of the first teaching of Proto-Sāṃkhya.

*The seed that gives rise to the tree of ignorance is two-fold: the perception of self as non-self and the understanding that what is not one’s own is one’s own*²⁵

The cause of ignorance is a two-fold misunderstanding in regard to the self (*ātman*) and the body (*anātman*).²⁶ The disembodied spirit (*adehin*) cannot own property nor can it be said to have begotten progeny (VP 6.7.14–15). Such notions of personhood and property are a result of the misidentification of the body as the self

*The foolish self in the body made of the five elements, covered by the darkness of delusion loudly asserts “this is I”*²⁷

and

*A man performs all actions for the enjoyment of the body, and following that another body results. When men act in this way then it leads to bondage*²⁸

Concealed by the darkness of delusion (*moha*) the embodied self falsely identifies with the body composed of the five elements. However, self (*ātman*) in its essential nature is pure, comprised of wisdom and happiness and is antithetical to matter

²⁴ For more on afflictions (*kleśa*) in YS see YS 2.10–13 and Frauwallner (2008, pp. 332–333)

²⁵ *anātmany ātmabuddhir yā asve svam iti yā matih avidyātarusambhūtibijam etad dvidhā sthitam* (VP 6.7.11).

²⁶ Such a connection is also mentioned in the MBh—*yo ‘ham ajñānasammohād ajñayā sampravṛttavān* (12.295.29ab); *idānīm eṣa buddho ‘smi nirmamo nirahaṃkṛtaḥ* (12.295.36cd).

²⁷ *pañcabhūtātmake dehe dehī mohatamo ‘vṛtaḥ aham etad ity uccaiḥ kurute kumatir matim* (VP 6.7.12).

²⁸ *sarvaṃ dehopabhogāya kurute karma mānavaḥ dehaś cānyo yadā puṃsas tadā bandhāya tat param* (VP 6.7.16).

*Indeed, the self is by nature pure, and made of bliss and knowledge. The impurities of ignorance, and sorrow are qualities of matter and not of the self*²⁹

In reality, these two are as distinct as water and fire. Just as water which has nothing in common with fire starts to bubble and boil when placed over fire, so also the self when it associates with matter (VP 6.7.23),

*In this way, the self from association with matter, defiled by the ego and so on, takes on the qualities belonging to matter though different from them. In reality, it is immutable*³⁰

The self when associated with matter is contaminated (*dūṣita*) by egoism (*ahaṃmāna*) and so on which are characteristics of matter. Keśidhvaja ends his discussion claiming that there is only one antidote for ignorance.

*That very seed of ignorance is explained to you by me. From yoga is the destruction of afflictions. No other (way) is known*³¹

The context up to this point is the discernment of the higher truth (*paramārtha*) the knowledge (*vijñāna*) of the higher self (*adhyātma*) and that this higher knowledge is called yoga, which brings about the quieting or stilling (*praśama*) of afflictions (*kleśa*) such as ignorance (*avidyā*).

Liberation

Keśidhvaja in the first teaching claims that when the dust of delusion (*moha*) is washed away by knowledge (*jñāna*) then one attains liberation (*nirvāṇa*).³² Liberation is the realization of right knowledge of the essential nature of the self and is unlike the realization of Brahman found in the Upaniṣads. The Upaniṣads too, recognize knowledge as the only means to salvation. However, the content of this knowledge is different in the two sources. The knowledge required for salvation according to this particular section of the VP is similar to epic formulations of the way of knowledge rather than that found in the Upaniṣads.³³ Specifically, knowledge in the Upaniṣads broadly speaking refers to the “knowledge of the fundamental principle of the universe, of the ‘One’ which is ‘All’, most commonly

²⁹ *nirvāṇamaya eva ayam ātmā jñānamayo ‘malah duḥkhājñānamalā dharmāḥ prakṛtes te tu na ātmanaḥ* (VP 6.7.22).

³⁰ *tathā ātmā prakṛteḥ saṅgād ahaṃmānādīdūṣitah bhajate prakṛtān dharmān anyas tebhyo hi so ‘vyayah* (VP 6.7.24)

³¹ *tad etat kathitaṃ bījam avidyāyā mayā tava kleśānāṃ ca kṣayakaraṃ yogād anyan na vidyate* (VP 6.7.25).

³² The use of the term *nirvāṇa* to denote liberation as in VP 6.7.21–22, is common. For instance, in the epic, MBh 12.188.1–3, the same term denotes liberation as ‘accomplishment’, ‘gnosis’, and “freedom from rebirth”.

³³ While the discussions of the way of knowledge denoted in the epic as proto-Sāṃkhya usually analyze the materiality either in terms of qualities (*guṇa*) of matter (*prakṛti*) or evolutes (*tatva*) of matter, the VP is not as detailed in its exploration of what it designates as the path of knowledge though it does conceive of existence in terms of matter and self (*ātman*).

called Brahman” and at times identified with the individual self. (Edgerton 1965, p. 40) As *Chāndogya* Upaniṣad 6.8.7 states—*the finest essence here—that constitutes the self of this whole world; that is the truth; that is the self (ātman). And that’s how you are, Śvetaketu.*³⁴ In the MBh, the self is considered what is ultimately real as in the Upaniṣads, but the content of knowledge that leads to salvation is simply the understanding and realization of the distinction of the self from the non-self and not the self as the ground of all being (Edgerton 1965, p. 41). This understanding of the first teaching of VP 6.6–7 on the knowledge of discrimination is akin to discussions in the MBh 12.187.44 where the goal of yoga is the vision of the true self and the destruction of the understanding that the body is the self (Brockington 2003, p. 14). Though knowledge of Brahman (VP 6.6.12) as a means to overcome ignorance and death is mentioned once, there is no characterization of liberation as identification with Brahman that is common in the Upaniṣads. That is, there is no overarching reality as the source of all, the realization of an identity which constitutes liberation. As mentioned earlier, this first teaching shares the intellectual milieu of proto-Sāṃkhya, which is characteristic of older sections of the purāṇas such as the VP and texts such as the *Mokṣadharmā* of the MBh and the BhG (Larson 1998, pp. 95–134, 288–291).

Consistent with the vocabulary and following the metaphysics discussed thus far, verses 6.7.97–100 conclude the discussion of the nature of liberation.³⁵ Khāṇḍīkyā thanks Keśidhvaja for his teaching that has deprived (*naṣṭa*) him of all *cittamala*—defilements of the mind (VP 6.7.97).

*The term ‘mine’ which is spoken by me is untrue and it is not possible to say otherwise by those who know the knowable O’ King*³⁶

Ultimately, the words ‘I’ and ‘mine’ are due to ignorance and are influenced by everyday usage.

One needs to purify the defilements of the mind such as the notion of ‘I’ or ‘mine’ which results from the misidentification of the self and the body. Proto-Sāṃkhya then is essentially the path of knowledge that leads to the supreme truth (*paramārtha*) that is the right understanding of the self.

In summary, in the first teaching of the VP, the proto-Sāṃkhya path of knowledge is the only effective antidote to repeated birth in *saṃsāra*. It stands opposed to the path of action as the knowledge that leads to the right understanding that the self is different from the body and that liberation is the dissolution of this misidentification. The best way to characterize proto-Sāṃkhya in this section is as a spiritual method that incorporates right knowledge as the means to liberation without reference to specific practices. The VP does indeed go on to specify a practical method in the second teaching but the metaphysics on which that instruction is based is not congruent with the context of the path of action and path

³⁴ Trans., Olivelle (1998, p. 253).

³⁵ What follows is a section of seventy verses up to 6.7.96 on eight-limbed Vaiṣṇava yoga and its unique soteriological implications. This is discussed as the second teaching of yoga in the next section.

³⁶ *mameti yan mayā cōktam asad etan na cānyathā narendra gaditum śakyam api vijñeyavedibhiḥ* (VP 6.7.98).

of knowledge discussed thus far. Liberation in the first discussion is the cessation of afflictions and is not union in Brahman which structures the practice of yoga that follows.

Second Teaching: Eight-limbed Vaiṣṇava Yoga

VP 6.6.1–4; 6.7.26–91; 6.7.92–96; 6.7.101–103

In the first teaching, the spiritual goal is to realize that the self is the true reality distinct from matter as one brings the ego under control. In what follows as the second teaching, yoga is defined specifically as a mental and practical regimen that leads to the self's identity with Brahman or Viṣṇu. This second teaching on yoga beginning with VP 6.7.26 picks up the theme introduced at the beginning of the previous chapter (VP 6.6.1–2). There, Parāśara defines yoga and mantra recitation (*svādhyāya*) as ways to reach Brahman (*brahmabhūta*). These two are interdependent as the practitioner proceeds from the practice of one to the other and vice versa and by which Puruṣottama, the Supreme Self manifests (*prakāśate*). Maitreya then requests instruction from Parāśara.

*Sir, I wish to know that yoga, knowing which I may behold
the Supreme Lord, the upholder of all. Explain that*³⁷

As mentioned earlier, this pronouncement of yoga as the way to behold Puruṣottama is not referenced again in the subsequent seventy passages that comprise the first teaching. Now, in the second discussion, Keśidhvaja once again echoes Maitreya's understanding as he explains the goal of yoga as dissolution in Brahman (*brahmalaya*) or union (*saṃyoga*) in Brahman. Even as new elements of yoga are introduced, this section of the purāṇa also presents a different cosmology as rationale for a new soteriology that is in stark contrast to the previous elaboration of proto-Sāṃkhya.

Referred to once again as the best among the knowers of yoga (*yogaviduttama*) but also as fluent in the science of yoga (*yogaśāstra*), Keśidhvaja claims that perfection in the essential nature of yoga (*yogasvarūpa*) leads to dissolution in Brahman (VP 6.7.27). To contextualize this new teaching of yoga, he begins with the mind of man (*manas*) as the cause of both bondage and liberation

*Mind itself of men is the cause of bondage and liberation. Its attachment to
objects
is the cause of bondage and so also, its detachment from objects is the cause of
liberation.*³⁸

³⁷ *bhagavaṃs tam aham yogaṃ jñātum icchāmi tam vada
jñāte yatra akhilādhāraṃ paśyeyaṃ parameśvaram* (VP 6.6.4).

³⁸ *mana eva manuṣyānāṃ kāraṇaṃ bandhamoksayoh
bandhasya viśayāsaṅgi mukter nirvisayaṃ tathā* (VP 6.7.28).

The term *manas* was not mentioned in the context of the first doctrine of proto-Sāṃkhya, although delusion (*moha*) is referenced as the cause of egoism that results in bondage. Though implicit connections between this and the previous discussion of egoism along with the misidentification of the body as the self can be worked out by a commentator, the context of ignorance here is not one of ‘I’ or ‘mine-ness’ caused by the misidentification of self and body, rather it is framed as the mind’s attachment to objects. Its detachment from objects is essential for salvific experience which is defined as the identity of self and Brahman

*The sage, whose nature is awareness, having removed the mind from objects, should meditate with that mind on the highest lord who is Brahman, for liberation*³⁹

Moreover,

*O’ Sage, he attracts to himself by his own power that one engrossed in Brahman, who is of the same nature and deserving of change, just as a magnet attracts metal*⁴⁰

In addition to one’s personal efforts, Viṣṇu in turn plays a role in the sage’s spiritual process. Through the control of the mind and consequently self-effort (*ātmaprayatna*), the practice of yogic exercise (*karma*) facilitates focus on the supreme lord (*parameśvara*) which leads to union (*saṃyoga*).⁴¹ It is uncertain whether Viṣṇu’s agency is to be interpreted as divine grace. The YS for instance mentions *īśvara* and *īśvarapraṇidhāna*,⁴² and the utility of *īśvara* as an object of meditation; however, he does not actively enable the practitioner on the spiritual path since he serves only as an exemplar. The devotional tenor evident in this purāṇa is missing in the YS.⁴³ In some tantric texts, divine grace is deemed necessary to attain the state of absorption through certain visualization practices, though this is not by any means the final goal of the practitioner (Rastelli 2009, pp. 305–306). The issue of union or identification with the Supreme Self is problematic with the analogy of the magnet and a piece of iron as the latter may be attracted to the magnet but never completely shares in the former’s essential nature. The term ‘union’ is open to interpretation as well and in these VP chapters may point to a type of Vaiṣṇava non-dualism.⁴⁴ These ambiguities however, do not affect the argument that the Supreme Brahman is actively involved in one’s yogic

³⁹ *viśayebhyaḥ samāhṛtya vijñānātmā mano munih cintayen muktaye tena brahmabhūtam pareśvaram* (VP 6.7.29).

⁴⁰ *āmabhāvaṃ nayaty enaṃ tad brahmadhyāyinaṃ mune vikāryam ātmanaḥ śaktiā loham ākarṣako yathā* (VP 6.7.30).

⁴¹ *ātmaprayatnasāpekṣā viśiṣṭā yā manogatih tasyā brahmaṇi saṃyogo yoga ity abhidhīyate* (VP 6.7.31).

⁴² YS 1.23–29; 2.45.

⁴³ For instance, Oberhammer (1977, pp. 162–177) on theistic yoga in the YS as non-sectarian. Also Pflueger (2005), argues that the *sūtra*-s themselves show no evidence of theism and that it is an interpolation by commentators.

⁴⁴ See Hacker (1995, pp. 33–39) for the relationship between Vaiṣṇava religion and early Advaitism.

practice while in the previous teaching such divine agency is misplaced within the metaphysics of self and matter.

Having characterized the nature of the mind as important for union in Brahman, Keśidhvaja details the eight limbs of yoga that enable the mind to detach from the objects of the senses. The term *aṣṭāṅga yoga* does not occur in the VP, but the limbs mentioned in the purāṇa are similar to the YS.⁴⁵ Five distinct features of this second instruction on yoga are contrary to the earlier teaching. First, Keśidhvaja narrates a new cosmology. Second, he provides a new epistemology on how the supreme Brahman is comprehended and the place of yoga in this context. Third, he devotes many passages to the auspicious object or support of meditation critical in yogic practice. Though certain tantric elements can be detected in the discussion of the modes of apprehension and visualization techniques, the tenor remains generally devotional rather than tantric. Fourth, Keśidhvaja prescribes a yoga practice constituted of eight limbs. Fifth, the nature of salvation as union in Brahman is distinct from his earlier teaching of liberation as the realization of the self as distinct from matter. A closer evaluation of these new aspects establishes the many ways in which this doctrine of yoga is independent of Keśidhvaja's prior teaching.

Cosmology

In this second teaching, yoga is the realization of all diversity as Brahman/Viṣṇu since it emanates from him who is the ground of all existence. To this end, Keśidhvaja commences a new cosmology with Viṣṇu as the creator and pervader of all existence.

*All this whole world of moving and immovable beings is
fully endowed with the power of Viṣṇu
who is of the essential nature of the Supreme Brahman⁴⁶
Viṣṇu's power is called supreme; when it is called the
field-knower it is not supreme
Ignorance called karma is said to be another, third power.⁴⁷*

Individual self and matter are defined as powers (*śakti*) of this supreme deity.⁴⁸ The primary energy is denoted as Viṣṇu himself. The second energy is the field-knower or the embodied self (*kṣetrajañña*) and the third energy is ignorance (*avidyā*) or karma. Through these energies, Viṣṇu not only creates the world but manifests as the world. Keśidhvaja divulges to Khāṇḍikya

*O' King with that (avidyā) the power called field-knower that is all-pervading
is enclosed and suffers all the torment of repeated worldly existence*

⁴⁵ See fn 7.

⁴⁶ *etat sarvam idam viṣvaṃ jagad etac carācaram
parabrahmasvarūpasya viṣṇoḥ śaktisamanvitam* (VP 6.7.60).

⁴⁷ *viṣṇuśaktiḥ parā proktā kṣetrajaññākyā tathāparā
avidyā karmasamjñā anyā trītyā śaktir isyate* (VP 6.7.61).

⁴⁸ There is no reference to *śakti* in terms of *kriyā śakti* and/or *bhūti śakti* as we find in tantric sources such as the *Ahīrbudhnyā Saṃhitā* (Schrader 1995, pp. 34, 117, 131).

*O' King due to concealment by that (avidyā), the power called field-knower exists in all beings in different degrees*⁴⁹

Ignorance as an energy of Viṣṇu called karma exists in various degrees in beings ranging from the creator god Hiranyagarbha to smaller life forms. Karma's power of concealment is weaker in higher beings such as gods and so on as compared to lower forms of life such as insects.

What is remarkable here is that though ignorance has the deleterious effect of concealment it is still considered a power emanating from Viṣṇu, perhaps a kind of divine illusion (*māyā*) that is integral to the deity and creation.⁵⁰ This is evident in the common reference to Viṣṇu as the *mahāmāyādhāra*, the substratum of great *māyā* (Goudriaan 1978, pp. 17, 15–25). As the cosmic deluding power that conceals the true nature of the self's identity with Brahman, ignorance is similarly characterized in the BhG (Malinar 2007, pp. 96–87, 132). In BhG 7.7, defining the individual self and matter as his higher and lower natures (*prakṛti*) Kṛṣṇa claims

*O' Arjuna, there is nothing higher than myself, all this is strung on me like rows of gems on a string*⁵¹

Seen in this light, ignorance is the mysterious power of Viṣṇu which is fundamental to the understanding of all reality as it emanates from him even while it conceals it. Though the term *avidyā* is utilized to denote ignorance in both teachings, the connotation is quite different. Earlier, in the context of the path of action and the path of knowledge, *avidyā* was characterized as the ignorance of the *deha-dehin* distinction. The realization of the self was the goal; the distinction of *deha-dehin*, *ātman-anātman*, sets up a distinct duality and the discrimination that needs to be acknowledged for the realization of the self as distinct from matter is termed yoga. Although the self is argued as ultimately real in contrast to matter/body, a monistic view of the self as the sole ground of reality is not proclaimed. In the second teaching, ignorance as materiality is the divine illusion that veils the true identity between the individual self and Brahman. The metaphysics that undergirds the new discussion is quite different compared to the dualism of the first teaching. The practice of eight-limbed yoga brings the mind under control not through knowledge that self and matter are different but through the recognition that the self is non-different from Brahman.

⁴⁹ *yayā kṣetrajñaśaktiḥ sāvēṣṭitā nṛpa sarvagā
saṃsārātāpān akhilān avāpnoty atisantatān* (VP 6.7.62).
*tayā tirohitavāc ca śaktiḥ kṣetrajñasamjñitā
sarvabhūteṣu bhūpāla tāratamyena lakṣyate* (VP 6.7.63).

⁵⁰ The term *māyā* is not mentioned in the context of the powers of Viṣṇu; however, *māyā* can have the connotation of a power (*śakti*) in the context of a supreme being who manifests as creation (Goudriaan 1978, p. 6).

⁵¹ *mattaḥ parataram na anyat kiṃcid asti dhananjaya
mayi sarvam idaṃ protaṃ sūtre maṇigaṇā iva* (BhG 7.7).

Modes of Apprehension

As a second aspect of the new doctrine of yoga, Keśidhvaja introduces the ways of knowing that are integral to the new cosmological framework. The advanced yogin well-versed in eight-limbed yoga is said to transcend the three modes of apprehension (*bhāvanā*) termed—*brahma*, *karma*, and *ubhaya*

*O' King, apprehension is three-fold. Now, listen to all: that which is called Brahman, that which is called karma and that which has the nature of both*⁵²

Briefly, perfect sages such as Sanandana are thought to be endowed with the nature of apprehending Brahman (*brahmabhāvanā*). Gods and other movable and immovable beings apprehend actions (*karmabhāvanā*). Beings such as a Hiranyagarbha and others possess the dual mode of apprehension (*ubhayabhāvanā*). What this means is that these beings possess knowledge of their own nature but also engage in actions (VP 6.7.49–51). It is unclear why the sage must transcend even *brahmabhāvanā* to gain liberation when it is defined as the mode of apprehending Brahman. Van Buitenen suggests that the three *bhāvanā*-s operate with regard to the perceptible (*mūrta*) aspect of God (1988, pp. 15–18). But, to realize the non-difference between the self and the subtlest form of Viṣṇu these modes of apprehension are of little utility. Emancipation is qualified as beyond the three modes of apprehension (VP 6.7.76) when in the last limb, *samādhi*, discriminative knowledge of the self which is beyond the three modes of apprehension leads to identity in Brahman (VP 6.7.92). It is not possible to discern a connection between the discussion of these modes of apprehension and their relevance to the earlier teaching of the path of knowledge whereas here, eight-limbed yoga is the means to transcend them.

The Auspicious Object of Meditation

Keśidhvaja's second teaching underscores a third novel element, namely the auspicious object or support (*śubhāśraya*) of meditation in the practice of eight-limbed yoga. VP 6.7 which discusses this type of yoga is traditionally known as the *Śubhāśraya Prakaraṇa*, *Treatise on the Auspicious Support of Meditation*. Here, he prescribes various manifestations of Viṣṇu as appropriate objects for meditation beginning with his grosser forms and progressing to more subtle forms such as the Supreme Brahman. There are parallels to visualization techniques of Brahman with form (*mūrta*) and without form (*amūrta*) to those found in the Pāñcarātra sources, though not as systematized and detailed (Rastelli 2009, p. 304). Keśidhvaja declares

*O' King the support of the mind is Brahman and in its own nature it is two-fold with form and without form, and each is supreme and not supreme*⁵³

⁵² *trividhā bhāvanā bhūpa viśvam etan nibodhatām brahmākhyā karmasamjñā ca tathā caivobhayātmikā* (VP 6.7.48).

⁵³ *āśrayaś cetaso brahma dvidhā tac ca svarūpataḥ bhūpa mūrtaṃ amūrtaṃ ca param cāparam eva ca* (VP 6.7.47).

The novice yogin is not capable of focusing on the formless Brahman and so must begin by utilizing gross forms of Brahman, such as the various manifestations (6.7.54). Keśidhvaja continues

*O' King, since it is not possible by the novice yogin to mediate on that, for this reason,
he ought to contemplate on the gross form of Hari, which is accessible to all*⁵⁴

As seen in the discussion on cosmology everything created is a form of Hari as it emanates from him as one of his energies (6.7.59). These forms of Hari function within the purview of the three modes of apprehension. The novice (*yogayuj*) first directs his mind to focus on the gross (*sthūla*) form of Hari such as Hiraṇyagarbha, or Prajāpati, or created beings sentient or insentient (VP 6.7.56–59). As the sage advances in practice, the object of meditation is to be replaced with more specific forms of Viṣṇu such as his many incarnations as men, animals and so on

*O' King, by his own playfulness, he causes that (universal) form endowed with all powers to assume such manner of life as gods, animals, men and so on.*⁵⁵

The forms of these incarnations are deemed special in the sense that they have not been generated through karma as is the case with created beings. As the yogin begins to focus on the incarnations of Hari all imperfections (*kliḥṣa*) in the practitioner are destroyed just as fire in the blazing wind burns up dry grass.⁵⁶ Any other support used as the auspicious object of meditation for the purpose of purifying the mind is said to fail (VP 6.7.77). Superior even to the incarnations is the perceptible four-armed form of Viṣṇu complete with weapons and ornaments of which Keśidhvaja provides a head-to-toe description (VP 6.7.79).

The practitioner having surpassed the stage of dependence on grosser forms of Viṣṇu such as other deities and the incarnations begins to visualize the four-armed standing form of Viṣṇu. First without his weapons, then without his ornaments and progresses to concentrating on Viṣṇu possessing only one limb and then Viṣṇu as simply the body to which belong the limbs (VP 6.7.80–89). The utility of these forms of Viṣṇu during meditation is necessary to transcend the three modes of apprehension, leading to the realization of the non-difference of Brahman and self. Again, this concept of the auspicious support for meditation and its function in yogic practice cannot be harmonized with the previous context of the path of knowledge as superior to the path of action.

⁵⁴ *na tad yogayujā śakyam nrpa cintayitum yatah
tatah sthūlaṃ hare rūpaṃ cintayed viśvagocaram* (VP 6.7.55).

⁵⁵ *samastaśaktirūpāni tat karoti janeśvara
devatīryaṇmanuṣyādiceṣṭāvanti svalīlayā* (VP 6.7.71).

⁵⁶ VP 6.7.74—it is unclear if these imperfections are to be understood as the afflictions (*kleṣa*) mentioned in the first teaching of yoga, although an implicit connection can be argued by a resourceful commentator.

Practice of Eight Limbed Yoga

A fourth aspect that constitutes one of the main distinctions between the two teachings is the elaborate practical regimen that is prescribed. The enumeration of the various limbs is rooted in a new cosmology and epistemology. Eight-limbs—*yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi* (6.7.36–6.7.105),⁵⁷ identical to the YS are mentioned but within a Vaiṣṇava context.⁵⁸ While the limbs from *yama* to *pratyāhāra* make no reference to the deity Viṣṇu, it is with the discussion of the object of meditation, the *śubhāśraya*, that various forms of Viṣṇu as objects of meditation become important.⁵⁹ Keśidhvaja begins with the five-fold categorization of the first two limbs (VP 6.7.36–38). *Yama* is comprised of continence (*brahmacarya*), non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), honesty (*āsteya*), and non-possession (*aparigraha*). *Niyama* encompasses Vedic study (*svādhyāya*), purity (*śauca*), contentment (*saṃtoṣa*), penance (*tapas*), and control (*niyata*). Endowed with the results of *yama* and *niyama*, the sage is to sit in one of the postures (*āsana*) such as *bhadrāsana*⁶⁰ and so on and bring his breath under control. This control of one's breathing is termed *prāṇāyāma*.⁶¹ Once the control of breath and the senses is perfected one is ready to concentrate on the auspicious object of meditation (VP 6.7.43). This object which forms the support for meditation is especially essential in the practice of the last three limbs of yoga—concentration (*dhāraṇā*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and absorption (*samādhi*).⁶²

Eighteen verses (VP 6.7.71–89) are devoted specifically to the discussion of the sixth limb, *dhāraṇā*. There is some uncertainty as to what constitutes *dhāraṇā* as at least two accounts are provided. Wilson notes that this may be an “attempt to combine the abstractions of Yoga theism and the sectarian worship of Viṣṇu” (2003, p. 919, fn 18). First, Keśidhvaja states in the discussion of incarnations that the single-minded concentration on these forms of Hari, understood as the receptacle of the previously mentioned energies of Viṣṇu is termed *dhāraṇā* (VP 6.7.75).

*Therefore he ought to rest the mind on the support of
all energies. For that is known as the perfect dhāraṇā*⁶³

⁵⁷ The only difference between the VP and the YS (2.30–45) as far as these two limbs are concerned is that in the latter, devotion to *īśvara* (*īśvarapranidhāna*) replaces self-control as one of the components of *niyama*.

⁵⁸ I utilize the term “vaiṣṇava yoga” rather than theistic yoga because of the use of this term in the discussion of theistic and non-theistic meditation in the YS which is neither sectarian nor even theistic in the devotional sense. See Oberhammer (1977, pp. 162–177)

⁵⁹ There is mention in VP 6.7.40 of breath control exercises performed with seed (*bīja*) or *mantra* and without seed (*abīja*) perhaps referring to the repetition of certain prayers along with a visible form of the deity and is called *ālambana* VP 6.7.42.

⁶⁰ YS 2.46–49.

⁶¹ VP 6.7.40–42 mentions three modes of breath control—suppression of expiration, suppression of inspiration and the suppression of both. In YS 49–51 four types are mentioned, the first three similar to the *purāṇa*, but the fourth which is referred to as the total suppression of breath. The control of the senses called *pratyāhāra* follows breath control as the yogi seeks to steady them and it is the same as in YS 2.54.

⁶² YS 3.1–3.

⁶³ *tasmāt samastasaktīnām ādhāre tatra cetasaḥ*

Second, he goes on to claim that retention in the mind of the four-armed visible (*mūrta*) form of Viṣṇu without regard to subsidiary forms is termed *dhāraṇā*.

*When the mind is focused on the visible form of the Lord,
free from the desire of all other support that is called dhāraṇā⁶⁴
O' King, and that perceptible form of Hari which ought to be meditated
on, listen to that. Without dependence on it dhāraṇā does not obtain⁶⁵*

Subsequent to an elaborate head-to-toe description of the standing form of Viṣṇu, Keśidhvaja concludes that when this image is constant in the mind of the sage regardless of his activities, his *dhāraṇā* is perfected (VP 6.7.86).

For the seventh limb, visualization of the four-armed form ornamented and bearing weapons leads to the focus on the four-armed form without any weapons but holding only a rosary followed by meditation on the form of Viṣṇu without ornaments, but possessing only one limb, and finally visualization of just the torso to which the limbs belong. Such process of conceiving the image (*rūpapratyaya*) in one's mind is called *dhyāna*, the penultimate limb. When this mental meditation ultimately results in the knowledge of a self free from distinctions, that final limb of yoga is termed *samādhi* (VP 6.7.91).

Liberation

Due to the difference in the analysis of existence from the earlier teaching of Proto-Sāṃkhya, there is a fifth aspect of this instruction that is distinct—soteriology. It has already been noted that liberation characterized as union with Brahman is dissimilar to liberation as the realization that the self is distinct from the body. In the discussion of the final stages of eight-limbed yoga and its goal, Keśidhvaja states

*And when the comprehension by the mind of the essential nature of
self, devoid of form is affected by dhyāna, that is called samādhi⁶⁶*

Salvation is the realization of the non-difference of the self and Brahman achieved through discriminative knowledge (*vijñāna*), which is free of the three previously mentioned apprehensions (*bhāvanā*) (VP 6.7.92). Once this goal is realized, the knowledge that the embodied self (*kṣetrajña*) utilizes to achieve such identification ceases (6.7.93).

*Having acquired that mode of apprehension then, that (ātman) is non-different
with the Supreme Self and the difference between them would be caused by
ignorance⁶⁷*

Footnote 63 continued

kurvīta samsthītiṃ sā tu vijñeyā śuddhadhāraṇā (VP 6.7.75).

⁶⁴ *mūrtaṃ bhagavato rūpaṃ sarvāpāśrayaṇiḥsprham
eṣā vai dhāraṇā proktā yac cittaṃ tatra dhāryate* (VP 6.7.78).

⁶⁵ *tac ca mūrtaṃ hare rūpaṃ yādrk cintyaṃ narādhipa
tac chrūyatām anādhāre dhāraṇā nopapadyate* (VP 6.7.79).

⁶⁶ *tasya eva kalpanāhīnaṃ svarūpagrahaṇaṃ hi yat
manasā dhyānanaiṣpādyam samādhiḥ so' bhidhiyate* (VP 6.7.91).

*When ignorance which produces difference (of ātman and Brahman) is forever destroyed who shall make that distinction (between ātman and Brahman) which does not exist?*⁶⁸

Since the self is understood to be different from the supreme self due to ignorance (*ajñāna*), once this is removed, there is no distinction to be made between them as it does not in reality exist. Keśidhvaja utilizes the term *ajñāna* rather than *avidyā* to denote ignorance. Though historically, these terms were used synonymously, it is noteworthy that this is the only instance when ignorance is designated with the former term. In contrast to liberation as discrimination between the self and the body in the first teaching, here it is the realization of the self without distinctions. It is not possible to reconcile these two soteriologies rooted in different metaphysical contexts without extensive extra-textual commentary.

Having received the instruction on yoga from his brother, Keśidhvaja returns to the city. Meanwhile, Khāṇḍikya having enthroned his son as king retires to the forest to practice yoga.⁶⁹ In the forest, focused on only one object, his mind intent upon (*viniveśita*) Govinda (VP 6.7.102), purified by the practices of the various limbs of yoga such as *yama* and so on he obtains union or absorption (*laya*) into Viṣṇu, the pure and perfect Brahman (VP 6.7.103). This description of salvation incorporates new ideas and concepts of Vaiṣṇava ontology in which the practice of eight-limbed yoga is embedded.

To summarize, in contrast to the spiritual path as the way of knowledge in the first teaching, the second teaching advocates the eight-limbed regimen supported by Vaiṣṇava metaphysics and ontology. Though liberation as deliverance from ignorance that causes rebirth is a relevant goal in both teachings, the understanding of existence from which release is sought and the implications of freedom are vastly different. Earlier, ignorance as the obstacle to liberation is variously defined as human affliction and suffering due to the misunderstanding that the body is the self. Now, it is the misapprehension that the individual self is distinct from Brahman/Viṣṇu. Aligned also with the concept of ignorance is the doctrine of the transcendence of the three modes of apprehension and the necessity of the auspicious object of meditation for salvific experience.

⁶⁷ *tad bhāvabhāvam āpannas tato 'sau paramātmānā bhavaty abhedī bhedaś ca tasyājñānakṛto bhavet* (VP 6.7.94).

⁶⁸ *vibhedajanake jñāne nāśam ātyantikam gate ātmano brahmaṇo bhedam asantam kaḥ kariṣyati* (VP 6.7.95).

⁶⁹ Earlier in VP 6.6.10–11 it is mentioned that Khāṇḍikya had been driven from his kingdom by Keśidhvaja who rules as the sovereign. Now, the mention of enthroning his son before his renunciation to practice eight-limbed yoga suggests that Keśidhvaja may have returned his brother's kingdom. Keśidhvaja himself in VP 6.7.105 is said to attain liberation through detachment from worldly objects, thereby reducing demerit, suggesting that though not a king, he might still have remained within the confines of society.

Conclusion

The discussion of yoga in the VP is embedded in two distinct ontological and soteriological frameworks which renders a unified doctrine problematic. Though similar terminology in both teachings such as *yoga*, *saṃsāra*, *mokṣa*, *atman* and *avidyā* provide a superficial continuity this is unsustainable upon further evaluation as each of these concepts function within distinct understandings of existence, liberation, and the nature of salvific experience. For instance, the term *yoga* is used in both teachings, but what comprises *yoga* differs radically. In the first teaching, *yoga* mentioned six times is not associated with a systematic method of practice and bears resemblance to forms of proto-Sāṃkhya quite different from the eight-limbed regimen. Similarly, the goal of liberation (*mokṣa*) is common to both teachings. However, since the nature of existence and ignorance are distinct, the soteriology also is significantly different.

In the first non-Vaiṣṇava teaching, existence is defined via the binary distinction of self and matter/body. The former is declared as the true reality in distinction to the body. Indeed, discrimination that redefines terms of common usage such as ‘I’, ‘mine’ and so on is denoted as the knowledge of the self (*ātmanvidyā*) that is identified as the path of knowledge in contrast to the path of action or ritual. Ignorance (*avidyā*) is the identification of the self with the body and is an affliction (*kleśa*) that characterizes *saṃsāra*. The discrimination that matter or body (*anātman*) is impermanent, impure, and characterized by pain leads to salvation defined as the cessation of afflictions. Though the self (*ātman*) in this proto-Sāṃkhya teaching is articulated as the ultimate reality in contrast to matter, it is not conceived of as an over-arching reality as the Brahman of the Upaniṣads. Neither is there mention of this *ātman* as the source of everything. In this teaching, no practical regimen is found juxtaposed with the knowledge that corrects the fundamental misunderstanding that the body is self.

The Vaiṣṇava orientation of the second teaching on *yoga* is hard to miss as Brahman is identified as the supreme deity Viṣṇu who manifests as existence through his powers (*śakti*), the embodied self (*kṣetrajñā*) and ignorance or karma. This latter power of Brahman conceals the truth that the self (*ātman*) is devoid of all distinctions and is indeed Brahman. Here, ignorance is not so much a misunderstanding of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ as it is the divine *māyā* of Viṣṇu. *Yoga* is the corrective for such ignorance and new modes of apprehension (*bhāvabhāvanā*) are mentioned as impediments in the practice of eight-limbed *yoga* and appropriate antidotes such as the auspicious object of meditation (*śubhāśraya*), the four-armed form of Viṣṇu, are introduced. Unlike the prior teaching which is rooted in the discrimination that self is different from matter, the second teaching on *yoga* underscores non-difference between the individual self and the supreme self amidst the plurality of the created world as it is simply a manifestation of Brahman.

Abbreviations

BhG *Bhagavadgītā with Eleven Commentaries*, ed. G.S. Sadhale. 3 Vols. Bombay: Gujarati Printing Press, 1935

- MBh *Mahābhārata: Śāntiparvan*. Mokṣadharmā, Vol 16 (A & B), ed. S. K. Belvalkar. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1954
- VP *The Critical Edition of the Viṣṇupurāṇa*, Vols I–II, ed. M.M. Pathak. Vadodara: Oriental Institute, 1997
- YS *Yogasūtras of Patañjali with Bhāṣya of Vyāsa, Tīkā of Vācaspati Miśra and Nāgoji Bhaṭṭa*. Bombay Sanskrit and Prakrit Series. Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1917

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