

AVIDYĀ – BOON OR BANE IN YOGIC ENDEAVOUR

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Abstract

To understand the meaning of Avidyā commentators of the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali have suggested the need to go to the roots of the involvement of Consciousness with Matter that is Creation itself. Avidyā is not merely 'ignorance' as used in common Sanskrit parlance. It is caused by Māyā (the Great Illusion) and thereby is the reason for the involution of Ultimate Reality of Consciousness in the form of Ātmā. The reverse process of evolution in which consciousness gradually extricates itself from matter results in an increasing realization of its Real nature and ends in complete Self-realization in 'Kaivalya', an exalted state as per the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali. It is this fundamental privation of knowledge of its Real nature, which begins with the evolutionary cycle, is brought about by the power of Māyā, and ends with the attainment of Liberation in Kaivalya, which is called Avidyā. This article shall explore the concept of Avidyā and whether it is a boon or bane in Yogic endeavour through a literary research based on authentic Yogic and Vedic literature. Through this exploration on the topic of Avidyā, the means available to the Yogi to reach his or her goal, despite Avidyā, may emerge.

Introduction

Yoga is one of the six orthodox schools (Ṣaṭdarśana) of Vedic philosophy and it is an authority for the practical pursuit of inner perfection. The most popular definition of Yoga (Mohan, 2000) is the union or

integration of individual self (*jīva*) and the supreme Self (God or *Puruṣa*). In the *darśanas*, while dealing with the theory of knowledge, the commonly accepted means of valid knowledge (*Pramāṇa*) is *Pratyakṣa* (perception) of which there are two types *viz. laukika* and *yaugika* where the term yoga (from *yaugika*) refers to 'inner' or that which comes through 'inner absorption'. So Yoga may also be defined as the journey of 'inner perception leading to the highest inner absorption'.

Patañjali defines Yoga as the 'the restraint or regulation of the modifications of the mind' in *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali (YS) 1.2 (Chapter 1, verse 2) which states: **Yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ.**

YS 2.15 states: **Pariṇāma-tāpa-saṃskāra-duḥkhaḥ guṇa-vṛtti-virodhāc ca duḥkham eva sarvaṃ vivekinaḥ.**

This may be translated as: 'To the people who have developed discrimination all is misery on account of the pains resulting from change, anxiety and tendencies (based on impressions), as also on account of the conflicts between the functioning of the *guṇas* and the *vṛttis* of the mind.' This Sūtra means that all experiences are either actively or potentially filled with misery to the wise person whose spiritual perception has become awakened. This is so because certain conditions like change, anxiety, habituation and conflicts between the functioning of the *guṇas* and *vṛttis* are inherent in life. The opposition between *guṇas* and *vṛttis* (called as

guṇa-vṛtti-virodhā) is the conflict between the natural tendencies caused by the preponderance of one of the *guṇas* and the states of the mind which are constantly changing (Taimni, 1968). Such a conflict is very common in human life and is the cause of much dissatisfaction in the life of the average individual. The following example illustrates this conflict and shows how it is one of the major causes of human misery: There is a man who is lazy by temperament owing to the predominance of *Tamas* in his nature. He hates activity but is placed in circumstances where he has to exert himself for his living. So he desires constantly a peaceful and inactive life and the result of this strong desire entertained persistently is that in his next life his desire finds fruition in an environment where he is forced to be quite inactive (he may be born as an Eskimo or be placed in charge of a lighthouse). But in this life there may be a preponderance of *Rajas* in his nature and he therefore wants activity in an environment where not much activity is possible. He is therefore dissatisfied with his new lot as he was with the old (Taimni, 1968).

Only when the Yogic aspirant has realized to some extent the illusion underlying the so-called 'happiness' which he pursues in the world, can he really give up this futile pursuit and devote himself whole-heartedly to the task of transcending *Māyā* (the Great Illusion) and finding that Reality in which alone can one find true states of 'Enlightenment' and 'Peace' (Taimni, 1968). It is well known that Patañjali, author of *Yoga Sūtras* (YS) is not the originator of the theory and practice of Yoga. He however did compile the available details prevalent during his time, on the practice and philosophy of Yoga and through 196 *sūtra*¹ propounded the Yoga school of

philosophy. The *sūtras* from YS Chapter 2 address the philosophy of *kleśas* and address the foundation, background and approach to address *Avidyā*.

Both the *Sāṅkhya* and *Vedānta* schools relate to Yoga practices within their literature (Vivekananda, 2013). Despite the ancient literary background to Yoga based on various texts it is important to understand that Yoga is not a discipline that can be understood by reading books and intellect alone but requires the discipline of practice and experience. The author of Yogic literature needs to be an attained *Yogi* to lend credibility to the material. One of the best authors in the modern world is the great Master and *Yogi*, Swami Vivekananda, who has shared the way of Yoga and *Vedānta* with the world in the 19th century and started a movement wherein the world begin to understand India's history in religion, spirituality and philosophy. Swami Vivekananda gave one of the first definitions of modern day spirituality when he emphasized that religion needs the 'experience of God' and not just 'belief in God'. He then explains that the science of *Rāja Yoga* proposes to put before humanity a practical and scientifically worked out method of reaching the Truth (a Real experience of God). He calls it a science because like a scientist using instruments to observe and measure physical phenomena the *Rāja Yogi* also makes use of internal instruments viz. the mind to observe internal states of being, study internal nature, and through that control the whole – both internal and external as per the teaching of *Rāja Yoga* that the external world is but a gross form of the internal, subtle world (Vivekananda, 2013).

One system of refined *Rāja Yoga* that deserves consideration is Sahaj Marg which has been propagated

¹ As per I.K.Taimni in *Science of Yoga* (commentary on *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali): *Sūtras* embody the art of condensation to the utmost limit. The language, with which *sūtras* are

constructed in ancient Sanskrit, though extraordinarily effective in the expression of philosophical ideas, can lend itself to an extraordinary variety of interpretations.

through the Masters (*Gurus*) of the Shri Ram Chandra² Mission. The Adi-Guru or founder of the Sahaj Marg system of refined *Rāja Yoga*, Shri Ram Chandra of Fatehgarh (affectionately called as Lalaji) is credited for the re-discovery of *Pranahuti* and paving the way for the re-emergence of *Rāja Yoga* as the primary means to attain the goal of life (Ram Chandra, 2010). He re-discovered in the sense the science, skill or art of *Pranahuti* which had been lost to humanity though it had existed 72 generations before King Dasharatha³. The Sahaj Marg system allows the Yogic practitioner to utilize the effect of the Yogic transmission (*Pranahuti*) to aid in the Yogi's transformation.

We shall understand through this paper the philosophy of *kleśās*, the role of *Avidyā* and the aspects of *Rāja Yoga* which may perhaps aid in conquering *Avidyā*.

Philosophy of *Kleśās*

The philosophy of *kleśās* is at the foundation of the system of *Yoga* outlined by Patañjali. Verses 1 to 28 from Chapter 2 of *YS* address the foundation, background and approach to the concept of *Avidyā* which is based in the philosophy of *Kleśās*.

YS 2.3 states: **Avidyāsmitā-rāga-dveṣābhīniveśāḥ Kleśāḥ.**

This may be translated as: The following are the five afflictions or *kleśās* responsible for causing all the miseries of life.

1. Lack of awareness of Reality (*Avidyā*)
2. Sense of egoism or 'I-am-ness' (*āsmitā*)
3. Attractions towards objects (*rāga*)
4. Repulsions towards objects (*dveṣā*)

² The founder of the Shri Ram Chandra Mission (and disciple of Lalaji) affectionately called as Babuji. Coincidentally both Babuji and Lalaji's names are 'Ram Chandra'.

³ The King of Ayodhya and father of Ram in Valmiki's *Ramayana*

5. Strong attachment / desire for life (*ābhīniveśā*)

All the *kleśās* are related like the different aspects of a tree: roots, trunk, fruits and leaves. They form a series beginning with *Avidyā* and ending with *ābhīniveśā*. Patañjali in *sūtras* 2.10 and 2.11 expounds the way to counter the effect of the *kleśās*. The method by which the subtle forms of *kleśās* can be destroyed is by reversing the process by which they are produced. *Abhīniveśā* is the final phase in the development of the *kleśās* and that is why it is called as *svarasavāhī* (sustained by its own inherent force or potency) based on the principle that until the initial cause disappears the subsequent effects must continue to appear in an unending flow. In the connected series of *kleśās*, *rāga* and *dveṣā* appear as the immediate cause of attachment to life (*ābhīniveśā*). It follows from this that the greater the play of attractions and repulsions in the life of an individual the greater must be his attachment to life. Observation of life around us shows that this is to a great extent true. It is people who are under the domination of most violent attractions and repulsions who are most attached to life. We also find that in old age these attractions and repulsions temporarily lose their force to some extent and in equal measure the desire for life also becomes comparatively feeble.

YS 2.4 states: **Avidyā kṣetram uttareṣāṃ prasupta-tanu-vicchinodārāṇām.**

This may be translated as: '*Avidyā* is the source of those that are mentioned after it, whether they are in the dormant, the attenuated, the alternating or the expanded condition'.

The *kleśās* appear in four states namely (1) dormant, (2) attenuated or feeble or mild (3) alternating (moving between opposites states) and (4) expanded (full or complete). Only in the advanced Yogi are the *kleśās* in the dormant state. In all ordinary human beings *kleśās* are present in one of the other three states and by the

preliminary practice of Yoga the active state is moved into a dormant state.

The key *kleśā* is *Avidyā* which is also the root cause of the other four *kleśās*. To understand the meaning and the role of *Avidyā* commentators of the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali have suggested the need to go to the roots of the involvement of 'Consciousness' (*Puruṣa*) with 'Matter' (*Prakṛti*) i.e. Creation itself. *Avidyā* is not merely ignorance as used in common Sanskrit parlance. It is caused by *Māyā* (the Great Illusion) and thereby is the reason for the involution of Ultimate Reality of Consciousness in the form of *Ātmā*.

YS 2.23 states: **Sva-svāmi- śaktyoḥ svarūpopalabdhi-hetuḥ saṃyogaḥ.**

This may be translated as: 'The purpose of the coming together of the *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* (this coming together is referred to as *Samyoga*) is gaining by the *Puruṣa* of the awareness of his true nature and the unfolding of powers inherent in him and *Prakṛti*.'

In this one *sūtra*, Patañjali has put the fundamental idea underlying the theory of evolution and also managed to bring into his generalization the most important aspect of evolution which unfortunately is missing in the modern scientific theory (Taimni, 1968).

Taimni goes on to explain that modern science accepts the evolution of 'form' in great detail but fails to even consider the investigation and evolution of 'life' that naturally accompanies the form. It may be said that the parallel for 'life' and 'form' or 'essence' and 'manifestation' in Sāṅkhyaas well as Yoga philosophy are the twin concepts of original spirit (*Puruṣa* which is unchanging, eternal and pure consciousness) and original materiality (*Prakṛti*). *Prakṛti* is in a state of continuous change and consists of the three *guṇas* (*Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*). The original state of *Prakṛti* is the state of balance between the three *Guṇas*. The three *Guṇas* refer to the states of *Sattva* (goodness,

constructive, harmonious), *Rajas* (passion, active, confused), and *Tamas* (darkness, destructive, chaotic) (Widgery, 1930).

The above *sūtra* answers the key question 'Why is *Puruṣa* brought into contact with *Prakṛti*?' to which the answer is: To unfold the powers latent in *Prakṛti* and himself and to enable him to gain Self-realization which contains the complete idea of evolution within it (Taimni, 1968). In order to understand the powers of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* referred to in this *sūtra* we have to recall how total evolution leads to the gradual unfolding of consciousness on the one hand and to the increase in the efficiency of the vehicles of consciousness on the other. As *Puruṣa* is essentially pure consciousness it is a question of how much this essential aspect is expressed depending on the nature of the various vehicles of consciousness. The powers of *Prakṛti* to which reference is made here are the capacities which develop in the vehicles as they evolve in association with consciousness. So as the consciousness (*Puruṣa*) within each vehicle expands or grows in expression the capacities of the vehicles (powers of *Prakṛti*) also grow and *vice versa*.

The definition for *Avidyā* is found in two *Sūtras*:

YS2.5 stated as: **Anityāsuci-duḥkhānātmasunitya- śuci-sukhātmaḥyātiravidyā**

Translated as: '*Avidyā* is taking the non-eternal, impure, evil and non-*Ātman* to be eternal, pure, good and *Ātman*'.

YS 2.24 stated as: **Tasya hetur Avidyā.**

This may be translated as: 'Its cause (the cause of *Samyoga* of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* referred in the prior *sūtra* YS 2.23) is the lack of awareness of his Real nature (*Avidyā*)'

The *Puruṣa* by his very nature is eternal, omniscient and free and his involution in matter which involves tremendous limitations is brought about by his being made to lose the awareness of his Real nature. The

power which deprives him of this knowledge or rather awareness of his Real nature is called *Māyā* or Illusion in Vedic philosophy and the result of this privation of knowledge is called *Avidyā* or ignorance. It is obvious that the words illusion and ignorance are used in their highest philosophical sense and we can barely get a glimpse into the real significance of these words. To understand *Māyā* and *Avidyā* in the real sense is to solve the Great Mystery of Life and to be free from their domination. This is the end and not the starting point of the search. The purpose of life would hint at the removal of *Avidyā* at each stage of existence as the *jīva* progressively realizes higher life stages or planes of existence until it reaches a stage wherein it is no longer limited by *Māyā* and therefore *Avidyā*.

This is called out as the stage of *Kaivalya* in YS 2.25 stated as: **Tad-abhāvāt samyogābhāvo hānaṃ tad dr̥ṣeḥ Kaivalyam.** This may be translated as: 'The dissociation of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* brought about by the dispersion of *Avidyā* is the real remedy and that is the liberation (or *Kaivalya*) of the Seer.'

Players of Perception

Now let us understand the role that *Avidyā* plays in perception of the world around us and within us. The Yoga Philosophy expounded by Patañjali has a common basis with Sāṅkhya philosophy on the conception of the world as composed of original spirit (*Puruṣa*) and original materiality (*Prakṛti*). Sāṅkhya philosophy goes on to explain the twenty three *tattvas* (principles) which constitute *Prakṛti*. They follow the chain of command as follows (Virupakshananda, 1995). The gross elements (earth, water, fire, air, ether) and the subtle elements (sound, element of touch, form, element of taste and odour) interact with each other and create impressions on the instruments of the sense organs (*jñānindriyas*). The *jñānindriyas* (hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell) which in turn inform the mind (*manas*) which may be

called as the lower mind or objective mind. From *manas* there is a flow to the intellect through the *chit* (the field of consciousness/ mind stuff/ subconscious) which provides memories from past experiences to the *buddhi* (the subjective mind) which may be called as a higher mind or 'discriminative faculty' which interacts with the underlying 'Self', 'psyche' or 'soul' (*Ātman*). It is the *Ātman* which is the subjective 'Self' which inspires the reaction to the input. The identity of 'I'-ness or ego (*ahaṅkara*) is also a player involved in the interaction between the various components of mind. The feedback to the external input originates from this underlying Self to enable a suitable and required response through the *buddhi*, *manas*, *chit* and *karmindriyas* (speaking, holding, moving, procreating, eliminating). The gross elements, subtle elements, *karmindriyas*, *jñānindriyas*, *manas*, *buddhi* and *ahaṅkara* together constitute the twenty three *tattvas* in Sāṅkhya philosophy.

Any imperfection in any one of the stages in perception (*karmindriyas*, *jñānindriyas*, *manas*, *buddhi*, *ahaṅkara*) then there is a flaw in the ultimate perception and final action accordingly. This imperfection may be called as an expression of *Avidyā*. It causes a false perception of Reality even though the ego (*ahaṅkara*) may take that false perception to be true. An alignment and integration of these 'different players in perception' within the human individual is required for a clear perception of the world (the events and activities around oneself) and the Self (the *Puruṣa*).

This process of integration and alignment is the real practice of Yoga and is expressed in YS 2.28 as: **Yogāṅgānuṣṭhānādaśuddhi-kṣayejñāna-dīptirā viveka-khyāteḥ.** This may be translated as: 'From the practice of the component exercises of Yoga, on the destruction of impurity, arises spiritual illumination which develops into awareness of Reality (Discriminative Knowledge)'.

The general principle underlying the destruction of *Avidyā* given in this sūtra is prescribed as the practice of uninterrupted *Viveka-Khyāti*. *Viveka* means discrimination between the Real and the unreal. *Khyāti* may be translated as knowledge or consciousness. So *Viveka-Khyāti* means knowledge of the discrimination between the Real and the unreal (Taimni, 1968). When one practices continuous *Viveka-Khyāti* then *Avidyā* does not exist for oneself. The corollary that when one is not in the state of *Viveka-Khyāti*, one is back within the grasp of *Avidyā*, also holds true. When one has gone beyond various states of *Samādhi* and established in *Kaivalya* one is permanently beyond the grasp of *Avidyā*.

Lalaji the Adi-guru of the Sahaj Marg system of Raja Yoga also refers to three doors of the mind the lower, middle and higher which correspond to the physical, mental and spiritual realms or gross, subtle and causal bodies. When the mind settles on the gross body it gains more experience because of 'the world of multiplicity' being perceived by the senses (Ram Chandra, 2010). It gets material for development of feelings of envy, hatred, enmity, of attaining better condition and progress. When the mind settles in the subtle body it gets opportunity to think, meditate, decide and adhere to a particular decision and has a mixed condition of happiness and sorrow. Lalaji explains the four functions of the four forms of the mind as '*chitta*' (or '*chit*') the thinking faculty, '*manas*' contemplating instrument, '*buddhi*' deciding instrument (intellect) and '*aharīkara*' dwelling upon a decision; 'I' ness or ego (Chandra, 2010). When the mind rises above these two stages it gets peace, stability and carefree happiness. The author relates the three components of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss (*Sat-Chit-Ananda* in *Vedanta*) as corresponding to the gross, subtle and causal bodies as their respective states.

Vehicles of Consciousness

The *Taittiriya Upanishads* offers the *Panchakośas* (five sheaths) personality framework wherein the 'Self' (or *Ātman*) is covered by several layers called *kośas* in Sanskrit, which means "sheath, vessel, container or layer." They are the sheaths through which the Self/Soul functions simultaneously in the various planes of existence. It is important to understand that the presence of one's 'Self' operating through a particular sheath comes to the awareness of one who is alert, sensitive and attentive to his inner conditions while on the path of Rāja Yoga.

Each *kośa* in order of increasing subtlety are explained as below:

1. *Annamaya kośa*: The sheath composed of food-the physical body, being the coarsest of sheaths.
2. *Pranamaya kośa*: Sheath composed of *prana* (vital force) also known as the etheric or health body. It coexists within the physical body as its source of life, breath and vitality, and is its connection with the astral body. The astral body consists of *pranamaya kośa*, *manomāyakośa* and *vijñānamaya kośa*.
3. *Manomāyakośa*: Mind sheath, the lower astral body also known as the instinctive-intellectual sheath of ordinary thought, desire and emotion or lower mind.
4. *Vijñānamaya kośa*: The sheath of cognition, is the cognitive-intuitive sheath. It is the vehicle of higher thought, understanding, knowing, direct cognition, wisdom, intuition and creativity.
5. *Ānandamayakośa*: Sheath of Bliss, the intuitive-super-conscious sheath, the foundation of all life, intelligence and higher faculties is also called as the causal body. There is some disagreement as to whether this *kośa* is the *Ātman* itself. However, being *akośa* there must be some limitation. It is the *Ātman* which shares with *Brahman* the qualities of expansiveness, vastness, unlimitedness and is Peace (Narayana, 2004). There may be various

interactions and overlaps between 'the players of inner perception' in prior chapter as functions of the mind and the *Panchakośas* as forms that sheath faculties of the mind but this paper does not aim to explain those details. But the role of Yoga in developing the discriminating faculty or *Viveka* is the first step which progresses towards the ultimate abolishing of *Avidyā* and consequent Self Realization.

Swami Sivananda relates the 'Players of perception' and the '*Panchakośas*' (Krishnananda, 2015) as follows:

1. The *annamaya kośa* is comprised of *tamoguna* (*tamas* as a *guṇa*).
2. The *karindriyas* are located in the *pranamaya kośa*⁴ which is a product of *rajoguna* (*rajas* as a *guṇa*).
3. The *manomāyakośa* consists of the mind (*manas*), the subconscious (*Chit*) and the five *jñānindriyas* or the sense-organs of knowledge. It is a means of enjoying pleasure and pain.
4. The *vijñānamayakośa* consists of the intellect (*buddhi*) and the ego (*ahankar*) working with the help of the five *jñānindriyas*.
5. The other name for *Avidyā* is *ānandamayakośa* or *karanasarīra* of *jīva* (individual soul). The impressions of all past *karmas* of all past births are lodged there. *Avidyā* is *Malina-Sattva* or *Sattva* polluted by *Rajas* and *Tamas*. There is a preponderance of distractive activity and stupor in *Avidyā*. The force of *Avidyā* limits the consciousness to such an extent that the individual is falsely made to believe that its body is the entire truth. Not only the body but even the objects and persons fictitiously connected with the interests of the body are also superimposed on the self and their loss or pain is considered as a real loss to the self itself.

There is a terrible degeneration of consciousness in the case of the individual earthly being. It first forgets the Reality; secondly it centres its consciousness in a localised body; thirdly it drags other external bodies also to its self and regards such of the few as are beneficial to its egoistic pleasures as its own self and consequently begins to hate those entities or individuals which are not connected with its interests or which are set in opposition to it (Krishnananda, 2015).

When *Avidyā* is dispelled, the whole universe disappears from sight, and only the Supreme *Brahman* is beheld. *Avidyā* is miniature *Māyā* or perhaps a personal *Māyā* for the individual. It is the cause of the appearance of the outer bodies of the individual. So to answer the question posed by the title of this paper. It is a boon as well as a bane it presents the chief obstacles in Yogic endeavour. Overcoming or realising one's *Avidyā* is the very definition of yogic endeavour. It is not a merely a boon or a bane; rather it is the central challenge to the endeavour.

Solution to *Avidyā*

We have seen the relationship between the 'players of perception' and the *Panchakośas* explained in the last two chapters. The role of *Avidyā* is causal with respect to the nature of miseries that contribute to the development of the subtle and gross bodies from viewpoint of the causal body as well as the latter *kośas* from the viewpoint of *ānandamayakośa*. It is the cause for *Puruṣa* being in a state of bondage and his experience of the lower worlds as manifested by *Prakṛti*. *Avidyā* also causes the eternal *Puruṣa* to take on the form of limited subconscious as *chit* within the *annamāyakośa*.

⁴ The five *pranas* are also included in this *Kośa*.

The detailed and comprehensive practice of Rāja Yoga, with both the preliminary Kriyā Yoga as well as the key practice of *dhyana* in relationship to *kleśas* is reflected in the three sutras below:

YS 2.1 states: **Tapah-svādhyāyēśvara-praṇidhānāni kriyā-yogaḥ.**

This may be translated as: 'Austerity, self-study and resignation to Išvara constitute preliminary Yoga (Kriyā Yoga).'

YS 2.2 states: **Samādhi-bhāvanārthaḥ kleśa-tanūkara-ṇārthaś ca.**

This may be translated as: (Kriyā -Yoga) is practised for attenuating *kleśas* and bringing about Samādhi.

YS 2.11 states: **Dhyāna-heyās tad-vṛttayaḥ.**

This may be translated as: The active modifications (of *kleśas*) are to be suppressed by meditation.

As per the above three *sūtras* the preliminary Kriyā Yoga defined as austerity, self study and submission to God (Išvara) help make the *kleśas* more and more subtle within the human being while supported by *dhyāna* where inactive modifications (of *kleśas*) are suppressed.

In the system of Sahaj Marg the Yogic transmission called *Pranahuti* is used to accelerate this transformation in the nature of *kleśas* by heart based meditation (*dhyāna*). Shri Ram Chandra explains that movement between a few points in the 'heart region', 'mind region' and 'central region' leading up to the 'Centre'⁵ which existed prior to 'Creation' takes at least a lifetime in past systems but due to the system of *Pranahuti* a shortcut is made available with the possibility that the 'Centre' itself may be attainable in one's current lifetime irrespective of where their journey starts (Ram Chandra, 2015). The system of Sahaj Marg and the use of *Pranahuti* may

warrant further research to evaluate its effectiveness in eradicating the state of *Avidyā* in Yogic Endeavour.

Through the practice of the system *Rāja Yoga* one reaches a state of *Viveka-Khyāti* and *Kaivalya* wherein one is beyond the influence of *Avidyā*. *Avidyā*'s role in Yogic endeavour is therefore comparable to the role of a villain in a play. The villain separates the hero from the heroine and thereby is the primal 'cause'. It may appear that it is the only original or 'real' bane that existence has offered. Overcoming various obstacles, re-uniting with the heroine and consequently abolishing the villain in order to reign supreme at the end is the 'goal' for the hero. The experience of overcoming the challenges posed by the villain makes the hero the 'one above all' at the end of the play. Thereby *Avidyā*'s role is also the real boon to the seeker, offering the opportunity to fulfil one's 'real' destiny as the hero.

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⁵ The conception of these three regions and Centre is unique to Sahaj Marg and has been expounded by Babuji from a state of superconsciousness in 'Sahaj Marg Philosophy'.

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