QUNIT 4: CHITTA VRITTI NIRODHOPAYA

UNIT STRUCTURE

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4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- Know about the cessation of the modifications of the mind,
- get knowledge about Abhyasa and Vairagya,
- Understand the concept of Ishwar Pranidhana.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

The Yoga Sutras of Maharshi Patanjali is more than just a philosophical treatise—it is a luminous guide to a life of profound joy and fulfilment. Rooted in an unshakable understanding of the human experience, this ancient wisdom offers not only insight but also a meticulously structured path to inner peace and ultimate liberation.

Far from being confined to a particular time, place, or belief system, these sutras transcend the boundaries of age, occupation, gender, and faith. They speak directly to the universal yearning for meaning, clarity, and serenity in a world that often feels unpredictable and overwhelming. With deep compassion and precision, they unveil a step-by-step process to dissolve suffering, calm the restless mind, and awaken to the radiant truth of our own existence.

Patanjali‘s teachings remind us that the happiness we seek is not in fleeting external pursuits but within us—woven into the very fabric of our being. Our True Self is not separate from the boundless joy we long for; rather, it is that joy, waiting patiently to be realised. By following this sacred blueprint, we embark on a journey inward, where peace is not a distant dream but a living reality, ever-present and unshaken.

4.3 CHITTA VRITTI NIRODHAHA

Patanjali, in his second sutra (YS-1.2), defines Yoga as "योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः," which translates to ”Yoga is the cessation of the modifications of the mind.”

This definition of yoga has three aspects

- *Chitta* (the mind, intellect, ego)
- *Vritti* or the modifications (of the mind)
- *Nirodhah*orcessation/control (ofthoughtsin the mind).

Here, the term **"Chitta"** refers to the mind or consciousness, while **"Vritti"** signifies the various fluctuations, thoughts, and patterns that constantly arise within it. **"Nirodhaha"** means restraint, control, or stillness.In essence, this sutra conveys that true Yoga is the art of quieting the restless waves of the mind, allowing it to become serene and undisturbed. Just as the surface of a lake becomes clear and reflective when the ripples subside, the mind, when free from distractions and disturbances, reveals the deeper truth of our existence. This state of inner stillness leads to self-realisation, harmony, and profound peace.

Every *vritti* (*klishta*) generates *samskaras* (deep impressions) which in turn result in *karma*, which again generates *samskaras*. The chain of *vritti-samskara-karma-vritti*is unending, and it keeps a human being bound to life-death-rebirth cycle. Human life is full of sufferings and if one to free oneself from these sufferings, one has to liberate oneself from the chain of life-death-rebirth cycle. Therefore, it is essential to stop the *chitta vrittis*. That is why, Yoga is defined as *chittavrittinirodaha*.

Yoga, as defined by Patanjali, is the cessation of the mind‘s fluctuations—*Yogaḥchitta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*—a process through which the restless waves of

thought, emotion, and perception are stilled, allowing the self to abide in its true nature. The mind, in its ordinary state, is constantly in flux, shaped by desires, fears, memories, and sensory impressions, creating an illusion of identity that binds the self to fleeting experiences. However, when these movements are mastered and brought to stillness, the mind dissolves as an independent entity, and the seer—*drashtuh*—rests in its unchanging, eternal essence. This is the state of pure awareness, beyond mental constructs, where the self is no longer entangled with its own projections. In this profound silence, the dualities of existence fade, leaving only the luminous presence of consciousness itself. Yoga, therefore, is not merely a practice but a journey toward inner awakening, guiding one beyond the turbulence of thought into the vast serenity of being.

4.4 ABHYASA AND VAIRAGYA

अभ्यासवैराग्याअभ्यांतन्निरोधः (YS.-1.12)

Abhyasa is the continuous and dedicated effort to attain and sustain a state of inner stillness and tranquility. It is the unwavering commitment to spiritual growth, requiring persistence, patience, and sincerity. True practice is not a fleeting attempt but a lifelong journey that unfolds gradually, deepening with time.

For Abhyasa to become deeply rooted, it must be undertaken with two essential qualities: Deergha Kala (a long and sustained period of practice) and Nairantarya (unbroken consistency). Just as a seed grows into a mighty tree through continuous nourishment, the mind and spirit are refined through dedicated effort over time.

When practice is pursued with devotion and sincerity, it naturally deepens, leading the seeker ever closer to the direct experience of their eternal, unchanging essence. This inner journey is not about struggle but about aligning oneself with the flow of truth, allowing the practice to reveal the profound stillness that is always present within. Through steadfast Abhyasa, one moves beyond fleeting distractions and connects with the boundless peace at the core of their being.

Vairagya, or non-attachment, is the art of letting go—of clinging to desires, fears, and false identities that cloud our true nature. It is not about renouncing the world but about freeing ourselves from the illusions that bind us.

When we detach from external distractions and the fleeting highs and lows of life, we create space for deeper self-awareness. We stop being controlled by temporary pleasures or pains and instead cultivate inner peace and clarity. This detachment allows the mind to remain steady, unaffected by external circumstances, and focused on the ultimate truth—the realisation of the Self.Through Vairagya, we walk the inner path without being swayed by obstacles, moving closer to our true essence with unwavering serenity.

What is Abhvāsa

Abhvāsa is the conscious practice of selecting thoughts, words, and actions that lead to a state of lasting tranquility. It serves as a guiding principle in every facet of life—shaping how we approach the world, communicate with others, and engage with our inner selves. By cultivating a continuous awareness of this principle, we infuse our being with harmony, ensuring the mind remains serene amidst the chaos and fluctuations of life.

To achieve this state of inner stability, we must nurture mindfulness of four key elements that anchor our consciousness. These elements help to guide us toward balance and peace, ensuring that we remain centred even as life shifts around us. Through unwavering awareness and conscious effort, we build a mind that is calm, grounded, and resilient—able to withstand the inevitable ups and downs that come our way.

Foundation for Abhyasa is explain as सतुदीर्घकालनैरन्तर्यसत्कारासेवितोदृढभूमिः in sutra 1.14. This sutra highlights the power of consistent practice, fuelled by devotion and sincerity. The essence lies in making a commitment to the practice and maintaining it without interruption, over time, until it becomes a deeply ingrained, unshakable foundation within us.

The word *satkara* encompasses a collection of vital qualities: devotion, sincerity, respect, reverence, positivity, and discernment in our choices. These qualities ensure that we approach our practice with an open heart and a clear mind. By

choosing the practice that is suitable for our current state, and committing to it each day, *satkara* naturally begins to develop.

Attention (*asevitah*) is the crucial element that sustains this journey. Without proper attention, the practice would lack the depth and commitment required for long-term transformation. Attention involves dedicating ourselves fully to each moment of practice, making each session meaningful and rooted in the intention to grow.

Together, *satkara* and *asevitah* work in harmony, gradually cultivating a strong, unwavering foundation for our spiritual journey. As we remain devoted, choose wisely, and give our full attention, the practice itself becomes a stable and solid support, transforming not just our abilities but our very nature, leading us toward true inner peace and fulfilment.

What is Vairagya?

दृष्टानुश्रविकविषयवितृष्णस्यवशीकारसंज्ञावैराग्यम्(YS-1.15)

This means that non-attachment arises when the mind loses its craving for objects, whether seen (drishta) or heard about (anushravika, referring to scriptural or traditional knowledge). When one reaches a state where even subtle desires do not arise, that is called Vashikara Vairagya—the highest level of detachment.

Vairagya is cultivated through practice (Abhyasa) and wisdom (Jnana), which leads to freedom from worldly attachments.

Vairagya, or detachment, is achieved through consistent practice and self-awareness. It arises when one recognises and overcomes attachments that bind the mind, known as *Kleshas* (afflictions). The *Kleshas* are obstacles that cause suffering and hinder spiritual growth. They are described in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (2.3)अविद्यास्मितारागद्वेषाभिनिवेशाःक्लेशाः॥ as:

1. **Avidya (Ignorance)** – The root cause of all afflictions. It is a mistaken perception of reality, where the transient is seen as permanent, the impure as pure, and the non-Self as the Self.

2. **Asmita (Egoism or 'I'-ness)** – The false identification of the Self with the body, mind, and intellect. It leads to attachment to one's identity, roles, and status.

3. **Raga (Attachment)** – The craving for pleasure and material possessions. When something brings happiness, we desire it repeatedly, leading to dependency and suffering.

4. **Dvesha (Aversion)** – The opposite of Raga, it is an aversion to pain or unpleasant experiences. This resistance creates suffering as one constantly tries to avoid discomfort.

5. **Abhinivesha (Fear of Death or Clinging to Life)** – The deepest-rooted *Klesha*, present even in the wise. It is the fear of losing existence, leading to anxiety and insecurity.

Through Vairagya, one develops dispassion and frees oneself from these *Kleshas*. This is achieved by self-awareness, meditation, and discernment (Viveka), ultimately leading to liberation (Kaivalya).

4.5 CONCEPT OF ISHWAR PRANIDHANA

Ishwara in theistic Indian philosophies mainly stands for God who performs the functions of creation, preservation and destruction of the universe. The presence of such *Ishwara* makes the school of thought or philosophy religious. The concept of such a God is accompanied by forms of worship, rites and rituals, mythological stories, do's and dont's, and religious organisation. None of the above are prevalent in Yoga of Patanjali *Yoga Sutras*. Hence, it is necessary to understand the concepts of *Ishwara* and *Ishwara Pranidhana*(complete surrender to *Ishwara*) in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras.

Patanjali defines *Ishwara* as a '*purusavishesha*', a special kind of *purusa*(pure consciousness) – one who was never embodied, is not embodied, and who will never be embodied. In *Ishwara*, the seed of omniscience is unsurpassed. *Ishwara* is referred to as the teacher of all ancient teachers because *Ishwara* is unconditioned by time. The designator of this *Ishwara* is *Pranava* or *AUM*.

Patanjali says that the japa of *AUM* should be performed with full involvement of the being and with full recognition of its significance. Such a japa will result in elimination of all obstacles in the path of Yoga and lead towards consciousness turning upon itself, i.e., leading to pure awareness. Obviously, in Patanjali‘s *Yoga Sutras*, there is no description of any forms of worship or rites and rituals. Hence, it is essential to understand that *Ishwara* in Patanjali‘s *Yoga Sutras* is not a religious God, and yoga is not a religion. *Ishwara Pranidhana*refers to complete surrender to *Ishwara*. This *Ishwara Pranidhana*is prescribed as a technique leading to the ultimate goal of kaivalya for all the three types of adherents (*adhama*, *madhyama*and *uttamaadhikarins*). *Ishwara Pranidhana*is suggested as an optional technique to *abhyasa*and *vairagya*; it is a part of Patanjali‘s *Kriya Yoga* (*tapa*, *swadhyay*and *Ishwara Pranidhana*); it is one of the *niyamas* (*shaucha*, *santosha*, *tapa*, *swadhyay*, *Ishwara Pranidhana*).
Therefore, Patanjali gives tremendous importance to *Ishwara Pranidhana*. In this *Pranidhana*may be emphasised more. Surrendering oneself means surrendering one‘s ego, which is the most important hurdle in the path of Yoga. Patanjali says *Ishwara Pranidhana*can lead to perfection in the state of *Samadhi*.

Yoga, as delineated in Patanjali‘s Yoga Sutras, is a systematic discipline aimed at self-realisation and liberation. Among the various principles enshrined in this classical text, Ishwara Pranidhana holds a significant position. It is one of the five niyamas (ethical observances) and a crucial element of Kriya Yoga (the yoga of action). The term ’Ishwara Pranidhana ‘translates to ’surrender to Ishwara, ‘and its essence lies in the complete offering of oneself to a higher consciousness. Unlike the religious notion of God seen in theistic traditions, the concept of Ishwara in Patanjali‘s philosophy is unique and distinct, devoid of rituals, mythologies, or prescribed religious practices.
Ishwara, as described in the Yoga Sutras, is not a deity in the conventional religious sense. Patanjali defines Ishwara as a ’Purusha Vishesha’—a special kind of pure consciousness. This Ishwara is unique because it has never been subjected to the cycle of birth and death, karma, or worldly afflictions. Unlike human consciousness, which is influenced by desires, attachments, and limitations, Ishwara remains ever pure and unconditioned.

Ishwara is characterised by unsurpassed omniscience, meaning that the knowledge possessed by Ishwara is limitless and beyond the constraints of time and space. Patanjali acknowledges Ishwara as the eternal teacher (Guru) of all teachers since Ishwara transcends temporal limitations. Thus, the existence of Ishwara is not dependent on faith but is an inherent principle that governs pure awareness and the process of spiritual liberation.

Patanjali states that the designation or representation of Ishwara is 'Pranava'—the sacred syllable AUM. The recitation (japa) of AUM, performed with full awareness and devotion, is a method to align one's consciousness with Ishwara. This practice is considered a direct means to remove obstacles on the yogic path and leads to inner purification. The repetition of AUM, combined with deep contemplation on its meaning, serves as an effective meditative technique, guiding the practitioner toward self-realisation and the ultimate goal of kaivalya (liberation).

The term 'Pranidhana 'means surrender or dedication. Thus, Ishwara Pranidhana signifies the complete surrender of one's ego, desires, and personal identity to the supreme consciousness. This surrender is not an act of helplessness or passive resignation but a conscious and voluntary offering of oneself to the higher reality. It involves relinquishing personal attachments and allowing one's actions to be guided by a sense of universal order.

Patanjali emphasises that Ishwara Pranidhana can lead to perfection in the state of Samadhi, the ultimate state of yogic absorption. By surrendering to Ishwara, the practitioner gradually dissolves the ego, which is the primary obstacle in attaining spiritual enlightenment. When the ego ceases to interfere, the mind attains stillness, and the practitioner experiences profound inner peace and self-transcendence.

Ishwara Pranidhana in Different Aspects of Yoga

Ishwara Pranidhana weaves divine surrender into every facet of yoga, guiding the soul toward grace and transcendence. Some different aspects of Ishwara Pranidhana are mentioned below:

- **Ishwara Pranidhana as Part of Kriya Yoga**

Patanjali presents Kriya Yoga, a preparatory practice leading to deeper states of meditation and self-discipline. Kriya Yoga consists of three elements:

- Tapas (austerity and self-discipline)
- Swadhyaya (self-study and study of scriptures)
- Ishwara Pranidhana (surrender to Ishwara)

These three aspects work together to purify the mind, discipline the senses, and deepen one's connection to the higher self. Ishwara Pranidhana, in particular, helps in overcoming attachment to results, fostering an attitude of devotion and selfless action.

- **Ishwara Pranidhana as a Niyama**

In the eightfold path of Yoga (Ashtanga Yoga), Patanjali outlines five niyamas (ethical observances), one of which is Ishwara Pranidhana. The niyamas serve as guiding principles for inner discipline and self-regulation. Through the practice of Ishwara Pranidhana, a yogi cultivates humility and devotion, recognising the presence of a greater reality beyond the personal self. This surrender aids in mental clarity and helps transcend the limitations of individual ego.

- **Ishwara Pranidhana as an Alternative to Abhyasa and Vairagya**

As mentioned, Patanjali presents two primary methods for stilling the mind and attaining higher consciousness: Abhyasa (persistent practice, Vairagya (detachment). However, for practitioners who find it challenging to pursue strict discipline and detachment, Ishwara Pranidhana serves as an alternative technique. By surrendering to Ishwara, a seeker can overcome obstacles without intense struggle, as the practice invokes divine grace and facilitates inner transformation.

Patanjali emphasises that complete surrender to Ishwara can lead to Samadhi, the highest state of meditative absorption. In this state, the practitioner experiences total unity with pure consciousness, free from mental fluctuations and worldly distractions. Since the ultimate aim of Yoga is to transcend the limitations of the material world and realise the true nature of the self, Ishwara Pranidhana serves as a powerful means to this end.

The process of surrendering involves deep trust and faith in the higher order of existence. It requires cultivating bhakti (devotion), shraddha (faith), and samarpan (dedication). When the seeker completely offers themselves to Ishwara, they are no longer bound by the dualities of pleasure and pain, success and failure, or attachment and aversion. This leads to inner freedom and unshakeable peace.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Fill up the blanks:

A. Yoga is the cessation of the ……..of the mind.
B. Two essential qualities for abhyasa: …….. and Nairantarya.
C. Vairagya is cultivated through ……..and wisdom (Jnana),
D. *Ishwara Pranidhana*is prescribed as a technique leading to the ultimate goal of……..
E. The term …….signifies deep devotion, complete surrender, or total dedication.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

- Patanjali's definition of Yoga in *Yoga Sutra* (YS 1.2) as "योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः" encapsulates the essence of yogic practice. It means that Yoga is the process of stilling the fluctuations of the mind (*chitta vrittis*) to achieve a state of inner peace and self-realisation.
- Our mind is constantly engaged in thoughts, emotions, memories, and perceptions, creating an ever-changing mental landscape. These modifications prevent us from experiencing our true nature, which is pure consciousness. Through disciplined practice (*abhyasa*) and detachment (*vairagya*), Yoga helps one transcend these mental fluctuations, leading to clarity, equanimity, and ultimate liberation (*kaivalya*).
- Vairagya, or detachment, blossoms through steadfast practice and deep self-awareness. It emerges when one transcends the attachments that tether the mind—known as Kleshas, the afflictions that cloud perception. These inner

obstacles weave the fabric of suffering, veiling the path to spiritual awakening. Only by recognising and dissolving them can one journey toward true liberation.

- Patanjali, in his *Yoga Sutras*, emphasises Ishwara Pranidhana (surrender to the Supreme) as a fundamental aspect of spiritual progress. The term Pranidhana signifies deep devotion, complete surrender, or total dedication.
- Patanjali places immense importance on Ishwara Pranidhana because it helps dissolve the ego—the biggest barrier to spiritual liberation. Through sincere surrender, a Yogi can effortlessly progress towards Samadhi, the highest goal of Yoga, where the individual self merges with the infinite consciousness.

4.7 FURTHER READINGS:

1) Karambelkar, P.V. (2017). *Patanjala Yoga Sutra*. KaivalyadhamaLonavla, Pune
2) Saraswati, S. S. (1983). Four Chapters on Freedom: Commentary on Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. Yoga Publications Trust
3) Patanjali‘s Yoga Sutras – commentaries by various authors.
4) MEA Official Guidebook .

4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

A. modifications

B. Deergha Kala

C. Abhyasa

D. kaivalya

E. Pranidhana.

4.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Very Short Questions:

Q1. What is the definition of Yoga according to Patanjali?

Q2. What is meant by "Chitta"?

Q3. What does the term "Vritti" signify?

Q4. What is meant by "Nirodhah"?

Q5.. What is the meaning of "Pranidhana"?

Short Question:

Q1. Name the three aspects of Chitta Vritti Nirodhah.

Q2. What is Abhyasa?

Q3. What are the two essential qualities required for Abhyasa?

Q4. What is Vairagya?

Q5. What is the significance of AUM in Ishwara Pranidhana?

Long question:

Q1. Explain the concept of Chitta Vritti Nirodhah.

Q2. Discuss the role of Abhyasa in achieving mental Stability.

Q3. Explain Vairagya and its importance in overcoming Kleshas.

Q4. Discuss the concept of Ishwara Pranidhana in Yoga Sutras.

Q5. Explain the relationship between Abhyasa, Vairagya and Ishwara Pranidhana in the path of yoga.

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