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## Understanding of Mind & Body and States of Consciousness in Upaniṣads: An instrument to reach absolute in modern perspective

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**Abstract**—Ancient India has great tradition of philosophy and Indian thinkers have contributed a lot in the field of metaphysics and spirituality and thus it's been the most prominent achievement of Hindu thinkers, but this richness is not only in metaphysics but also we get ample of material from original works on Indian philosophy dealing with Mental sciences like Psychology, Ethics, logic etc. Mental science, although, was never an independent branch of study for ancient Indian thinkers but in the course of advancing knowledge on metaphysics and spirituality they have made valuable contributions to describe issues related to various mental sciences.

This research paper is an attempt to explore and find out the fact that how ancient Indian thinkers have analyzed different aspects of human psychology during their practice of self-realization and attaining spiritual enlightenment. This research is based on the study of relationship of Body & Mind and different states of consciousness mentioned in major Upaniṣads and their use as an instrument for motivation.

**Keywords-** Consciousness, Turīya, Modern perspective, Absolute.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Upanishads are sacred treatises, spiritual and philosophical in nature. They are the foundations on which most of the later philosophies of India rest. As we know that the second section of the Vedic literature is *Jñāna kāṇḍa*, the part that deals with knowledge. This segment is the spiritual and philosophical part and consists of the several *Upaniṣads*. In the course of imparting knowledge on spirituality major *Upaniṣads* talk about human psychology. They, indeed, are source of information regarding origin of mental sciences in India.

The aim of the *Upaniṣads* is not so much to reach philosophical truth but it seems to bring peace and freedom to the anxious human spirit. They express the restlessness and anxiety of the human mind to grasp the true nature of reality. The central theme of the *Upaniṣads* is the search of what is true.

In solving the question of the nature of ultimate reality, ancient thinkers used the method of philosophical analyzing the nature of the self which has been called '*Ātman*' in *Upaniṣads* and this question is discussed in metaphysical as well as in psychological manner.

As ancient Indian thinkers were really interested in psychological states of human being they explored and analyzed relationship between Body & Mind. In *chāndogyopaniṣad* some general characteristics are mentioned which the self or *Ātman* should possess, "The 'self' who is free from old age, death and grief etc. *ya ātmāpahataavijarovimrtyurviśoko-----vedyante* [1]. In *Praśnopaniṣad* [2] two terms have been used for the '*Ātman*' e.g. *Bhoktā* and *Kartā*. These two terms together indicate towards the fact that psychological or conscious aspect of activity is *Manas*. The conscious side of the soul's activity is carried on by *Manas* with the help of ten senses *daśendriya* and

it controls both the sensory and motor organs. It coordinates the impression received from outside. In *taittirīyopaniṣad*, mind is called as *Brahman* (*manobrahmetivyajanātmanaso hi eva khalu imāni bhūtāni jāyante* [3]).

This concept is observed by modern psychologists and they also have accepted mind's control over body. Rita L. Atkinson and Richard C. Atkinson have mentioned that no discussion of consciousness is complete without considering mystical claims of mind. They opine that a person's attitude and expectations can control what happens to bodily process. These authors of "Introduction to Psychology", 8th edition strongly believe in the theory of mental control over body [4]. In *chāndogyaopaniṣad* it's been stated that physical and mental are closely correlated. This reference scientifically brings out the relation between speech, mind, thought and other functions of the body and provides a sequence of priority that which functions of the body is greater than other. (*vāgvā va nāmno bhūyasi mano vā va vāco bhūyahsamkalpo vā va manaso manaso bhūyānvītam vā va samkalpādbhūyah* [5]). The *taittirīyopaniṣad* described the five sheaths (*koṣaḥ*) of an individual. First there is the body, the *Annamaya*; which is physical. Within the body is the *Prāṇamaya*; the vital force. Within this vital force the *Manomaya*; the mental sheath. Inside the mental sheath is the *Vijñānamaya*; the self-consisting of understanding, Inside this intellectual sheath is the *Anandmaya* the self-consisting of bliss [6].

In order to understand beautiful and thoughtful travel from mental science to self-analyze, this doctrine of 'Koṣās' proves to be an important reference. There are the physical, the biological, the behavioral, the intellectual, and the self-actualizing components. The behavioral components, the *Annamaya koṣa* and the *Manomaya koṣa* are common in all human beings. This is the *Vijñānamaya koṣa* which distinguishes the man and the animal and contributes to develop understanding for ultimate wisdom.

The *Kaṭhōpaniṣad* gives another description. The body is compared with chariot and the self with the lord of the chariot. The intellect is the charioteer, the sense organs are the horses and the mind is the reins with which the horses are held in control *ātmānam rathinam viddhi śarīram rathamevatu. Buddhim tu sārathim viddhi manaḥ pragrahameva ca* [7]. When the individual has no understanding and when the mind is fickle, the senses are out of control. It is the learned man who has control over the rein of his mind and senses, is able to reach the end of his journey of spiritualism.

## II. STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

What is the consciousness? In the words of R.A. Baron, renowned scholar of Modern Psychology; "sometimes we feel more alert and energetic during day time than other days. Very often we daydream with no idea what is happening around. So many times we lost and our thoughts are thousand miles away while doing some other work. If we observe our above mentioned behavior we come across that we all are experiencing different states of consciousness which are called as levels of awareness of internal and external stimuli in the terms used in studies of modern Psychology" [8]. According to Baron till the

later years of 20th century the study of consciousness was largely ignored by psychologists. It was considered as less important topic, but few decades' ego consciousness has become an important area of Psychology.

Modern psychologists may have not recognized consciousness as an important topic for their studies of psychology but in ancient India sages or thinkers were well aware of this branch of mental science and in the course of their philosophical discussion they, very consciously, described importance of different states of consciousness. It, in fact, is the one of the unique contribution our ancient thinkers have made in the field of mental science.

In the context of *Prajāpati's* instruction to Indra concerning the real self, we find the unique analysis of the various states of consciousness. The *Upaniṣads* identify four states consciousness: (a) Waking (*Jāgrat*), (b) Dreaming (*Svapna*), (c) Deep sleep (*Suṣupti*), (d) *Turīya* [9].

First three states of consciousness are common with what modern psychology describes and that too rather with more minute details, These states of waking, dream, and dreamless sleep are within the experience of all human beings and directly connected with body and mind and thus provide ample of material for the studies of mental science.

The fourth state called *Turīya* is unique state attained only by few. In this condition the individual is neither conscious of external objects nor of internal objects. This is the state which is incommunicable and indefinable. Dr. B. Kuppaswami says that *Turīya* state resembles with *Suṣupti* state as in both the states there is the withdrawal of normal consciousness. In *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* these four states of consciousness are mentioned in the form of four quarters of the self. It says that the first quarter is *Vaiśvānara*, whose sphere is the waking state. The second quarter is *Taijasa* whose sphere is the dream state. The third quarter is *Prājña*, whose sphere is the deep sleep state [10]. Fourth quarter of self is self itself.

## III. MODERN PERSPECTIVE

How can we understand idea of consciousness mentioned in Upanishads in modern perspective? Answer of this curiosity is given by Kittu Reddy, A professor in Pondicherry, who was invited by chief of staff of the Indian Army, general B.C. Joshi to help raise the level of motivation in the Army from the prevalent normal level of consciousness to higher spiritual level. According to Dr. Kuttu, there are certain reasons to join Army. Along with making a living, spirit of patriotism and the spirit of self-sacrifice (which is not a very common motivation to join Army but does come in certain level) are important reasons to join Army. He also found that Army is a collective organization where the individual is always secondary to the group. Army officers or *Jawāns* are taught; the safety and welfare and honour of the country come first and foremost. This, indeed, is the area where idea or attitude of spirituality can be instilled.

Now question arises that why imparting the knowledge of consciousness to Army men is important? Dr. Kuttu says, "Behavior depends on the level of consciousness on which one is living" [11]. He has considered consciousness as root of

creation and, like ancient thinkers, he mentioned four levels of consciousness; physical to the vital and then to the mental and finally to the spiritual. He categorized human behavior under these four levels of consciousness. He thinks that somebody living entirely in the physical consciousness will be dull, lazy, not willing to make any effort. When one lives in the vital being, the characteristic are energy, enthusiasm and drive & desire. In the third level, mental consciousness, one stands back and watch. According to him when one is living in the spiritual consciousness, one's motivation is absolute [12]. This term "absolute" resembles with state of consciousness called "turīya" mentioned in *Upaniṣads*. First three levels of consciousness, although, are resembling more with three *Guṇās* (*Satva, Rajas and Tamas*). Here, we need to understand that term 'absolute' is opposite to 'relative'. When everything is depended upon external circumstances, it becomes relative. Love, happiness and even peace become relative. Somebody's behavior, gesture or attitude become the reason of other person's reciprocate behavior. This tendency does not work with Army men. In order to fulfil the required selfless and sacrificing attitude, state of 'absolute' (*Turīya*) is essential.

The knowledge or awareness of concept of consciousness is, indeed, an instrument to reach that state where one can give his best in any endeavor. That, perhaps, Dr. Kutty used for Army men. He explained this concept through various exercises to army soldiers and trained them to enhance their power of consciousness and motivated them towards their ultimate purpose of joining Army.

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