



Vidyodaya Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences



VJHSS (2023), Vol. 08 (01)

Neo-Platonism in Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*

S. R. Bhandari

Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Tribhuvan University, Pokhara, Nepal

Article Info

Article History:

Received 09 Sep 2022

Accepted 28 Nov 2022

Issue Published Online

01 January 2023

Key Words:

God Consciousness

Kriya Yoga

Neo-Platonism

Liberation

the One

ABSTRACT

This article uncovers the congruity of Neo-Platonism in Autobiography of a Yogi by Yogananda. The philosophy of Neo-Platonism postulates that the phenomenal creation is the emanation of the Cosmic One which radiates pervasive wisdom, the world soul and the living being. Thus, the spark of divinity dwells in every living being. Likewise, Yogananda's Autobiography of a Yogi expounds that the entirety of creation is the qualitative growth of the unitary cosmic consciousness that is known as God. With the experience of Kriya Yoga, one can transform this mundane identity into a cosmic self by establishing communion with cosmic consciousness or God. This is the ultimate way to realize God Consciousness, liberating oneself from the bondage of the phenomenal world. Besides, this work also enthralls the dichotomy of soul and body by substantiating the concept that creation is the idea of a divine unitary mind. The body is the source of frozen energy. The moment it embraces yogic vibes, it suffuses to realize its original source. In this way, both Neo-Platonism and Yogananda unite to open the gateway to realize the effulgence of the One, the highest Good, cosmic consciousness, or God. To explore these concepts, this article implements the paradigm of qualitative approach, interpreting Autobiography of Yogi from the philosophical lens of Neo-Platonism propounded both in the East and the West.

*Corresponding author

E-mail address:

bhandarisabindra@gmail.com



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3906-4605>

Journal homepage:

<http://journals.sjp.ac.lk/index.php/vjhss>

<http://doi.org/10.31357/fhss/vjhss.v08i01.14>

VJHSS (2023), Vol. 08 (01),
pp. 247-259

ISSN 1391-1937/ISSN
2651-0367 (Online)



Faculty of Humanities and
Social Sciences 2023

1. Introduction

This article unveils and explores the aura and ideations of Neo-Platonism postulated by philosophers like Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus in the West and the classical Upanishads, the Dhammapada, and Tao Te-Ching in the East. It also equally interprets and explores how *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda (2018) enriches and redefines the spirits of Neo-Platonism, giving it a practical shape by blending its spirit with the scientific aspects of *Kriya Yoga* and the dichotomy of soul and body. The aura of Neo-Platonism, postulated both in the East and the West, centralizes the concept of the unitary mind or consciousness that they name as the One. The principle is that all the phenomenal manifestation is the emanation of the play of that cosmic One. In this regard, every pattern of creation is the microcosm of that macrocosm. To simplify it, there is divinity in us. This is the fundamental principle that Yogananda (2018) unveils, unmask, and enriches in his work *Autobiography of a Yogi*. He believes that the cosmic mind that he names God is the unitary light or consciousness that dwells in every pattern of creation. The realization of that cosmic consciousness is the stage of super consciousness. To attain that blissful stage, he proposes the pragmatic theory of *Kriya Yoga*. The practice of that yoga illumines the spark of that cosmic mind that dwells within us, liberating us from material bondage. In this regard, this article aims to crystallize how the great minds both from the East and West formulate a similar essence of spiritual evolution.

Autobiography of a Yogi was first published in 1946 A.D. It relates the life story and the spiritual evolution of Paramahansa Yogananda (1593-1952 A.D.). He was born in India in a pious Hindu family as Mukunda Lal Gosh. Since this work dazzles out spiritual insights that he received in the eastern and western world, it thus becomes a rendezvous for the various religious and philosophical truisms from the East and the West.

Yogananda (2018), in his autobiography, cites Babaji about the importance of bridging the East and the West:

East and West must establish a golden middle path of activity and spirituality combined,' he continued. 'India has much to learn from the West in material development; in return, India can teach the universal methods by which the West will be able to base its religious beliefs on the unshakable foundations of yogic science. (p. 353)

This is the significance of this book as it poses the theory of universal religion that ties people from every corner of the world. He is a yogi who is "an ascetic, the man of self-control, follower of the path of Yoga" (Panikkar, 1994, p. 900). The Sanskrit word "yoga" has its root in "yuj" which signifies "to bind together". Frawley (2018) defines yoga "means union. . . which aims at guiding us to our own self-realization, an inner unity with the Divine unity and universal, no simply subordinating us to an outer religious identity" (p. 10). In this regard, the basic fundamental of this book is to expound the realization of god consciousness with the pragmatic implication of yogic experience.

1.2. Review of Literature

Autobiography of a Yogi holds great value in the arena of literature. Since the date of its publication, it attracted various commentaries and critical appreciation. There are significant reviews of this book. Besides, scholars like Philip Goldberg and Durga Mata also wrote the biography of Yogananda. Distinguished scholar Evans-Wentz (2018) hails it by substantiating that it is a great book by a wise man from India, and more than that it "is a book about yogis by a yogi" (p. xiii). That's why; the book must differ from other books by authors belonging to different arenas. The context and ideas expressed in the book transcend the demarcation of our day-to-day life. In this regard too, the book needs a new lens to

divulge its nucleus, and Neo-Platonism could fulfill its intensity at this point.

The book received wide recognition throughout the world. In America, it brought a new trend of yogic trend and has been able to record a sale of more than four million copies. Goldberg (2010) in his *American Veda* writes a very succinct comment that suffices to expose the nature of the book. He writes:

Filled with miracle-making yogis and magical moments, the life story of the most influential Indian guru to settle in America is, for some readers, just a good yarn and exotic travelogue. But for those with the heart of a seeker, it's an introduction to Vedic philosophy, yoga practices, and concepts such as karma, kundalini and *siddhi* (extraordinary power). (p. 110)

This commentary settles the area of this book. It dazzles out the heart of the matter of this book. The book never fails to enthrall the readers with its mystical insights and the essence of the Vedanta and other sub-parts of the Vedas. It gives an esoteric touch to the subject matter excluding the exoteric one. It is one of the fundamental patterns of the Neo-Platonic philosophy that is to unveil the esoteric aspect of knowledge. Thus, this study proves to be justifiable.

Clark (2020) substantiates the idea of Yogananda's autobiography. He views that the "transmission of *Kriya Yoga* to the USA and elsewhere significantly shaped the understanding and practice of yoga in the twentieth century" (pp. 95-96). It centralizes the point that the power of autobiography and the blending of various philosophical tenets are so pervasive throughout the world. This is another point to consider the value of yogi's autobiography with a new revisiting. Of course, it demands because the voice of Yogananda (2018) dignifies human life. Mata Durga (1993), one of his disciples, signifies the power of his radiance. She says:

You have heard Master's voice on records and tapes; therefore, I can only add that seeing the expression of his eyes and face and gestures, plus the power of his own soul's perception, gave the voice a power of conviction. Hearing his voice on the lecture platform, singing or talking, many were healed of body, mind, and soul. Such words of wisdom and love came through one of God's greatest vehicles, Master and his God power-driven voice. (p. 150)

Reading the autobiography is entering into a new panorama. A materialist may be skeptical about his ideas and philosophy. But, after the full reading of the book, one accepts his ideas because he blends the multiple strands of philosophical ideations and blends science and faith. That's why; a new perspective of Neo-Platonism to approach the text becomes significant.

Yogananda (2018) in his *Autobiography of a Yogi* proposes the religion of universal brotherhood. His biographer Goldberg (2018) in *The Life of Yogananda* justifies that he has established a new creed and dogma; rather he has proposed a new principle of the science of the soul. He views that there is only one religion which is the religion of God-Consciousness because there is only one God. This is perhaps the highest contribution of Yogananda to disseminate the principle of the catholicity that all paths lead to the same God. Neo-Platonism also postulates unitary consciousness. So, the point of coalescence should be explored. In this regard, this new revisiting proves to be justifiable.

1.3 Statement of Problem and Research Questions

Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* radiates the concept of a cosmic mind that is unitary one. The yogic realization communes with the cosmic mind, disregarding the bondage of body and matter. The stage of super consciousness can be attained when one immerses in that cosmic light that is the primal source. Besides, the whole creation

emanates from that unitary consciousness that he names as God. These ideations of God-consciousness are the fundamentals of the Neo-Platonism postulated by Neo-Platonist philosophers like Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus. They proclaim that the entirety of creation is the emanation of the One. All the hierarchies are simply the gradation of the One in this great chain of being. These are the points that bring Neo-Platonists and Yogananda together. Thus, to explore these dynamics, this paper answers the following research questions: a) what are the syncretic aspects of Neo-Platonism postulated both in the East and the West? How does Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* harmonize and enrich all the fundamentals of Neo-Platonism, blending them with the scientific touch of *Kriya Yoga*?

2. Materials and Methods

This article qualifies new perceptions about the syncretic aspects of Neo-Platonism. So, it implements the qualitative approach to research. Flick (2021) views that qualitative research explores the new obscurity. Besides, postmodernism argues that the era of big narratives and theories is now gone. Locally, temporally, marginalized, and hitherto neglected narratives are now required. Since there is a canonical shift in the research, this study proposes to explore a new obscurity, analyzing the concepts of Neo-Platonism in Yogananda's (2018) *Autobiography of a Yogi*. In this way, Neo-Platonism becomes the theoretical lens to view the text. To select the concepts and phenomena from the text, it has applied the purposive sampling method because according to Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2015), this method focuses on specific concepts while excluding other unnecessary concepts. Thus, the ideas related to the spirit of Neo-Platonism in the book become the primary source of concern. Content analysis and thematic analysis are the ways to interpret the concepts. To maintain validity, it applies thick descriptions. Besides, this paper equally values the related criticisms, book

reviews, and other online sources as secondary sources of concepts to prove the claim by establishing arguments.

3. Results and Discussion

The following sub-sections interpret and explore the tenets of Neo-Platonism and their vivid implications in *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Yogananda.

3.1. The Syncretic Strands of Neo-Platonism

In the arena of Greek philosophy, Stoicism and Epicureanism ostensibly had their warp and woof on materialistic outlook. Unlike them, Neo-Platonism had its vibes to dazzle the relationship between the cosmos and creatures, and in a broad term between the creator and the creature. This philosophical movement synthesized the tributaries of philosophical thoughts that flowered after Plato. The philosophy, though had its roots in different religious philosophies as well, founded its right path with the philosophical ideations mainly of Plotinus (A.D. 204-70). His successors Porphyry (234-305 A.D.), Iamblichus (245-325 A.D.), and Proclus (412-85 A.D.) enlarged his philosophical insights. These philosophers were labeled as the "Neo-Platonists" and their philosophical speculations as Neo-Platonism. They were at some points influenced mainly by Plato's transcendental philosophy of ideas or archetypal forms as real and the material gross reality stands as simply the copy of them with the foundational notion that "what we seem to see around us is not the 'ultimate' reality, but that the real world is somehow hidden" (Law, 2013, p. 27). Yet, it would be misleading to confine them then only within this framework because this movement flowered after the Hellenic era and Christ and Christianity. In this aspect, it could not remain aloof from the various and diverse trends and tenets of the philosophical thoughts of that time.

Plotinus' philosophy had its haven in his work *Enneads* which was compiled by his successors Porphyry. Later on, other successors like Iamblichus and Proclus directed Neo-Platonism toward the mystical zone with a touch of religious philosophy. Since this philosophy debunks the reality of matter, it centralizes the mind as more fundamentally real than matter. The cause precedes the effect, therefore, the causative force of the universe grounds reality more than the universe itself. Grayling (2019) consolidates the philosophical vibes of Neo-Platonism, as he says:

Since mind is ontologically prior to matter, the ultimate cause of the universe is therefore mind or consciousness, and moreover is a single unitary mind. They regarded this unitary mind as divine and variously called it 'the One', 'the First', 'the Good'. (p. 124)

There is a single reality; the manifested reality is its just variegated forms. It is 'the One' that guides the entire creation. This concept of the unitary source is better expressed in the speculations in Taoism by Tzu (1997) as he says, "The Tao produced the One. The One produced the Two. The Two produced the Three. The Three produced All Things" (p.42). The ultimate reality resides in "the One". The One is in all and all is in the One. There remains the fundamental philosophical quest of Neo-Platonism. Consciousness as the primary cause also finds its culmination in the Upanishads. The Upanishads are the source of perennial philosophy. Navlakha (2000) claims that they were compiled and composed between the period of 900 to 600 B.C. The Upanishads known as Vedanta, according to Zimmer (2011), have been discussed as the philosophical part of the Vedas of Hindu philosophical systems. They talk about the final truth. *Aitareya Upanishad*, one of the principal Upanishads, basically claims that the whole creation is the play of consciousness that exactly resembles Neo-

Platonic postulation of consciousness as the causative force of the universe. *Aitareya Upanishad*, in its final culmination, disseminates the grandeur thought as it projects, "all this is directed by consciousness grounded in consciousness; the world is guided by consciousness, the consciousness is its basis, the consciousness is Brahman!" (3:3; Deussen trans., 2010, p. 20). *Brahman* is the name for ultimate reality in the Upanishadic philosophy. The resemblance shows that Neo-Platonism dazzles out as the leitmotif of various philosophical thoughts.

When Neo-Platonism claims the oneness of reality and the unitary mind, it finds its syncretic vibes with the ancient Upanishadic philosophy of the Hindu. In the Rig Veda, the oldest book ever written, there is great speculation about the power of the One as the source of creation. Macdonnell et al. (2014) claim its date cannot be later than the thirteenth century B.C. The Rig Veda expresses the grandeur of the truth of "the One" and its intensity in this way:

Neither death nor immortality was there then,
No sign of night or day.
That One, breathed, windless by its own energy:
Naught else existed then. (Rig Veda X, 129; Blocker trans. 1999, p. 19)

The Rig Vedic and Taoist speculations radiate the concept that the truth is only one. Only the radiations have their multifaceted forms. Likewise, *Chandogya Upanishad* from the Hindu philosophical system of Vedanta also supports the oneness of reality as it says, "In the beginning, my dear, there was that only which, being alone, is one only, without a second" (6.2:1; Muller trans., 2000, p.186). The idea of a unitary mind also finds its ideations in *Aitareya Upanishad* as it proceeds, "The self, verily, was (all) this, one only, in the beginning. Nothing else whatsoever winked" (1.1:1; Radhakrishnan trans., 2016, p.515). In this way, the strands of philosophical speculations consolidate the

unitary “the One” as the source of creation because there are various paths and names for the truth, but all lead to the same goal as beautifully expressed in the Rig Veda, “*Ekam sat vipraha bahudha vadanti*. . . Truth is one, the wise call it by many names” (as cited in Goldberg, 2010, p.10). The goal of Neo-Platonism, thus, represents the goal pointed out in various religious schools.

Neo-Platonists believe that the cosmos is the emanation of “the One”. It transcends all dualities and categories. Since the main purpose of human life is to realize the One, one should attempt to rise beyond the gross reality of this material reality and body. This is possible by realizing the hierarchal chain of creation. Since the One is the primary, there are two other categories namely *nous* (consciousness or mind), and from *nous*, the soul is formed. Tarnas (2000) substantiates the crux of Neo-Platonic philosophy:

The first creative act is the issuing forth from the One of the divine Intellect or Nous, the pervasive wisdom of the universe, within which are contained the archetypal Forms or Ideas that cause and order the world. From the Nous comes the World Soul, which contains and animates the world, is the source for souls of all living beings, and constitutes the intermediate between the spiritual Intellect and the world of matter. The emanation of divinity from the One is an ontological process which Plotinus compared to the light that moves gradually outward from a candle until it at last disappears into darkness. (p. 85)

The heart of the matter remains that the entire worldly manifestations are the formation of the soul and the matter. The soul as the main quality of the One dwells there. In this regard, human is the miniature of the One. The interaction between consciousness and matter radiates cosmic manifestation. Consciousness has its standing while the

matter becomes subordinate as it takes the power from the One. This powerful speculation finds its explanation in the *Prasna Upanishad*:

In the beginning, the Creator longed for the joy of creation. He remained in meditation, and then came Rayi, matter, and Prana, life. These two', thought he, 'will produce beings for me'.

The sun is life and the moon is matter. All that has form, solid or subtle, is matter: therefore, form is matter. (1:4; Mascaro trans., 1965, p.67)

The discussion centralizes how the vibes of Neo-Platonism find their coalescence and concordances breathe in the diverse philosophical schools. With the combination of matter and spirit, the whole creation goes ahead. It also radiates the concept that human has the potentiality to reach the zenith of spiritual realms after attaining liberation from the sensory world.

Plotinus studied his philosophical knowledge in Alexandria. Gaarder (1996) claims that the place was the meeting point between oriental and Greek philosophy. This is the reason that we find the echoes of various philosophies resounding in Neo-Platonism postulated by him. As Neo-Platonists believe, humans are at once divine because the spark of the one dwells in them. So, the “purpose of a life of virtue is to revert to unity with the one” (Grayling, 2019, p. 129) by going beyond the sensory pseudo world. This idea blends in with Buddha’s *the Dhammapada*:

If you want to reach the other shore, don't let doubts, passions, and cravings strengthen your fetters. Meditate deeply, discriminate between the pleasant and the permanent, and break the fetters of Mara.

Those who are free from fear, thirst, and sin have removed all the thorns from their life. This body is the last. (349, 350, 351; Easwaran trans., 2015, p. 236)

Mara is the earthly illusion created by the gross reality. Buddha waves the path that to attain Nirvana demands blowing out the negativity and illusory aspects of the gross world. At this juncture, Neo-Platonism finds its strands in Buddha's philosophy.

While discussing the syncretic dynamics of Neo-Platonism, it remains equally important to pinpoint its affinity with Christianity. Grayling (2019) opines that if we view Neo-Platonism as a religious philosophy, we find the idea of salvation is deeply engraved in the philosophies of Christianity and Neo-Platonism. At that time, Neo-Platonism remained as an alternative to Christianity because Neo-Platonism became a source for Christianity while at the same time adapting many ideas from it. The idea of trinity postulated by Neo-Platonism—though it also matches with Hindu's concept of trinity i.e. *Brahma* as the creator, *Bishnu* as the preserver, and *Shiva* as the liberator – resembles the Holy Trinity of Christianity; yet they have still the point of departure that demands a long discussion. So, in this context, Russell (2013) and his summation hold the entirety of the relation between the two when he says, "The work of transmitting what could survive of his philosophy was performed by Christian philosophers of the last age of Rome" (p. 280). This would be the right detection to reveal the prescience of Neo-Platonism.

3.2 *Autobiography of a Yogi: The Coalescence of Neo-Platonism*

Autobiography of a Yogi, in its true spirit, does not only relate to the life history of Yogananda; rather it canonizes the spiritual evolution of a man of daily affairs in a yogi with the power of *Kriya Yoga*. In its essence, this work of classics expounds the yogic

experience of a man who climbs the ladder to unite with the One by discarding the external boundaries and worldly limitations and tutelage. This is the spirit of Neo-Platonism that enriches its intensity in the philosophy of *Kriya Yoga*. Besides, he becomes a cosmic wave with the power of *Kriya Yoga*. This practice is not simply poetic in words but combines science in its essence. Yogananda (2018) explains the science and facts that is in its foundation:

Kriya Yoga is thus "union (yoga) with the Infinite through a certain action or rite." A yogi who faithfully follows its technique is gradually freed from karma or the universal chain of causation. . . .

Kriya Yoga is a simple, psychophysiological method by which the human blood is decarbonized and recharged with oxygen. The atoms of this extra oxygen are transmuted into life current to rejuvenate the brain and spinal centers. By stopping the accumulation of venous blood, the yogi is able to lessen or prevent the decay of tissues; the advanced yogi transmutes his cells into pure energy. Elijah, Jesus, Kabir and other prophets were past masters in the use of *Kriya* or a similar technique, by which they caused their bodies to materialize and dematerialize at will. (p. 247)

Since our soul emanates from the One, we have the potentiality to know that unitary mind, as Neo-Platonists believe, with the "flight from the body as necessary for the soul's philosophical ascent to the divine reality" (Tarnas, 2000, p. 84). The above facts provided by Yogananda about the power of *Kriya Yoga* that caused the body "to materialize and dematerialize at will" give the ineffable realization after boarding the flight from the body.

When the inner brain and spine are suffused with the cosmic vibrations by the

intermediary of *Kriya Yoga*, the body starts to long for its essence which is *Nous*. This is the point where the body and soul work as the bridge from this world to that realm of the essence as proclaimed by the philosophy of Neo-Platonism. In this regard, the yogi gives a practical shape to the ideations of the Neo-Platonic spirit. Elijah, Jesus, and Kabir realized the One with this application of yoga. Yogananda, at this juncture, projects a universal religiosity by coronating them as the real *Kriya Yogi* from antiquity. Goldberg(2010) hails this dynamic assimilation of Yogananda and says, "This combination of scientific rationality and respect for the Judeo- Christian tradition would become the hallmarks of his approach and were no doubt key to his success in winning minds and hearts" (p. 113). What a sense of unifying the diverse strands!

In the ideal of Neo-Platonism, *Nous* slithers towards the One. It is the light that leads our soul toward infinity. So, to perceive the divine unitary mind, we have to "study our soul when it is most god-like" (Russell, 2013, p. 273). *Autobiography of a Yogi* projects the study of the soul unlike the understanding of phenomenal nature and reality, and *Kriya Yoga*, in its essence, enables to separate the domain of body and spirit that embarks the realization of the One. Yogananda's expansion of *Kriya Yoga* unites the essence of the One that is in us with the real unitary the One. He expounds on the power of *Kriya Yoga*:

The *Kriya Yogi* mentally directs his life energy to revolve, upward and downward, around the six spinal centers (medullary, cervical, dorsal, lumbar, sacral, and coccygeal plexuses) which correspond to the twelve astral signs of the zodiac, the symbolic Cosmic Man. One-half minute of revolution of energy around the sensitive spinal cord of man effects subtle progress in his evolution; that half-minute of *Kriya* equals one year of natural spiritual unfoldment. (p. 251)

The phenomenal and material human becomes the cosmic human. One gets united with the real essence. This is the power of *Kriya Yoga*. It also pinpoints that the entirety of the creation is the play of consciousness and energy. The moment our body realizes its essence that it is nothing but simply the conglomeration of energy, the effulgence of the supreme mind dawns. According to Goldberg (2018), Yogananda replaces the physiological language to replace the yogic terminology "chakra" which is the source of subtle energy. The language of physiology replaces the yogic terminology for the center of subtle energy known as *chakras*. To attain that energy, the concentration should be on the third eye in the forehead, and focused breath should be moved to attain the life force called *prana* (cosmic energy). In this regard, *Yogi's Kriya Yoga* lands a seeker to make a union with the cosmic vital principle that is another way of self-realization and cosmic consciousness.

Yogananda's *Kriya Yoga* remains as the practical application of Neo-Platonist ideals. Since the Neo-Platonists possess the self-assertions that human beings have divinity, these powerful ideations find perfect summation in Vedanta. The great scientist Schrodinger (2010) says, "Vedanta teaches that consciousness is singular" (as cited in Goldberg, 2010, p. 285). It is the expression of the idea of the One as the unitary principle postulated by Neo-Platonists. *Chandogya Upanishad* enriched this vision with these powerful words, "That which is the subtle essence, in it is the self of all that exists. It is true. It is the self, and thou . . . art it" (6.13:3; Muller trans., 2000, p. 193). We are all divine, and the divinity is within us, and we are that ultimate reality. So, we have to realize ourselves as beautifully expressed in *the Holy Bible*, "Here it is, or there it is, because the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke, 17:21). If this is the reality then again *the Holy Bible* opens the path as it proclaims, "so watch yourselves" (Luke, 17:3). The self-realization has its important goal in Buddhism too. Buddha in his *the Dhammapada* generates the

profound truth as he says, "Your own self is your master; who else could be? With yourself well controlled, you gain a master very hard to find" (160; Easwaran trans., 2015, p.157). What coalescence explained in different words! So, the Rig Veda's postulation that there is a single truth; only the wise call it by different names holds the starkest reality. In this aspect, the whole philosophical speculations play a single melodious tune with different vibrations.

The *Kriya Yoga* expounded by Yogananda is the way to lead to the realm of the ultimate reality, the One. However, Yogananda himself justifies that in reality the system of *Kriya Yoga* was founded by Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavadgita* chapter IVverse29; chapter V verses 27-28; chapter IV verses 1-2. Similarly, Patanjali also elaborated on it. It is the shortest way to attain liberation. Neo-Platonists also postulate the same ideals. They view that the shortest way "to reabsorption into the One is the philosophical life devoted to understanding the nature of reality" (Grayling, 2019, p. 129). *Kriya Yoga* projects devotion along with the perception of reality. It is the easiest but the most confirmed way to realize eternity. Yogananda(2018) explains:

One thousand *Kriya* practiced in eight hours gives the yogi, in one day, the equivalent of one thousand years of natural evolution: 365,000 years of evolution in one year. In three years, a *Kriya Yogi* can thus accomplish by intelligent self-effort the same result which nature brings to pass in a million years. The *Kriya* shortcut, of course, can be taken only by deeply developed yogis. With the guidance of guru, such yogis have carefully prepared their bodies and brains to receive the power created by intensive practice. (p.251)

The power gained by this yogic practice is to be realized because it is ineffable. The shortcut route, though it is, gives a perception

of the One of which rising is never to be faded. The illumination is from the mortal mind to the supermind. Mehta (2006) clarifies, "Man's spiritual stature is to be judged from the condition of his mind and not from his demonstrable code of behavior" (p.35). Once the effulgence of spirituality is attained, it never sinks into darkness. Every duality vanishes in this stage when one rises beyond the antagonism of these gross realities. This is the blissful stage.

The blissful stage dawns the eternity where one communicates with the One and merges with it. Yogananda (2018) shares this experience in his *Autobiography of a Yogi*. It touches the inner depth of one's soul. He shares the perception of that blissful stage:

In the initial states of God-contact (*sabikalpa samadhi*) the devotee's consciousness merges with the Cosmic Spirit; his life force is withdrawn from the body, which appears "dead," or motionless and rigid. The yogi is fully aware of his bodily condition of suspended animation. As he progresses to higher spiritual states (*nirbikalpa samadhi*), however, he communes with God without bodily fixation, and in his ordinary waking consciousness, even in the midst of exacting worldly duties. (p. 250)

The evolution from consciousness to super-consciousness remains the sole goal of the real *yogi*. With the true spirit, one can attain this communion with the highest good. That is the sole projection of Neo-Platonism and Yogananda. It is *Autobiography of a Yogi*, writes Clark (2020) which "presents aspects of science and interpretations of religious experience that were *courant* at the time, which are blended into the divine metaphysics of *Kriya Yoga*" (p.94). This is the essence of this work of classics that blends the diverse strands of philosophical schools.

3.3. The Dichotomy between Soul and Body

The realization of the dichotomy between soul and matter is the essence to perceive the realm of the One. This is the foundational basis of Neo-Platonism. Soul and matter (body) belong to two distinct levels of stratification. The soul conjoins to the higher plane while the body is to the lower. Grayling (2019) justifies that still, the matter is the emanated form of *Nous* (omnipresent consciousness or wisdom of the universe), and so it is a part of the divine. It is dull and passive and regarded as the low level of reality in the hierarchy. It is an edge of the chain of activities that flows from the One, and perhaps a shaded region of another point of existence. Yoganada's *Autobiography of a Yogi* talks about this dichotomy by blending science and spirituality. Though matter composes of body particles and the soul is in the domain of consciousness and mind, their perfect harmony brings the creation and activities in the creation. This is the fundamental of *Sankhya* philosophy propounded by Kapila. In *Taoism* too, the blending of active and passive or dull forces brings the creation of perpetual cycles. Tzu (1997), the major propounder, says, "All things carry Yin and hold to Yang\ Their blended influence brings harmony" (p. 42). "Yin" is the dull or passive force while the "Yang" is the active, conscious, and energetic force. Their blending brings activities and creation.

Autobiography of a Yogi substantiates the ideations of the soul-body dichotomy. Yogananda (2018) views the body as the gateway to realizing cosmic consciousness. Each creature of this creation is the microcosm of the macrocosm. He consolidates this dichotomy:

Great saints who have awakened from the cosmic mayic dream and realized this world as an idea in the Divine Mind, can do as they wish with the body, knowing it to be only a manipulatable form of condensed or frozen energy. Though physical scientists now understand that

matter is nothing but congealed energy, fully-illuminated masters have long passed from theory to practice in the field of matter-control. (p. 294)

The body is the frozen energy and with the power of a yogic touch, it starts to evolve to realize its primeval source that the One. The projection that this creation and the phenomenal world is the emanation of the single mind remains as the metamorphosis of the concept of the One postulated by the Neo-Platonists. A person, going beyond this duality perceives the ultimate reality because according to Schopenhauer (2013), this phenomenal world and matter are just the manifestation of the single reality that is the ultimate one (as cited in Law, 2013, p. 203). Every matter then is the stuff of that cosmic consciousness. The only way to realize it is by rising above the gross reality with the power of yogic or philosophical insight. This world is nothing more than the veil of *maya* (divine illusion).

What is real appears to us as unreal and vice versa. This is because of the snarls of bodily temptations. But the realization gives illumination. Plotinus (2013) says in his *Enneads*:

Yet, there comes the moment of descent from intellection to reasoning, and after that sojourn in the divine, I ask myself how it happened that I can now be descending, and how did the Soul ever enter into my body, the Soul which even within the body, is the high thing it has shown itself to be. (as cited in Russell, 2013, p. 274)

The realization of the soul is the ultimate goal. This power of the soul is to guide the body. The body moves because of the soul. In this regard, Russell (2013) justifies that matter or the fact that the body is passive and cannot exist without the power of the soul. If the soul does not exist, matter dwindles and proves to be anything. So, it is the essence and nourishment of the body. It is the breath of

life. It should be realized. Yogananda (2018) says, "The soul must stretch over the cosmogonic abysses, while the body performs its daily duties" (p. 153). The soul always longs for cosmic spirit while the body only acts as its subordinate. This distinction is persuasive if these are the perceptions of Yogananda and Neo-Platonists, regarding the dichotomy of soul and body; they are dualists like Plato and Descartes.

This soul and mind dichotomy remains a crucial matter of discussion throughout the development of eastern and western intellectual traditions. Yogananda's philosophical discussion could not remain aloof from it, yet he redefines and enriches the clarity on this issue. *Autobiography of a Yogi* (2018) claims that one should transfer the affinity from the creation to the creator, the more one "realizes his unity with Spirit, the less he can be dominated by matter. The soul is ever-free; it is deathless because birthless" (p. 173). If divinity transcends the fetters of death and decay dwells within us, then it is worthless to get attached to the pros and cons of these bodily attachments and must make a quest for the One. Yogananda (2018) provides a practical analogy as he says, "A cinema audience can look up and see that all screen images are appearing through the instrumentality of one imageless beam of light. The colorful universal drama is similarly issuing from the single white light of a Cosmic Source" (p. 287). This consolidates Plotinus' concept. For him, evil is nothing but simply the absence of the light from the One. Gaarder (1996) justifies that the One illumines the soul. The matter is far from hierarchical stratification and so bears no existence. If the body conjoins the matter, then it lacks its existence. At this point too, they both play similar beats of the music of philosophy.

Yogananda's autobiography throughout the whole narration disseminates the radiance of the cosmic mind or god over the fleshy gross reality. He does not simply talk; rather gives a practical shape to this dichotomy. Yogananda

(2018) blends the soul-body dichotomy plausibly. He cites a poem from Adi Shankara that reveals what a human being is:

Mind, nor intellect, nor ego, feeling;
Sky nor earth nor metals am I.
I am He, I am He, Blessed Spirit, I am He!
No birth, no death, no caste have I;
Father, mother, have I none.
I am He, I am He, Blessed Spirit, I am He!
Beyond the flights of fancy, formless am I,
Permeating the limbs of all life;
Bondage I do not fear;
I am free, ever free,
I am He, I am He, Blessed Spirit, I am He!"
(p. 234)

This is the summation of the entire speculative and formative patterns of Neo-Platonism. It synthesizes the dichotomy between body and soul as well as mind and body. The entirety of all the manifested and phenomenal corporeal existence is the One. The One is in all and vice versa. Only the difference is the qualitative presence of the One. No doubt, the poem projects that the soul or spirit bears the qualitative gravity of the One than matter and body. The realization of the soul is the way to liberation. Jesus' proclamations add greater intensity to perceive the in-depth dichotomy as he speaks, "The spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing" (John, 6:63). So, one should evolve as a spirit out of the body. Yoga and its eight limbs along with the power of meditation always lead to the realm of the One. That's why, Jesus' words recur as invincible armour as he says, "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for a soul?" (Mathew, 16: 26). The internalization of the poem by Shankara and Jesus' words give a prescience of the Neo-Platonists ideals.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Autobiography of a Yogi by Yogananda blends the multiple strands of Neo-Platonism postulated in the eastern and western

philosophies. It projects that the soul and phenomenal manifestations are the emanations of the cosmic mind. This work formulates the practical aspects of *Kriya Yoga* that ultimately become the pathfinder to merge into the cosmic the One. The hierarchy category of the One, *Nous*, soul, and body postulated by Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus find their perfect haven in the concepts of the cosmic mind, God, and the dichotomy between soul and body in the *Autobiography of a Yogi*. It radiates a heartstring way to realize that fleeting the self in the earthly mirth does not recapture the original source from where human beings emanate. The genial perception of the One delivers the passport to overpass the vibratory domain of the gross and phenomenal reality. The moment one is in the full swing to make a flight from the duality and realizes that a person is the microcosm of the macrocosm of the cosmic the One, the liberation is played out. After the realization of the original source, one evolves from the becoming and immerses in the being. In the great chain of stratification, the stages of realization merge this earthly voice with the cosmic voice. This is the fundamental of Neo-Platonism. The two stages of self-realization namely *Sabikalpa Samadhi* and *Nirbikalpa Samadhi* become the foundational goal of Yogananda postulated in his practical application of *Kriya Yoga* and the understanding of soul-body dichotomy. The first stage establishes communion with God, and the latter merges the seeker in the consciousness of the One. No bodily fixation and grossly bondage bind the seeker at this stage. This is the blissful stage when the yogi is surcharged with the vibrationless genuine source. One becomes the cosmic spirit. To name a few, the greats like Jesus, Plotinus, Silesus, Adi Shankara, St. John, Lahiri Mahasaya, and Swami Yuktswar attained that spiritual zenith. May the world surcharge with these vibes of Neo-Platonic spirit to liberate from bodily fixations and attain the domain of the One! This work demands a

systematic revisiting from the perspective of mysticism.

5. References

- Blocker, H. G. (1999). *World philosophy, an east-west comparative introduction to philosophy*. Prentice-Hall.
- Clark, M. (2020). Book review: Biography of a yogi. *Journal of Yoga Studies* (2020), Vol. 3, 93–96. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34000/JoYS.2020.V3.004>
- Croucher, S. M. & Cronn-Mills, D. (2015). *Understanding communication research methods*. Routledge.
- Deussen, P. (Trans.). (2010). *Sixty upanishads of veda* (V. M. Bedkar & G. B. Palsule trans. from German). Motilal Banarasidass.
- Durga, M. (1993). *A Paramhansa Yogananda, trilogy of divine love*. Joan Wight Publications.
- Easwaran, E. (Trans.). (2015). *The dhammapada*. Jaico.
- Evans-Wentz, W. V. (2018). Preface. In P. Yogananda, *Autobiography of a yogi*, (pp. xii-xiv). Penguin Ananda.
- Flick, U. (2021). *An introduction to qualitative research*. Sage.
- Frawley, D. (2018). *What is hinduism?* Bloomsbury.
- Gaarder, J. (1996). *Sophie's world*. Berkley Books.
- Goldberg, P. (2010). *American veda*. Three River Press.
- Goldberg, P. (2018). *The life of Yogananda*. Hay House.
- Grayling, A. C. (2019). *The history of philosophy*. Penguin Books.

Law, S. (2013). *The great philosophers*. Quercus.

Macdonnel, A. A., Oldenberg, H., & Muller, F. M. (Trans.). (2014). *The golden books of the holy vedas*. Vijay Goel.

Mascaro, J. (Trans.). (1965). *The upanishads*. Penguin Classics.

Mehta, R. (2006). *From mind to super-mind*. Motilal Banarsidass.

Muller, F. M. (Trans.). (2000). *The thirteen principal upanishads*. Wordsworth Classics.

Navlakha, S. (2000). Introduction. In F. Max Muller, *The thirteen principal upanishads* (pp. ix-xxxi). Wordsworth Classics.

Panikkar, R. (1994). *The vedic experience*. Motilal Banarsidass.

Radhakrishnan, S. (Trans.). (2016). *The principal upanishads*. HarperCollins.

Russell, B. (2013). *History of western philosophy*. Routledge.

Tarnas, R. (2000). *The passion of the western mind*. Pimlico.

The holy bible

Tzu, L. (1997). *The Tao of power (Tao te ching)* (R. L. Wing Trans.). Thorsons.

Yogananda, P. (2018). *Autobiography of a yogi*. Penguin.

Zimmer, H. (2011). *Philosophies of India*. Motilal Banarsidass.