



# Place And Functions Of The Self, The Role Of Mind In Advaita Theory Of Perception

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ABSTRACT

Perception plays a very significant role in Indian epistemology. All the Indian philosophical schools, irrespective of their differences, have accepted perception as a valid and distinct means of knowledge. It is through our perceptual knowledge that we define the external world as well as the internal world. What is unique in the theory of perception is not just its definition but the process and the instrumentality of knowledge through which the system establishes an inseparable relation between Metaphysics, Epistemology, logic, and ethics.

When we talk about the doctrine of perception, the question arises: not just how we define perception but how the perceptuality of knowledge takes place? Whether it is internal or external? Is external perception possible without sense organs? What is the role of mind and sense organs? Does my perceptual knowledge help me to understand the scientific world, the spiritual world, or both, or neither? Does it have ethical content also? Can we say the diversity of the world is being constructed by mind and its sense organs. What is the role of Self and its functionality? In our analysis we will define Advaita theory of perception and how it is different from Nyaya theory of perception. The epistemological process given by Advaita Vedanta to establish perception as a distinct means of knowledge is more convincing than the realistic explanation given by Nayāyikas. Both schools accept role of Self in providing knowledge.

In Advaita Vedanta, the Self, or Ātman, is considered the essence of an individual, distinct from the physical body and mind. Perception involves the dynamic interplay between the senses, the mind, and the external world. The self, transcending the realm of perception, is regarded as the witnessing consciousness (*Sākshi Chaitanya*) that illuminates all experiences. It is the witnessing consciousness (*Sākṣī Chaitanya*) that illumines all experiences without itself becoming an object of experience. The Self is not something perceived but that enables perception. Just as light reveals objects without being altered by them, the Self provides the awareness that makes perception possible while remaining untouched and unchanged by what it illumines. Advaita Vedanta teaches that the Self is not an object of perception. It is the underlying reality behind all phenomena. The function of the Self in perception is to provide the awareness that allows perception to occur.

Keywords: Vedanta, Sakshi Chaitanya. Perception, Vritti, Advaita, Consciousness, Self etc.

## Introduction

Perception plays a very significant role in Indian epistemology. All the philosophical systems, irrespective of their differences, have accepted perception as a valid and distinct means of knowledge. It is through our perceptual knowledge that we define the external world as well as the internal world. What is unique in the theory of perception is not just its definition but the process and the instrumentality of knowledge through which the system establishes an inseparable relation between Metaphysics, Epistemology, logic, and ethics.

Ordinarily speaking perception refers to things what we perceive through our sense organs. But philosophically speaking it is not just what you perceive, rather how does perception take place.

- Does perception have a metaphysical basis or it has nothing to do with metaphysics?
- Is there any connection between metaphysics and epistemology? Which one precedes the other?
- Finally, why there is a need for a proper understanding of metaphysics in order to draw an epistemological conclusion.

Besides these questions, we also enquire about how the perceptuality of knowledge takes place? Whether it is internal or external? Is external perception possible without sense organs? What is the role of mind and sense organs? Does my perceptual knowledge help me to understand the scientific world, the spiritual world, or both, or neither? Does it have ethical content also? Can we say the diversity of the world is being constructed by mind and its sense organs. What is the role of Self and its functionality?

The objective of this paper is to get answers of all these questions through Advaita theory of perception. And Advaita Vedanta through its Metaphysical explanation of Self has beautifully answers to all such questions. It is essential to understand the role and functionality of Self in case of perceptual knowledge. In our analysis we will discuss how Advaita theory of perception is different from Nyaya theory of perception. The epistemological process given by Advaita Vedanta to establish perception as a distinct means of knowledge, is more convincing than the realistic explanation given by Nyāyikas. Both schools acknowledge the role of Self in providing knowledge.

It is important to mention here that except some schools of Buddhism all systems of Indian philosophy believe Metaphysics/ontology precedes epistemology. D.M.Datta in his book *The Six Ways of knowing* stated that

*“In most of the schools, the nature of reality and possibility of knowledge have been ascertained on the grounds of the revealed texts which have come to be regarded as the embodiment of spiritual experiences. Consequently, epistemology has been confined to the investigation of the different sources of knowledge (pramāṇas) and the problems of truth and error.”<sup>1</sup>*

Advaita Vedānta is a non-dualistic school of Indian philosophy that offers a profound understanding of the Self (Ātman) and perception (Pratyaksha). It emphasizes the unity of the individual Self with the Universal consciousness (Brahman). It describes a unique process of perception involving the mind (Antahkaraṇa). This framework highlights the distinct roles and functions of the Self and mind in the perceptual process.

In Advaita Vedanta, the Self, or Ātman, is considered the essence of an individual, distinct from the physical body and mind. Perception is nothing but the dynamic interplay between the senses, the mind, and the external world. The self, transcending the realm of perception, is regarded as the witnessing consciousness (*Sākshi Chaitanya*) that illuminates all experiences. The metaphysical explanation of Self as an Absolute reality is important without which perception has no meaning. Advaita Vedanta

<sup>1</sup>. Datta D.M. (1932). *The Six Ways of Knowing*. Motilal Banarasidass Publishing House. India. pp. 27-28.

teaches that the Self is not an object of perception but the subject that perceives. It is the underlying reality behind all phenomena. The function of the Self in perception is to provide the awareness that allows perception to occur. It is like the light that enables us to see objects but remains unaffected by what it illuminates. Without the Self, there is no knowledge.

## **Svataḥ-Prāmāṇyavāda and Parataḥ-Prāmāṇyavāda in Indian Philosophy<sup>2</sup>**

Indian epistemology is deeply concerned not only with the sources of knowledge (pramāṇa) but also with the validity of knowledge (prāmāṇya). A central debate among Indian philosophical schools concerns the origin and ascertainment of the validity of cognition—whether knowledge is self-valid (svataḥ-prāmāṇya) or requires external confirmation (parataḥ-prāmāṇya). This debate reflects deeper metaphysical commitments concerning consciousness, error, and the nature of truth.

The debate between **svataḥ-prāmāṇyavāda** and **parataḥ-prāmāṇyavāda** represents two foundational approaches to epistemic certainty in Indian philosophy. While Nyāya emphasizes verification and correspondence, Mīmāṃsā and Advaita Vedānta stress intrinsic validity grounded in consciousness itself. Rather than being merely technical, this debate shapes Indian philosophy's broader understanding of truth, error, action, and liberation.

Svataḥ-prāmāṇyavāda holds that knowledge is valid by itself and do not need any extraneous conditions for its validation, at the moment of its origination. Knowledge does not require an external validating agency to be known as true.

### **Schools Supporting Svataḥ-Prāmāṇyavāda**

- Mīmāṃsā (especially Kumārila Bhaṭṭa)
- Advaita Vedānta

‘The doctrine of self-validity of knowledge forms the cornerstone on which the whole structure of Mīmāṃsā philosophy is based. Validity means the certitude of truth. The Mīmāṃsā philosophy asserts that all knowledge excepting the action of remembering (smṛiti) or memory is valid in itself, for it itself certifies its own truth, and neither depends on any extraneous condition nor any other knowledge for its validity.’<sup>3</sup>

Śāṅkara accepts intrinsic validity at the empirical level (vyāvahārika), grounded in self-luminous consciousness (svayamprakāśa). “Knowledge shines by itself and reveals its object simultaneously.” Error arises due to avidyā, not due to cognition itself.

Parataḥ-prāmāṇyavāda holds that knowledge becomes valid only when confirmed by some other cognition or condition. Validity is not intrinsic but established through external verification.

### **Schools Supporting Parataḥ-Prāmāṇyavāda**

- Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika
- Later Navya-Nyāya

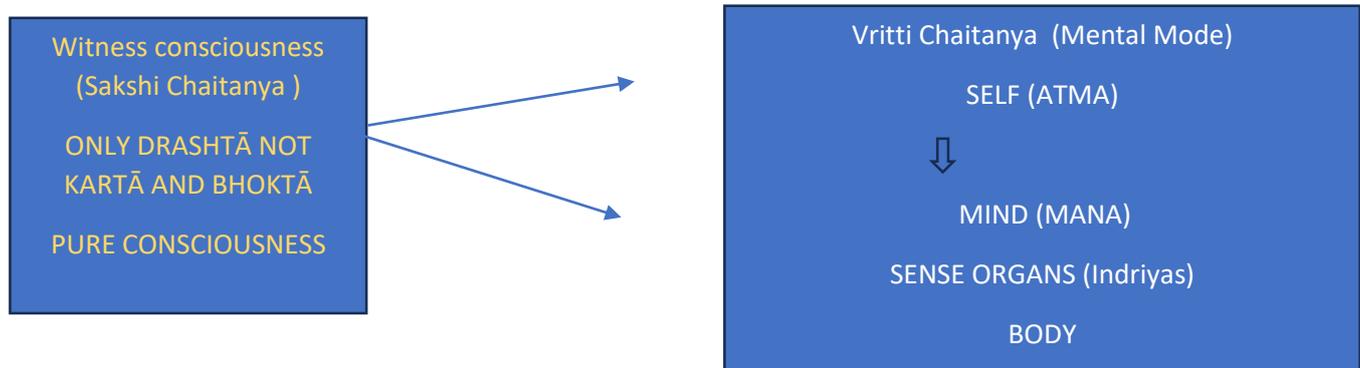
Like other Nyāyikas, Jayanta is of the view that the specific features responsible for the production of truth and falsehood, are the merits (guna) and the demerits (dosa) which add the qualities of truth and falsehood respectively to valid and invalid forms of cognition. Hence in his opinion truth and

<sup>2</sup>. Dasgupta Surendranath. (2018). A History of Indian Philosophy. Vol.1. Rupa Publications Pvt. Ltd.. p 372.

<sup>3</sup>. Dasgupta Surendranath. (2018). A History of Indian Philosophy. Vol.1. Rupa Publications Pvt. Ltd.. p 372.

falsehood are not intrinsic or natural but extrinsic or adventitious.<sup>4</sup> Thus, to establish truth extraneous considerations are necessary,

A. SVATAH PRAMĀNYAVĀDA MODEL OF ADVAITA VEDĀNTA/ THE MIMAMSHAKAS SPEAKS ABOUT A PROCESS WHERE PERCEPTION IS DEFINED AS IMMEDIATE COGNITION (“SAKSHĀTAH PRATITIH PRATYAKSHAM”).<sup>5</sup>



Perception is a process: SELF IS THE MAJOR SOURCE. The role of the mind and sense organs are limited.

B.THE PARATAH PRAMANYAVADA MODEL OF NAYAYIKA SPEAKS ABOUT AN INSTRUMENT WHERE PERCEPTION IS DEFINED AS “INDRIYA ARTHA SANNIKARSHA UTPANNAM JNANAM PRATYAKSHA JNANAM”.



### Place and Function of Self in Perception: Advaita Vedānta's Analysis

The theory of perception in Advaita Vedānta cannot be understood independently of its metaphysical commitment to non-duality (Advaita). Perception (pratyakṣa) is explained not as a function of an independent subject apprehending an external object, but as a process occurring within empirical reality (vyavahāra), superimposed upon the non-dual Self (paramārtha). Internal perception is as valid as external perception.

Śāṅkara consistently emphasizes that the Self is not a knower in the empirical sense but the very ground of all knowing. Yet, Advaita provides a detailed account of perceptual cognition involving the mind and senses. This apparent tension forms the central philosophical problem addressed in this paper.

Perception involves a relationship between the knowing self and its object. This relationship is shaped by how the self and the object are conceived. In Vedantic metaphysics, different thinkers have variously conceptualized both the self and the world of objects. As a result, each unique combination

<sup>4</sup> . Bijalwan C.D. (1977). Indian Theory of Knowledge based upon Jayantas Nyayamanjari, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, p. 54.

<sup>5</sup> . Prakarana Panchika by Salikanatha Misra, taken from the book *Six Methods of knowledge*, Swami Satprakashnanda, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, 1995, P. 36.

of these conceptions theoretically gives rise to a distinct type of relation between the self and the object.

Regarding the Self, three different views prevail within Advaita Vedanta, namely;

1. The knower, the individual self, is finite and limited; it is therefore neither all-pervasive
2. The individual self is all-pervasive and unlimited, but not the material cause of the world
3. The individual self is both all-pervasive and the ground of this universe<sup>6</sup>

### Relation between Metaphysics and Epistemology

The deeper analysis of the theory of perception shows that the metaphysical explanation of the Self is predominantly used as an epistemological process in the perception theory and thereby establish a close relationship between metaphysics and epistemology. As stated by Dr. Paul Deussen in the book *The System of the Vedanta* “The whole perceptual process delineated by Vedanta is based on its Metaphysics rather than on its psychology and physiology.”<sup>7</sup> When we discuss western philosophical traditions their epistemological structure rooted in their metaphysics specially with the rationalists (Descartes, Spinoza, Kant etc.). Hume being a radical empiricist like some schools of Buddhism rejects Metaphysics.

### Functionality of Self in Advaita theory of Perception

Coming back to Advaita theory of perception we found that the fundamental reality is self-existent and self-luminous. Brahman the Supreme Being, is pure consciousness. It is the light of all lights, the one source of all knowledge. Brahman is Being-Consciousness and Bliss (Satchidananda). Brahman in Advaita philosophy is the ground of all existence. The perceptual world is created by Brahman to understand Brahman and the limitations of the phenomenal world.

In the *Vedānta Paribhāshā*, it is stated that ‘the immediacy of knowledge does not rest on its being caused by the sense organs.’<sup>8</sup> Advaita Vedānta accepts the definition of perception given by the Prabhakara school of Mimamsha, i.e., “Perception is immediate cognition (*sakshātaḥ pratitih pratyaksham*).”<sup>9</sup> And this makes the place and functionality of the SELF most important, without which perception has no meaning.

“According to the Advaita theory of perception, the Chaitanya within us makes perception possible. The Chetana (intelligence) within us unites with the Chetana (intelligence) in the object, and the result is perception. It does not follow from this that the mind and the senses are useless,..for they serve the purpose of determining the special object of each sense.”<sup>10</sup>

The Vedānta theory of perception is explained by the existence of a universal consciousness in which appears the empirical distinction of subject and object, mediated by a process of knowledge. Advaita Vedanta believes that the only reality is the Ātman or Brahman, which is supreme consciousness, and hence neither the subject nor the object nor their relation can exist outside it. They are all apparent modes superimposed on their transcendent being.

<sup>6</sup> . Datta D. M. (2021). *Six Ways of Knowing: A Critical Study of Advaita Theory of Knowledge*, Motilal Banarasidass Publishing House, Delhi, p.62.

<sup>7</sup> . Dr. Paul Deussen (1912). *The System of the Vedanta* (Authorised Translation by Charles Johnston), LaSalle, Open Court publishing Co. pp, 47-48.

<sup>8</sup> . Adhvarindra Dharmaraja. (1983). *Vedanta Paribhasha*, Trans. By Swami Madhavananda, Advaita Ashram, P12.

<sup>9</sup> . Mishra Salikantha. *Prakarana- Panchika*.

<sup>10</sup> . *Ibid*, p. 205.

When we speak about the functionality of Self in the perceptual knowledge we find without Self-perception has no meaning. Perception is a process which is governed by the Witness consciousness. In this case Nayāyikas have different views altogether. Gautam defines perception (*Pratyaksha*) as that knowledge which arises from the contact of a sense with its object and which is unnameable (*avyapadeshya*), uncontradicted (*avyāvichari*) and determinate (*vyavasāyatmaka*).<sup>11</sup> As we know Gautam's definition about perception is being criticised by his opponents, even by the Nayāyikas. In this paper we are not discussing in detail the Nyaya theory of perception. For the Nayāyikas sense organs play important role in case of perceptual knowledge. Like Advaita they have acknowledged the role of Self in perceptual knowledge. Nyāya being a realistic school believes that Self, mind, sense organs and objects are the major factors responsible for producing perceptual knowledge.

“All knowledge is indeed arthaprakāsha, revelation of objects and it is called perception, when the sense factors are the instruments of its production and the knowledge produced is of the objects with which the senses are in contact. The contact of the senses with the objects is not in any sense metaphorical but actual.”<sup>12</sup>

In case of Advaita theory of perception in the functional aspects of perceptual knowledge Self play a major role. The best art of Vedantic understanding about the Self is that it is never the object of a knowing act, yet it is immediate and direct. The Idealistic explanation of the functionality of the Self and the theory of perception shows that in case of Advaita Vedanta metaphysics precedes the epistemology.

Advaita Vedanta speaks about two kinds of perception i.e., External perception and Internal perception. The perception of the world and external objects happens through external perception, whereas the experience of pain, pleasure, love, hate, Knowledge, and ignorance is due to internal perception. Internal occurrences are subjective, private, and thereby live experiences of a particular individual. Internal perception is as valid as external perception is both have to be recognized as criteria of reality.

The Advaita theory of perception takes into account two most important elements, such as the Self as a metaphysical entity and the functional aspect of the Self. Swami Satprakash Nanda, in his book *Six Methods of Knowledge*, writes, ‘the functional aspect of internal perception is twofold, namely, relative to the perceiving Self and relative to the states of mind. In experiencing happiness, which is a state of mind, a person is aware of himself as an experiencer. But he ascribes to himself the mental state, although he is distinct from it as its experiencer. Individuals can be aware of themselves as doers and experiencers. But once the individual recognizes his self the subject and object distinction disappear. The Self shines of itself and beyond objectification.’<sup>13</sup>

We have to make a distinction between the transcendental self and the empirical self, which is part of our false ego. Whereas the process created by the transcendental Self has limitations but the limitation is not within the transcendental Self. The Self is infinite, eternal, and everlasting.

All ‘the Upanishadic texts convey the definite knowledge of the witness consciousness (*Sakshi Chaitanya*) which is beyond ego and its identity with the all-pervading Supreme Self. Hence, the intuitive perception of the Self as Brahman beyond all distinctions is not counted in Vedanta as a Pramana.’ Perception in Advaita Vedanta is a process where the role of the mind and sense organs is

<sup>11</sup> . *Nyaya Sutra* of Gautam, 1.1.4.

<sup>12</sup> . Dasgupta Surendranath. (2018). *A History of Indian Philosophy*. Vol.1. Rupa Publications Pvt. Ltd. P.335.

<sup>13</sup> . Satprakashnanda Swami. (1995). *Methods of Knowledge: Perceptual, Non-perceptual and Transcendental*, Advaita Ashrama, Delhi, pp.41-42.

limited. In this context, the modal consciousness (*Vritti Chaitanya*) is important to know the limitations of the empirical self.

The perceptual knowledge of Vedanta philosophy takes into account three things, such as:

- a. The Physical states
- b. The Mental states
- c. The knowing Self

The theory of perception developed by Advaita Vedant is much more convincing in comparison to the Realistic explanation of the theory of perception given by Nyaya-Vaisheshika school, Jainism, Mimāṃshā etc. Advaita gives us a progressive and sustainable model for the individual and society at large. Without the Self, there is no knowledge. The eternality of the Self retains its purity from its inception not as an agent but as witness consciousness (*Sakshi Chaitanya*). This witness consciousness provides you strength when you are emotionally disturbed, tells you to keep on moving, and provides wonderful solutions.

This universal consciousness is modalised in empirical perception in three ways:

- a. “*Vishayachaitanya* or the consciousness appearing under the mode of the external object, which may be termed object-consciousness, forex. Consciousness limited by chair, table, etc.;
- b. *Pramanachaitanya*, or the consciousness limited by the mental state acting as the cognitive consciousness;
- c. and *Pramatrachaitanya*, or the consciousness appearing through the mode of the *Antahkarana*/limited by the mind, and existing as the cognizing consciousness.”<sup>14</sup>

All these three modes are the one universal consciousness of the Atman appearing to be conditioned by the object, the psychosis, and the internal organ itself. When one consciousness passes through these three relative modes valid for empirical existence, it goes by the names and the forms put on by these modes. The indeterminable Absolute gets determined, as it were, by the three terms of the process, all of which rise simultaneously in the act of perception.

In the Vedanta Paribhasha, an objection was raised regarding the eternality of consciousness.

“Objection: Is not Consciousness without a beginning? So how can the eye etc. as instruments of that, be the means of knowledge?”

Reply: Although Consciousness is without a beginning, yet that mental state which reveals it arises through the contact of the organs, etc. Hence Consciousness qualified by the mental state is spoken of as having a beginning.”<sup>15</sup>

### Role of Mind and the Sense Organs

The Vedantic views on sense-organs are different from other Indian philosophical schools. ‘The five sense organs such as the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, etc. which are part of the physical body are not the actual organs of sight, hearing, smell, taste, etc. Mind (*antahkarana*) is the main component factor and the sense organs (*indriyas*) are their subtle counterparts that belong to the subtle body. The sense organs are composed of the same type of subtle substance as the mind is and subject to contraction and expansion as freely as the mind is. The five sense organs are called *buddhiindriyas* or

<sup>14</sup> . Adhvarindra Dharmaraja. (1983). *Vedanta Paribhasha*, Trans. By Swami Madhavananda, Advaita Ashram, P14.

<sup>15</sup> . Ibid. p.9.

jnanendriyas (organs of perception) distinct from the five motor organs called 'karmendriyas' (organs of action). The real organs also belong to the subtle body.'<sup>16</sup>

In case of any external perception, the mind is attended with one or more sense-organs according to the requirement of the case whether it is normal or supernormal. It is stated in the Vedānta Paribhāṣā, '... as the water of a tank, issuing through a hole, enters in the form of a channel many fields, and just like them assumes them a rectangular or any other shape, so also the luminous mind, issuing through the eye, etc. goes to the space occupied such as a jar, and is modified into the form of a jar, or any other object. That very modification is called a state (*vritti*).'<sup>17</sup>

### Nature of Mind in Advaita Vedānta

To understand the theory of perception in Advaita Vedānta it is essential to understand the nature of the Mind. Mind in Advaita philosophy is not an independent reality. In Vedānta epistemology, the mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) occupies a central place. It works as a mediating position between the Self (*Ātman*) and the external world. While consciousness (*cit*) is self-luminous and immutable, the mind is an internal organ through which cognition, volition, memory, and ego operate. Vedānta does not regard the mind as the knower in the ultimate sense, but as a subtle material entity (*sūkṣma jaḍa*) that functions only when illumined by consciousness. An understanding of the *antaḥkaraṇa* is therefore essential for Vedāntic metaphysics, psychology, epistemology, and soteriology.

Mind is not a fundamental substance; rather, it is the functions of the *Antahkaraṇa* process that correspond to the concept of the mind. Advaita Vedānta makes a strong claim that "... mind is finite, that is of medium magnitude (*Madhyamā parimāṇa*'). So, it can be connected with one or more organs at the same time. Therefore, a person can perceive different objects one after another simultaneously...."<sup>18</sup> For example, a student can both listen to music and read the book simultaneously without missing any information. Moreover, the five organs of action can function either sequentially or simultaneously, demonstrating the versatility of mental engagement.

Unlike Advaita Vedānta, Nyāyikas gave a distinct view regarding the nature and functioning of the mind. For Nyāyikas mind is infinitesimal (*anu*), partless (*nirvayava*), and eternal (*nitya*). Therefore, it cannot connect with more than one organ at a time. They reject the Vedāntins' claim that a person can perceive more than one object at a time. Rather a person can see one object at a particular time.

Vedānta rejects the Nyāya theory that knowledge is a product, that arises from the contact of *Manas*, the sense organs with the object, and connects with the self. DM Datta believes, "In the Vedānta theory of knowledge 'consciousness is not a product.' The *Antahkaraṇa* (mind) can thus be regarded only as a factor in the modification of the already existing consciousness, and not as an instrument in the generation of knowledge as the Nyāyikas and others suppose it to be".<sup>19</sup>

Regarding mental modification, an objection was raised against the Advaita Vedānta, in the Vedānta Paribhāṣā which is as follows:

**‘Objection:** The mind being devoid of parts, how can there be a mental state which is a modification?

**Reply:** ... the mind is not devoid of parts, for being a substance with a beginning it must have parts. And that it has a beginning is proved by such shruti text as "it projected the mind" (,Br. 1.ii. .1) that the knowledge which is the mental state is an attribute of the mind is borne out by the shruti text. Desire, resolve, doubt, Faith, want of Faith, steadiness, shame intelligence, and fear -all these are but the mind.

<sup>16</sup> . Satprakashnanda Swami. (1995). *Methods of Knowledge: Perceptual, Non-perceptual and Transcendental*, Advaita Ashrama, Delhi, p.45.

<sup>17</sup> . Adhvarindra Dharmaraja. (1983). *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, Trans. By Swami Madhavananda, Advaita Ashram, P.15.

<sup>18</sup> . *Ibid.*, p.52.

<sup>19</sup> .Datta D.M., *Six Ways of Knowing*, p.58.

The word intelligence refers to the knowledge that is a mental state. For this very reason, desire etc. are also attributes of the mind.’<sup>20</sup>

### Mind and its limitations

The Vedānta theory of perception posits that the mind extends outward through the eye and takes on the shape of the external object. The reason why Advaita Vedanta distinguishes the mind from the luminous Self is that the Self is the perceiver, the knower perse. It is stated in the Six Methods of Knowledge, ‘ in any external perception four distinct factors are involved, namely:

- a. the Knowing SELF
- b. the Mind (Antahkaraṇa)
- c. the Sense-organs
- d. and the object

In the absence of any of these, perceptual knowledge will not take place. Out of these four, the Self only is intrinsically luminous. It is through the light of self the objects are manifested. The mind conjoined with sense-organs helps to initiate the process with the help of the Self. Consciousness exists only within the Self. Consciousness is the cognizer but not the object cognized. There is an essential difference between the cognizer and the cognizable. Thus, the cogniser cannot be an object of cognition, nor can an object of cognition be the cogniser. The mind being cognizable cannot be the cogniser, the knowing Self. Shankaracharya writes, ‘ The cognizer is invariably the cogniser; the cognizable is invariably cognizable. In the Advaita Vedanta, it is clearly stated that mind and self are two different things. The mind has no power and is guided by the power of the Self. One must notice very carefully in the whole perceptual process only the Self is the being of the nature of consciousness and the rest i.e., the Mind, body, sense organs, and objects are devoid of consciousness. It is the light of the self that manifests the object. The Self must be related to the object, The mind conjoined with the sense-organs brings about this relation. The Self is the drasta, not the bhokta or karta. It is the knowledge perse. It makes the Advaita theory of perception distinct and unique in comparison to other theories of perception (Indian and Western).

Mind is an internal instrument of the knowing self; there is no consciousness inherent in it. Patanjali has given the reason why the mind cannot be the self. He writes, ‘ It (Mind} is not self-luminous because it is observable.’

To know further about mental state, it is essential to understand the role and nature of sense organs and the mind in Advaita's theory of perception. We generally understand the mind plays a pivotal role in reaching out to physical objects. But this is not true.

Manas which can be more or less rendered as the mind is an important faculty postulated in Advaita theory. Manas is not a sense organ (Indriya). The reason for this denial is that such internal states as pleasure are completely mind-produced and are apprehended directly.

Manas is not an independent reality existing outside the subjective whole. Advaita regards manas to be part of a complex, unified inner organ which is termed as Antahkaraṇa, which means ‘inner vehicle.’ Manas and Antahkaraṇa are sometimes used interchangeably.

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<sup>20</sup> . Adhvarindra Dharmaraja, *Vedanta Paribhasa*, Trans. By Swami Madhavananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta,1983, p.10.

Antahkarana is described by Madhusudana Saraswati<sup>2</sup> as being composed of five subtle elements (tanmātras), namely., the subtle essences of earth, water, air, fire, ether [akasa] with the predominance of the latter over the former.

Interestingly, being closest to the Self, the mind (*Antahkarana*) receives the light of consciousness that belongs to the Self. The mind is not the cogniser, but only an instrument of cognition. Mind shines with the help of consciousness. It has no light of its own. Therefore, the mind is a highly effective instrument of knowledge. Without the presence of the mind, it is difficult to understand the process created by the consciousness. “Knowledge is nothing but the manifestation of consciousness through an appropriate mental mode.”<sup>21</sup> Mind works as a medium through which consciousness transmits knowledge to the sense organs. Mind is made up of sattva substance because of which it receives the light from consciousness and helps the motor organs to function. Vidyaranya says ‘Mind, the leader of ten organs, is seated in the orb of the lotus of the heart. It is the inner instrument (antahkarana), since it cannot by itself deal with external objects without organs (indriyas).’ PD II: 12

It is exceedingly important to understand the nature of consciousness in Advaita Philosophy. Primarily Advaita metaphysics is controlling its epistemic process. In other words, we can say that it is difficult to separate the metaphysics from its epistemology. The world of phenomena is governed by Pure Consciousness which is identical with Pure Being. As stated in the Brihadāranyaka Upanishads “Brahman is Being-Consciousness and Bliss”.<sup>22</sup>

Consciousness is not a quality of the self but its essence which is, pure and simple. It is immediate awareness. Every act of cognition is an expression of consciousness through a mental mode (anatahkarana vritti). Vedanta speaks about two aspects of consciousness, namely;

- a) Sakshi Chaitanya (witness consciousness/ pure consciousness)
- b) Vritti Chaitanya (Modal Consciousness)

The word “pure” transcends the subject-object duality. The pure consciousness is the ultimate ground of all relations. It is often misinterpreted by scholars saying that ‘the Advaita Vedanta claims the world as unreal or false’. The world as it appears is unreal, as it does not have an absolute existence. But so far as its essential nature is concerned it is real. In this context, Vedanta speaks about three kinds of existence, such as;

- A) The illusory existence (*Pratibhāsika Sattā*)
- B) The empirical existence (*Vyavahārika Sattā*)
- C) The Absolute existence (*Paramārthika Sattā*)

Whereas the Pratibhāsika satta appears and disappears, the Vyavahārika satta continues to exist till the Paramārthika Satta is attained.

It is stated in the Svetasvatara Upanishads “.... He is all-pervasive and is the innermost Self of all. He presides over the law of Karma and all beings reside in him. He is the witness and He is pure consciousness, transcendent, and free from relativity.”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> . Satprakashnanda Swami. (1995). *Methods of Knowledge: Perceptual, Non-perceptual and Transcendental*, Advaita Ashrama, Delhi, 1995, ISBN 81-7505-065-9, p.52.

<sup>22</sup> . Vide Br. U. III: 4.2.

<sup>23</sup> . Sv.U.VII:11.

“Just as the sun which helps all eyes to see is not tainted by the defect of eyes or the external objects revealed by it, even so, the same undiversified innermost Self is not contaminated by the misery of the world, being beyond it.”<sup>24</sup>

Perceptual knowledge is direct cognition or immediate apprehension. As pointed out in the Vedānta Paribhāṣā, valid perceptual knowledge according to Vedānta is nothing but pure consciousness. This the Upanishads declare as 'Brahman that is direct and immediate. Brahman is manifest in every human being as self-awareness that is direct and intuitive. this is the immutable consciousness (kutasthā) ever-present as the witness self (Sakshi) it illuminates the mental states: pleasure, pain hope, fear, knowledge, ignorance, memory, loss of memory, and so forth. the mental states are immediately cognized of their presence to the witness Self.

For all perception, a Vritti or psychosis of the Antahkaraṇa (the internal organ) is necessary, since perception is possible only when the universal consciousness is individualized by a limiting adjunct. A Vritti is a function of the Antahkaraṇa and is indistinguishable from the latter. The Pramātrichaitanya or the consciousness conditioned by the Antahkaraṇa is said to flow like a ray of light to the object outside and take the form of the object by pervading it. This pervasion of the object by the mental Vritti is called Vritti-vyāpti. “The *Antahkarana-vritti* (mode of the internal organ) enters through the opening of the eye, removes ignorance regarding the objects, assumes the shape and form of the objects, and presents the objects to our view. The function of the Vritti is to remove the veil or layer of ignorance that envelops all objects. It is the consciousness of the Ātman that illumines the Vritti, and it is the transparency of the Vritti and its proximity to the Atman that makes perception possible, e.g. in the form of ‘I perceive the object.’ The Prāmātri-chaitanya (cognising consciousness) moving out as Pramāna-chaitanya (cognitive consciousness) thus gets identified with the Vishayachaitanya (object-consciousness) on which the object is superimposed. This identification is possible, because the essential consciousness that underlies the Prāmātri, Pramāṇa, and Vishaya, as their reality, is the same. The three modes are only phenomena in the universal consciousness. The consciousness determined by the individuality of the object is appropriated to the consciousness determined by the Vritti which takes the form of the object by pervading it. This consciousness conditioned by the Vritti is again unified with the consciousness defined by the mind or the Antahkaraṇa. Thus, the subject knows the object through a relational consciousness. The rise of the cognitive psychosis illumined by the consciousness is accounted for by the physical vibrations which are transmitted to the sense-organs using auxiliary causes such as light rays, the proximity of the sense organs to the objects, etc.

According to the Advaita theory of perception, the Chaitanya within us makes perception possible. The Chetana (intelligence) within us unites with the Chetana (intelligence) in the object, and the result is perception. It does not follow from this that the mind and the senses are useless.

It is clear from our discussion that the mind, which is considered as Antahkaraṇa in Vedānta, encompasses various faculties like the intellect (buddhi), ego (ahamkara), and the lower mind (manas), which processes sensory information and emotions.

According to Advaita Vedānta, perception includes the mind extending outward through the senses to apprehend objects. The mind projects itself through the sense organs, such as the eyes, and takes on the shape of the external object. This interaction between the mind and the object creates the perceptual knowledge. The self, as the witnessing consciousness, illuminates this process, making perception possible.

The Advaita theory of perception uniquely integrates the concept of the self with the perceptual process. Unlike the realistic school that treats the self and perception as separate entities, Advaita

<sup>24</sup> . Ka. U. II: 2.11.

Vedanta emphasizes the role of SELF/CONSCIOUSNESS in illuminating and giving a name to perceptual experiences.

It is clear from the above analysis that the Self in Vedanta philosophy is not the object of any knowledge and ever present in the consciousness. “ The Self itself is the revealer of all objects of knowledge, but is never itself the object of knowledge, for what appears as the perceiving of self as object of knowledge is but the association comprehend under the term ego (ahamkara). The real Self is identical with the pure manifesting unity of all consciousness”<sup>25</sup>

Advaita's non-dualistic perspective on the self and perception challenges the dualistic distinctions made in other philosophical systems. It posits that the apparent multiplicity of objects and experiences is a manifestation of the one reality, Brahman. This view has significant implications for understanding consciousness and reality, promoting a holistic approach to perception and existence (*Brahman satya jagat mithyā/ jive Brahmaiva nā parah/!*)

The Advaita approach to perception has practical implications for spiritual practice and self-realization. By recognizing the self as the witnessing consciousness, individuals can detach from the transient experiences of the mind and senses, which are the product of false ego and thereby reaching to a state of bliss.

## Conclusion

Advaita Vedanta presents a distinctive and profound theory of perception as compared to other schools. It emphasizes the relationship between the Self, the mind, and the external world. The Self, as the witnessing consciousness, and the mind, as the active agent in perception, together create an all-inclusive framework. It integrates non-dualistic metaphysics with its epistemological process and establishes the practicalities of perceptual experience. This type of idealism offers deep insights into the nature of reality and consciousness. Advaita philosophy highlights the significance of the Self's role in understanding and transcending perceptual experiences.

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**Conflict of Interest Statement**

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