

## A REVIEW STUDY ON SWADHYAYA (SELF-STUDY) IN ANCIENT AND MODERN PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*Svādhyāya* literally means 'to study oneself'. It is a larger concept which has many meanings. *Svādhyāya* is a 'Niyama' in various Hindu philosophies. Swadhyaya also means 'self-study' and reading the Vedas and other scriptures. Studying, listening, contemplating, contemplation etc. Of books related to life-making and reform leading to God and liberation is called *Svādhyāya*. Knowing about yourself and seeing your faults is also *Svādhyāya*. The lives of many great men have been transformed by the power of *Svādhyāya*. Satsang and *Svādhyāya* are both pillars for living a pure and happy life. Satsang awakens the spirit of *Svādhyāya* within a person. *Svādhyāya* has an important contribution in building life. *Svādhyāya* changes a person's life, behavior, thinking and nature.

**KEYWORD:** *Svādhyāya*, Behaviour, Thinking, Self-study, Nature, Moksha.

### INTRODUCTION

*Svādhyāya* is a Sanskrit term which means self-study and especially the recitation of the Vedas and other sacred texts. It is also a broader concept with several meanings. In various schools of Hinduism, *Svādhyāya* is a Niyama (virtuous observance) connoting introspection and "study of self".<sup>[1]</sup>

**Svādhyāya has many meanings<sup>[2]</sup>**

- a. Study of Vedas and related to Vedas
- b. Svādhyāyewhat we did – ; What we're thinking; could doWhat we sh; What are we afraid of, etc.
- c. Learning something by self-study, without a teacher

Svādhyāya is a compound Sanskrit word composed of sva (स्व) + adhyāya (अध्याय). Adhyāya means "a lesson, lecture, chapter; reading". Svā means "own, one's own, self, the human soul". Therefore, Svādhyāya literally means "one's own reading, lesson".

Svādhyāya is also a compound Sanskrit word composed of svā (स्वा) + dhyāya (ध्याय). Dhyāya means "meditating on". The root of Adhyāya and Dhyāya is “Dhyai” (ध्यायै) which means “meditate, contemplate, think of”. The term Svādhyāya therefore, also connotes “contemplation, meditation, reflection of one self”, or simply “to study one’s own self”.<sup>[3]</sup>

The term *Svadhyaya* has other meanings. In the Sruti, it refers to the historical practice of self-reciting Vedas to ensure it is memorized and faithfully transmitted, without writing, by the word of mouth, to the next generation. In various schools of Hinduism, particularly Yoga, *Svadhyaya* is also a Niyama, a virtuous behavior. As a virtue, it means "study of self", "self-reflection", "introspection, observation of self".<sup>[4]</sup>

*Svādhyāya* is translated in a number of ways. Some translate it as the "study of the scriptures and Darsanas."<sup>[5]</sup> Some translators simply use the word "study" without qualifying the type of study. Mac Neill translates it as "self-study or spiritual self-education".<sup>[6]</sup> Dhyāya, when used in the context of self-study in ancient and medieval Indian texts, is synonymous with *Abhyasa*, *Adhi* and *Viks*; while Adhyāya, when used in context of reciting and reading in Indian texts, is synonymous with *Anukti*, *Nipatha* and *Patha*.<sup>[7]</sup>

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Classical texts which were available from many ancient textbooks & PubMed databases available from net surfing was also reviewed as per the title. Research articles are included in review of this article.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### SVADHYAYA IN ANCIENT LITERATURE

Taittiriya Upanishad's emphasizes the central importance of *Svadhyaya* in one's pursuit of Reality (Rta), Truth (Satya), Self-restraint (Damah), Perseverance (Tapas), Tranquility and Inner Peace (Samas), Relationships with others, family, guests (Prajā, Prajana, Manush, Atithi) and all Rituals (Agnaya, Agnihotram).<sup>[8]</sup> Taittiriya Upanishad, however, adds in verse 1.9.1, that along with the virtue of *svādhyāyā* process of learning, one must teach and share (Pravacana) what one learns. This is expressed by the phrase "*svādhyāyappravacane ca*", translated as "and learning and teaching" by Gambhīrānanda.<sup>[9]</sup> In verse 1.11.1, the final chapter in the education of a student, the Taittiriya Upanishad reminds,

सत्यंवद। धर्मचर। स्वाध्यायान्माप्रमदः।

Speak the Truth, follow the Dharma, from *Svadhyaya* never cease. Taittiriya Upanishad, one of the earliest mentions of *Svādhyāya* is found in Taittiriya Aranyaka 2.15: "*Svādhyāyadhyetavyah*" ("*svādhyāya* must be practiced"). Śatpath Brāhmaṇa also repeats it. Chandogya Upanishad verse 4.16.1-2 recommends both silent (*mānas*) and vocal (*vāchika*) types of *svādhyāya*.<sup>[10]</sup>

### Swadhyaya - A revolution Shri

Have we ever thought about who made us, who makes us sleep, who keeps the memories of our past, who makes our blood, there is definitely only one answer to all the questions, there is definitely some power working continuously in this world which takes care of her children like a mother i.e. us continuously. We call this power God. Self-study *Svādhyāya* has given us many steps to express gratitude to that God by awakening the consciousness of what we do for God who has done so much for us. *Svādhyāya* is one of them.<sup>[11]</sup>

### Trikal Sandhya

Which says to remember God only three times a day. After getting up in the morning, at lunchtime and at night before sleeping. Self-study has given us three different mantras for the three periods.<sup>[12]</sup>

### After waking up in the morning

कराग्रे वसते लक्ष्मी, करमूले सरस्वती

करमध्ये तू गोविंद प्रभाते कर दर्शन।

Lakshmi resides in the front part of our hand, and Saraswati resides in the root of the hand, that is, God has given so much power in our hands, on the strength of which we earn wealth i.e. Lakshmi. On the strength of which we attain Vidya Saraswati. Not only this, The Lord Himself is sitting in the middle of the hand to coordinate the Saraswati and Lakshmi that we earn. In such a situation, why not start the day well in the morning by seeing your hand and realizing the power given by God and expressing gratitude to God.<sup>[13]</sup>

समुद्रवसने देवि पर्वतस्तन मंडले  
विष्णुपत्नि नमस्तुभ्यं पादस्पशं क्षमस्व मे।

Under this verse, forgiveness has been sought from Mother Earth. It has been said, Mother Earth, I do not know how many sins I am committing on You, every day I walk on You, You touch My feet, yet You bear the burden of those like me, so forgive me. Hence Mother Earth is called the wife of Bishnu.

वसुदेव सुतं देवं, कंस चारुण मर्दनं  
देवकी परमानंदं, कृष्णं वंदे जगतगुरुं।

The son of Vasudeva, the son of Kansa and Charuna, the red of Devaki, Lord Krishna are the gurus of this world. Kudos to them.

### Lunch Time

यज्ञशिष्टाशिनः संतो मुच्यन्ते सर्वकिल्बिषैः ।  
भुञ्जते ते त्वधं पापा ये पचन्त्यात्मकारणात् ॥  
यत्करोषि यदश्नासि यज्जुहोषि ददासि यत ।  
यत्तपस्यसि कौन्तेय तत्कुरुष्व मदर्पणम् ॥  
अहं वैश्वानरो भूत्वा प्राणिनां देहमाश्रितः ।  
प्राणापानसमायुक्तः पचाम्यान्नं चतुर्विधम् ॥  
ॐ सह नावतु सह नव भुनक्तु सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।  
तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु मा विद्धिषावहै ॥  
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Yajnashishta means the gentleman who consumes the rest of the remaining by surrendering to the gods by the yajna, is free from all sins, who cooks food only for himself selfishly, he eats the food of sin. O Arjuna, whatever deeds you do, whatever you consume, whatever havan you do, whatever you give, whatever penance or fasting, offer them all to God. I, the Supreme Soul, in the form of fire and the shelter of all beings, endowed with life, apan and other ages, digest the Chaturvidya food, drink, lehya, and chaushya food. O Supreme Soul,

protect both of us equally between the Guru and the disciple, that both of us may attain equal strength, that there should be no enmity between us. The learning we both studied was stunning. Let all our afflictions be retired.

We get food by the grace of God. No matter who cooks or grows, there is God's grace behind him. We say that farmers sow seeds and then they get food, but where did the first seed come from? What power of the farmer was used to make four thousand grains after sowing four grains in the field. He who gives birth to a living being cares for its nourishment. He who gave teeth gave the teeth. Oh, how has that Karunanidhi designed his body. Eat jowar millet roti or wheat roti, everyone's blood becomes red. Who cares about how food is digested after eating? Pomegranate combines with the blood to provide continuous strength, that much we know. Even great scientists are not able to make the same chemical from different substances. Therefore, it is the order of our culture to greet this invisible power who has grown food for us and digested our food and made red blood. One should remember God while eating food. Food is not just filling the stomach, it is a sacrificial act. God is the lord and enjoyer of all sacrifices.<sup>[14]</sup>

## OTHER SCRIPURES

Patanjali's *Yogasutra*, in verse II.- 44, recommends *Svadhyaya* as follows

स्वाध्यायादिष्टदेवतासंप्रयोगः॥

Study thy self, discover the divine. *Patanjali's Yogasutra*, Vishnu Smriti's verse 22.92, states that "human body is cleansed by water, the mind is cleansed by truth, the soul by self-study and meditation, while understanding is cleansed by knowledge".<sup>[15]</sup> Vasistha Dharmasastra verses 27.1 through 27.7 states that *Svadhyaya* helps an individual understand and overcome his past. Apastamba Dharmasutra 1.4.12.1 states *Svadhyaya* is a form of Tapas. This view is shared by Baudhayana Dharmasastra in verses 4.1.29 to 4.1.30, which adds that "svadhyaya is a means of getting past one's past mistakes and any guilt". Baudhayana Dharmasastra describes "Svadhyaya", in verse 2.6.11, as the path to Brahman.<sup>[16]</sup>

*Svādhyāya* is mentioned as one of the virtues in Bhagavad Gita 16.1. *Svadhyaya* is mentioned a second time in *Bhagavad Gita* verse 17.15 as a component of the discipline of one's speech by which, states the verse, "speak words that are truthful, kind, helpful, and elevates those who hear it".<sup>[17]</sup>

## SVADHYAYA AS A HISTORICAL PRACTICE

### Learning one's Vedic recension

As a tool for memorization, *svādhyāya* had a unique meaning for Vedic scholars as the principal tool for the oral preservation of the Vedas in their original form millennia. When used as a formal part of scriptural study, *svādhyāya* involves repeated recitations of scripture for purposes of mastering the mantras with their accurate pronunciation.<sup>[18]</sup>

The Vedas had not been committed to writing in ancient times. Almost all printed editions depend on the late manuscripts that are hardly older than 500 years, not on the still-extant and superior oral tradition. Monier-Williams defines *Sruti* as "sacred knowledge orally transmitted by the *Brāhmans* from generation to generations, the Veda".<sup>[19]</sup> Michal Witzel explains this oral tradition as follows.

The Vedic texts were orally composed and transmitted, without the use of script, in an unbroken line of transmission from teacher to student that was formalized early on. This ensured an impeccable textual transmission superior to the classical texts of other cultures; it is, in fact, something like a not just the actual words, but even the long-lost musical (tonal) accent (as in old Greek or in Japanese) has been preserved up to the present.<sup>[20]</sup>

The commentator Sayana discusses this term in the introduction of his commentary on the *R̥gveda*, in which he says that *svādhyāya* enables Vedic rituals to take place.<sup>[21]</sup>

Madhva, the dualistic Vaishnava philosopher, defined philosophy as the three-stage process of understanding (*śravaṇa*), reflection (*manana*), and application (*nididhyāsana*), expressing itself in two forms: study (*svādhyāya*) and teaching (*pravacana*). Of these two, Madhva considered teaching to be the highest aspect of discipline leading to Miksa Mādhavāchārya's views on *svādhyāya* are to be found in chapter 15 of *Sarva-Darśana-Sangraha*.<sup>[22]</sup>

### EXEPTIONS

There are certain days on which *svādhyāya* were prohibited, these were called *anadhyāya*, after which *svādhyāya* must be resumed on the following day; therefore, the day of resumption is also called *svādhyāya*.<sup>[23]</sup>

## SVADHYAY AS A NIYAMA



**Yoga meditation** – a means to the virtue of Svadhyaya.

Svādhyāya is one of the three key elements in the practice of yoga as defined in the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, appearing in the opening verse of Book two on spiritual practice and elaborated upon in two other verses.<sup>[24]</sup> Patanjali mentions *svādhyāya* a second time as one of the five recommended observances (niyamas), along with purity, contentment, austerity, and self-surrender. The five *niyamas*, together with the five abstentions (vamas), have been described as "'the ten commandments' of the *Sāṃkhya-Yoga*."<sup>[25]</sup>

The practice of Svadhyaya as a Niyama is perfected in many forms. One form of Svadhyaya is mantra meditation, where certain sound constructs pregnant with meaning are recited, anchoring the mind to one thought. This practice helps draw the mind away from outward-going tendencies, silencing the crowding of thoughts, and ultimately towards inward feeling of resonance.<sup>[26]</sup> It can alternately be any music, sermon, chant, inspirational book that absorbs the person to a state of absorption, trance, unifying oneness.

Svadhyaya is practiced as a self-reflection process, where one silently meditates, in Asana, on one's own behaviors, motivations and plans. Svadhyaya is, in a sense, for one's spirit and mind a process equivalent to watching one's body in a non-distorting mirror.<sup>[27]</sup> This self-study, in Yoga, is not merely contemplation of one's own motives and behaviors, but also of one's circumstances and the environment one is in, assessing where one is in one's life, what is one's life direction, if and how desirable changes may lead to a more fulfilling Self.<sup>[28]</sup>

## DISCUSSION

True Svadhyaya is that by which our worries are removed, our doubts are resolved, harmony and good thoughts arise in the mind and the soul experiences peace. In our scriptures, the great importance of self-study has been described. Reading the Arsha-Granth from the



Brahmachari Acharya clan, doing Vidhi Seva-Sushruva etc., living in a family with Samavartan Sanskar, making oneself, children and other people religious by self-study in the holy place, subordinating all the senses, subordinating all the senses, not doing violence to the living beings even in other places of pilgrimage, Having thus passed through the whole life, one acquires the status of Moksha and is freed from the cycle of birth and death.

## CONCLUSION

Svadhyaya of the scriptures is very important to make human life happy, prosperous and cultured. Svadhyaya is the true sweetheart of human life and food for the soul. Svadhyaya inspires us to make life an ideal. Svadhyaya is the key to all our life-related problems. Svadhyaya helps us in building our character and leads us to God-realization. Svadhyaya is the gate to heaven and the step to liberation. All the great men, scientists, saints, mahatmas, sages, maharishis, etc. in the world were Svadhyaya. The study and meditation of the true literature of Svadhyaya is the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita, etc. and the biographies of great men. Anything that is read cannot be called Svadhyaya. It is not self-study to read books full of entertainment, novels, plays and makeup. Reading such literature is actually a misuse of time and defiling your soul. It should be considered a sin to even touch ugly dirty literature. *Svādhyāya* has an important contribution in building life. *Svādhyāya* changes a person's life, behavior, thinking and nature.

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23. Sanskrit text of verses 2.1, 2.32, and 2.44 and discussion as a key practice, see: Taimni, 1961; 127–128, 220, 250.
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