



Review Article

Concept of Brahmacharya in Indian philosophy

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Abstract

Food, sleep, and sex are common requirements in animals and humans. Sexual instinct is prevalent in animals and humans equally. Only when one overcomes this instinct and channelizes the urge and the energy in a controlled way is real progress in life possible. As per ancient Indian knowledge, semen or vital juice tones the nerves and brain and energizes the whole human body. By the vow of celibacy, one can preserve his vital force and sublimate it into Ojas (shakti). Rtambaraprajna (true knowledge) comes from preserving veerya (semen). It is only possible by abhyasa (steady practice) for a long period. When men and women are involved in sexual activities for procreation only, then it is the real observance of Brahmacharya.

Introduction

Brahmacharya (celibacy) is the control over sexual urges and sex organs. Avoidance of sexual activities physically, mentally and verbally is considered Brahmacharya. It is

considered one type of physical Tapas (austerity). Worshipping Gods, Brahmins, and learned persons, practicing cleanliness, simplicity, Brahmacharya and ahimsa are some of the physical Tapas (Das, 2021).

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ब्रह्मचर्यं नाम गुप्तेन्द्रियस्योपस्थस्य संयमः (व्यासभाष्य 2.30)

कायेन मनसा वाचा सर्वविस्थासु सर्वदा
सर्वत्र मैथुनत्यागं ब्रह्मचर्यं प्रचक्षते ॥ (गरुडपुराण पूर्वखण्ड 238.6)

एतन्मैथुनमष्टाङ्गं प्रवदन्ति मनीषिणः
विपरीतं ब्रह्मचर्यं सेवनीयं सदा वुधैः ॥ (दक्षस्मृतिः 7.32)

देवद्विजगुरुप्राज्ञपूजनं शौचमार्जवम् ।
ब्रह्मचर्यमहिंसा च शरीरं तप उच्यते ॥ (गीता 17. 14)

Any sexual act dispirits the nervous system and results in loss of energy. Excessive sexual intercourse drains energy enormously. According to Ayurveda, veerya (semen) is blood's purest and most concentrated essence. Out of forty drops of blood, one drop of semen is manufactured. The three factors, mana (mind), prana (breath), and veerya (semen) are interlinked with each other, which are like three pillars of Jivatma (individual soul). We can control one of these three factors by controlling the other two factors. By restraining prana, the movement of the mind and veerya is restrained (Sivananda, 1997).

आहारनिद्राभयमैथुनं च सामान्यमेतत्
पशुभिर्नराणाम् । (नरसिंहपुराणम् 15.13)

Brahmacharya has two components: 'Brahma' (the absolute, eternal, supreme God) and 'Charya' (to follow). So Brahmacharya is a lifestyle adopted to attain the ultimate reality. It leads to the conservation of shukra dhatu, which is responsible for bala (strength), veerya (semen), yash (fame), and dhairya (patience). These qualities assist higher faculty like prajnya (intellect), leading to correct decision-making power. A healthy state of mind is achieved with Brahmacharya. (Upadhyay, 2014). Gandhi had described Brahmacharya as a search for Brahma (truth). The commonly accepted sense of Brahmacharya is "control in thought, word and action", of all the senses, at all times and in all places. It is the elimination of sexual desire. Satya (truth), ahimsa (nonviolence), satyagraha (nonviolent resistance) and Brahmacharya are an essential part of Gandhian thought (Lal, 2000). Gandhi tried to educate Indians to practice an asexual

life for cultural liberation through the practice of Brahmacharya (Choudhury and Rath, 2022). In the views of Asian sexologists, sexual science was not just a corpus of knowledge about the body and its sexual functions but a method for combating ignorance (Botre and Haynes, 2017).

Brahmcharya in Yoga

Brahmacharya is one of the Yamas (self-discipline). Yama is one of the different limbs of Yoga described in various classical texts such as Patanjali Yogasutra, Vedanta Sara, and Aparokshanubhuti. Yamas are those restrictions that are required for self-discipline in life. Controlling the Indriyas (senses) while realizing that everything is Brahman (universal soul) is called Yama. It should be practiced again and again. Different types of Yamas are described in various Samhitas like Trsikhobrahmana Upanisad, Varaha Upanisad, Darsana Upanisad, Sandilya Upanishad, Manadala Brahmana Upanisad, Patanjali Yogasutra, Hatharatnavali and Yogayanjyavalkya (Das, 2021).

शरीरसाधनापेक्षं नित्यं यत् कर्म तद्यमः । (अमरकोशः 2.49)

सर्वं ब्रह्मेति विज्ञानादिन्द्रियग्रामसंयमः ।
यमोऽमिति संप्रोक्तोऽभ्यसनीयो मुहुर्मुहुः ॥ 104 ॥

Brahmacharya can be physical, mental, and verbal (Sivananda, 1997). The Astanga Brahmacharya (abstinence from eight types of sexual activities) are -remembering the opposite sex (mental), talking a lot about the opposite sex (verbal), amorous activities (physical), looking at him or her (physical), talking to him/her secretly (physical), mental resolution to do the sexual act (mental),

endeavour (physical), the accomplishment of the act (physical). Thus, abstention from all these activities is the observance of the complete Brahmacharya (Das, 2021).

ब्रह्मचर्यं सदा रक्षदष्टधालक्षणं पृथक् ।
श्रवणं कीर्तनं केलिः प्रेक्षणं गुह्यभाषणम् ॥
संकल्पोऽध्यवसायश्च क्रियानिष्पत्तिरेव च ।
एतन्मैथुनमष्टाङ्गं प्रवदन्ति मनीषिणः ॥
विपरीतं ब्रह्मचर्यं सेवनीयं सदा बुधैः ॥
(Daksha Smriti 7.31-32)

By the practice of Surya namaskara, Halasana, Sarvangasana, Sirshasana, Nadi shodhana pranayama, Bhastrika pranayama, Ujjayi pranayama, Moola bandha, Vajroli mudra, Ashwini mudra, the Mind and the Prana are automatically controlled. For this, one should have pure thoughts (Saraswati, 2004).

Brahmacharya in Ayurveda

Ahara (diet), Nidra (sleep), and Brahmacharya (celibacy) are the Tri-Upastambhas (three secondary supports) of life. Control of Indriyas (senses) and spiritual bliss conducive to the knowledge of Brahman is included in Brahmacharya (Sharma and Dash, 2011).

त्रय उपस्तम्भा इति आहारः निद्रा
ब्रह्मचर्यं चेति (चरक सूत्रस्थान 11.34)

As per Ayurveda, the function of seven Dhatus is Prinana (nourishment), Jivana (supporting life), Lepa (covering the body), Sneha (oleation), Dharan (supporting the body), Purana (filling the bone cavities) and Garbhotpadana (getting pregnancy) respectively (Vidyanath, 2012). The seventh Dhatu is Sukra (semen), the last Dhatu formed out of food. The prior six Dhatus are Rasa, Rakta, Mamsa, Meda, Asthi, Majja. Each Dhatu has its own Dhatwagni (digestive fire) which helps in the formation of the next

Dhatu. These Sapta Dhatus support our body and life. Our physical body, the heart and the intellect are nourished by semen (Sivananda, 1997).

A person who is moderate in sexual intercourse lives a long youthful life and becomes good-looking, fair, healthy, strong, and firm in his nerves and muscles. As per ancient Indian knowledge, excessive sexual intercourse produces Sula (colic), Kasa (cough), Jvara (fever), Karsya (emaciation), Pandu (anaemia), Kshya (phthisis), and Aksyepaka (epilepsy). So, it is prescribed that a husband should have sexual intercourse with his wife with a gap of at least three days in all the seasons except in summer, when he should have sex once in fifteen days (Kunjral, 2012). In ideal situation, a householder can have sexual intercourse with his wife once in a month at the right time to get progeny, not for sexual enjoyment. The husband and wife should have diet regulation, meditation, and observing fasts, religious practices and spiritual practices. They should also observe Swadhyaya by regular study of religious scriptures (Sivananda, 1997). Regular practice of Brahmacharya is essential to the collective social health of a nation (Haynes, 2020).

Sex and food consumption are very intricately related. One who wants to observe brahmacharya should avoid meat, fish, egg, tobacco, liquor, garlic, and onion. Onion and garlic are considered worse than meat. All kinds of non-vegetarian diets are restricted. One should take a very light diet at night. Heavy dinner is the direct cause of nocturnal emission (Sivananda, 1997). Those who want to follow Brahmacharya should always have Mitahara only. Moderation in the diet is called Mitahara. One should fill half of the stomach with wholesome food, and a quarter of the stomach with pure water. The other quarter should remain free. Description of mitahara is found in Yoga Kundali Upanishad, Hathayoga Pradipika and Gheranda Samhita (Das, 2021).

Benefits of Brahmacharya

One can have immense strength (physical, mental and spiritual) only when he/she practices Brahmacharya perfectly and regularly. Through brahmacharya one gains valor.

ब्रह्मचर्यप्रतिष्ठायां वीर्यलाभः (योगसूत्र 2.38)

One conquers death by Brahmacharya. To conquer death means being liberated. The knower of Yoga conserves sexual fluid. By conserving the sexual fluid, he conquers death. Because falling semen is death and conservation of the same is life. Therefore, one should protect it carefully. Protection of semen depends on the strong mental resolve to do so (Svatmarama, 1998).

एवं संरक्षयेद् बिन्दुं मृत्युं जयति योगवित् ।
मरणं विन्दुपातेन जीवनं बिन्दुधारणात् ॥ H.P. 3.87

चित्तायत्तं नृणां शुक्रं शुक्रायत्तं तु पौरुषम् ।
तस्मात् शुक्रं रक्षणीयं योगिभिश्च प्रयत्नतः ॥ H. P. 3. 89

Conclusion

Most of Indians consider the loss of semen as a threat to individual health. Dhat syndrome (related to semen loss) is considered as a culture-bound syndrome (Prakash et al., 2014). Hinduism always advocates Brahmacharya. Ayurveda, the oldest medical system of practice and the indigenous medical system of India, says that Brahmacharya is highly essential for healthy living and increased life span. Through brahmacharya semen and energy are conserved, increasing the chance of a prolonged life (Skandhan et al., 2021). It is described in Vedas that through Brahmacharya and tapas (austerity), the Devas (Gods) have conquered death (Sivananda, 1997). By the practice of Brahmacharya, sexual energy is transformed into spiritual energy. It is the

secret of complete physical health, mental health, and longevity.

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