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THE YOGA INSTITUTE

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SOCIOLOGY

WERE YOGINS HELD IN LOW ESTEEM?

What status do the yogins enjoy in old India, specially when references to their being not invited to religious ceremonies occur?

MODERN scholars are sometimes found to deduce such conclusions from the statements of ancient works, as are not only illogical but also ridiculous. A noteworthy example of this tendency concerning yogins, is shown here, of these scholars.

While dealing with a certain religious rite known as *śrāddha*, the Vāyupurāṇa is found to state that *śrāddhas* should be carefully offered to yogins as what is eaten by an adept in Yoga, saves one from great fear; a yogin is superior to a thousand householders, a hundred forest hermits and a thousand students.

Quoting these verses Dr. R. C. Hazra, a well-known scholar of Purāṇic literature, remarks that 'such prominence given to yogins is not traceable in the Law-Books of Manu and Yājñavalkya, who do not seem to have held yogins in high esteem'.

Dr. Hazra seems to have laid undue stress on the reference to not inviting yogins in a *śrāddha* rite. In fact such an invitation is a gross form of social behaviour. This invitation does not in any way glorify the position of a yogin of higher order. There is reason to surmise that only those practitioners of Yoga were invited in a *śrāddha* rite, who belonged to the initial stage of Yoga. It is inconceivable that persons possessing true Yoga, i.e. possessing, *samprajñāta* or *asamprajñāta* form of Yoga, possess the desire to attend a *śrāddha* ceremony. All such rites and customs are looked by these yogins as nothing but disturbing factors. It is to be noted in this connection that according to law authority Manu, a *brahmacārīn* is to be invited in a *śrāddha* rite. This tends to prove that persons practising external forms of Yoga or belonging to the initial stage of Yoga were usually invited in a *śrāddha* rite.

The view of Vāyu Purāṇa that a yogin is superior to the three *āśramins* is nothing but a laudatory statement only. Absence of a similar statement in the Law-books of Manu or Yājñavalkya, does not prove that these sages did not hold Yoga in high esteem. The exalted view on Yoga as found in several verses of Manu and Yājñavalkya places yogin in a much more superior position than is given by the aforesaid verses of the Vāyu purāṇa. It is needless to say that one who praises Yoga necessarily praises yogins, for Yoga cannot be found in a person other than a yogin.

We have to just read the following statements to realise the importance that yogis held in society :

Yājñavalkya regarded Yoga as the highest form of *dharma* and expressly stated that Yoga is the means for realising *ātman* and *paramātman*.

Both Manu and Yājñavalkya aver that divine qualities are to be acquired through *prāṇāyāma*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyaṇa*, *indriya-nirodha* i.e. *pratyāhāra*, *ahimsa* and other forms of *yama* and *niyama*.

There are a few statements that directly speak of the exalted character of yogins. Yājñavalkya says that if a person leaves his body (i.e. expires) after being perfect in Yoga, he would attain immortality. Does this statement not prove that Yājñavalkya held yogins in the highest esteem?

It is a pity that an Indian scholar may think without any hesitation that persons like Manu and Yājñavalkya did not hold yogins in high esteem, simply because they have not stated that *śrāddhas* should be carefully offered to yogins

R. S. BHATTACHARYA