

Mind and Its Purification in the Philosophy of Advaita Vedanta

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ABSTRACT

The concept of mind occupies an important place in the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. The mind consists of three *gunas*, namely, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Every man is a combination of all the three *gunas*, in varying proportions and they constantly act on one another. *Sattva* represents knowledge and calmness, *Rajas* represents activity and desire, and *Tamas* represents laziness and ignorance. The mind is capable of purification (*citta suddhi/ sattva suddhi*). It refers to the betterment of character. Purification of the mind is the mandatory condition for the onset of Brahman-*atman* knowledge. Purification of the mind is effected by providing the mind with wholesome food and through the process of bringing about a change in the constitution of the mind in such a manner that *sattva* predominates over the other two *gunas*, namely *rajas* and *tamas*.

Keywords: *Gunas, Sattva, Rajas, Tamas, Citta/Sattva Suddhi*

Mind is a finer/subtle substance within and pervades the gross body of man. The mind is a subtle substance as its stuff consists of the subtlest part of the food part-taken by man. In his commentary on the *Chandogya Upanishad (VI.5.1)*, Sri Sankara states that the food when part-taken is transformed into three parts. The grossest part turns into excrement, the medium constituent becomes the flesh and the subtlest part forms the mind.

The components of the mind

According to Advaita Vedanta, the mind is compound of three substantive forces called *gunas*, namely, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, which are also the basic constituents for the entire universe. In his *Vivekacudamani (Verse 111-119)*, Sri Sankara states that *maya-avidya*, the cause for the emergence of the mind, consists of the three *gunas*. *Tamas* has its veiling power (*Avrti-shakti*) promoting ignorance, laziness and causes man's repeated transmigrations. *Rajas* has its projecting power (*Viksepa-shakti*), promoting worldly activities causing bondage. Pure *sattva* (unmixed with *rajas* and *tamas*) promotes cheerfulness, contentment and devotion to the *atman*. The *Bhagavad Gita (Chapter XIV, Verses 5 & 17)* and the *Pancadasi (II, 14-16)* of Sri Vidyananda also defines the three *gunas* according to their effects, namely, *Sattva* represents knowledge and calmness, *Rajas* represents activity and desire, and *Tamas* represents laziness and ignorance.

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Every man is a combination of all the three *gunas*, in varying proportions. The predominance of one of the three *gunas* over the other two determines the dominant personality trait of a man's nature. The *Bhagavad Gita* (Chapter III, Verse 33) states that every man acts in accordance with his/her own nature dictated by the combinations of the *gunas*. The three *gunas* constantly act on one another.

The purification of the mind (citta suddhi/sattva suddhi)

According to Advaita Vedanta, the mind is capable of purification (*citta suddhi/ sattva suddhi*). It refers to the betterment of character.

Now, the question is that why should the mind be purified?

According to Advaita Vedanta, purification of the mind is the mandatory condition for the onset of Brahman-*atman* knowledge. In his commentary on the *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* (IV.iv.22), Sri Sankara points out that only a purified mind can easily know the self, that is revealed by the *Upanisads*. In his introduction to the commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Sankara proclaims that only a purified mind becomes fit for practicing the discipline of knowledge which, in due course, generates the liberating knowledge itself.

Further in his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* (Chapter V, Verse 26), Sri Sankara clearly explains the path-way to *Moksa* thus: first the purification of the mind (*sattva suddhi*), then knowledge (*jnana*), then renunciation of all actions (*sarvakarma sannyasa*) and finally *Moksa*. This state is known as the state of *Jivanmukti*.

Now, the question is how is the mind purified?

According to Advaita Vedanta, purification of the mind is effected by providing the mind with wholesome food and through the process of bringing about a change in the constitution of the mind in such a manner that *sattva* predominates over the other two *gunas*, namely *rajas* and *tamas*.

We have already seen that the mind is formed of food. The *Chandogya Upanisad* (VII.26.2) states that when the food is pure, the mind becomes pure. When the mind becomes pure, memory becomes firm. When a man is in possession of a firm memory, then all the worldly bonds are loosened. Therefore, by part-taking pure food, the mind is purified.

Another dimension to the purification of the mind lies in the purification of the *sattva* at the cost of *tamas* and *rajas*. In his *Vivekacudamani* (Verse 278), Sri Sankara points out how *sattva suddhi* is achieved. He proclaims that *tamas* is destroyed by both *sattva* and *rajas*. *Rajas* is destroyed by pure *sattva*.

The *Bhagavad Gita* (Chapter XIV, Verse 18) proclaims that the inner journey of mind purification starts from a predominantly *tamasic* state of existence to the *rajasic* state, and in turn, from a predominantly *rajasic* state of existence to the *sattvic* state of existence.

Thus, we are able to observe that the mind is capable of purification and a purified mind enable the realization of the self/Brahman-*atman*, in the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta.

CONCLUSION

From the foregone discussion, we are able to observe the fact that the concept of mind is an important cog in the wheel of Advaita Vedanta. It is often stated that the one's own mind is

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the cause for bondage as well as for liberation. The *Bhagavad Gita (Chapter VI. Verse 5)* proclaims that one must oneself subdue one's weakness and raise oneself by oneself.

Let us conclude by understanding that Advaita Vedanta is very positive and practical in showing that whatever be the present state of a man's mind, the mind can always be purified for the onset of Brahman-*atman* knowledge/ realization. Further, we are also able to understand that the purification of the mind may be effected irrespective of caste, creed, culture, religion, class, gender, etc. This reflects the all-inclusive and universal nature of Advaita Vedanta.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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