

**Notes on the Meaning of “Asmita” in Yoga Philosophy**  
**by Student**  
**Book Notes V09BN**

3-LETTER CODE: HIN

TOPIC: Hinduism

SUBJECT: Asmita

SUBSUBJECTS: Yoga, Soul, Overself, Mercurius

ORIGINAL LOCATION & FILE NAME (of PDF used for typing): 1983 0427 PBP Asmita 03p.PDF

CONTENTS:

**Brief review of meaning of Asmita as used in Yoga philosophy**

**Yoga focuses on egoism as source of suffering; provides useful comparison to help us understand how ego functions as representative of soul**

**Quotes from Taimni and Dasgupta on Asmita and ego**

**Taimni: in *Yoga Sutras*, asmita is identification of purusha and buddhi**

**Dasgupta: all passing states are modifications of buddhi and are lit up by purusha**

**Dasgupta: passive and active aspects of buddhi; active aspect appears as ego; ethical value of egoism must be distinguished from its theoretical aspect as cosmic principle**

BOOKS QUOTED FROM OR REFERENCED:

- Patanjali, *Yoga-Sutras*
- I.K. Taimni, *The Science of Yoga*
- S.N. Dasgupta, *Yoga as Philosophy and Religion*
- S.N. Dasgupta, *Yoga Philosophy*

AD HANDWRITING: Typewriter typed, no AD edits

COMPLETENESS: Full Paper

PUBLISHABILITY: No, mostly published

DATE ASSOCIATED WITH THIS PAPER: 1983 0427

RETYPE AND REFORMATTED by IT 2022

NOTES:

- **RETYPE BOOK NOTES (V09BN).**
- This is **1983 04/27b, Asmita Book Notes, and the second entry associated with this date. 1983 04/27a = PB Paras; Overself class.**
- These notes are attached to the 1-page partial transcript/notes that we have for WG Class 1983 0427a PB Paras; Overself and are almost certainly student notes.

## NOTES ON THE MEANING OF “ASMITA” IN YOGA PHILOSOPHY

Because the third phase of Soul is variously called Mercurius, the I Am, the Overself, or the Asmita principle, it seemed that it might be helpful to review the meaning of Asmita as it is used in the Yoga philosophy, which was systematized by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*. Yoga philosophy focuses on egoism as the source of suffering and presents the development of the understanding only in a negative sense, as the discipline of and eventual complete suppression of mental activity. But while it does not give proper value to the formative power and intelligence of the Ideas which underlie experience, nevertheless Yoga’s metaphysical super-structure provides a useful comparison in our attempt to understand how the ego functions as a representative of the Soul.

The following remarks are very loosely quoted from Taimni, *Science of Yoga*, and Dasgupta, *Yoga as Philosophy and Religion* and *Yoga Philosophy*, and are meant to provide only a very quick glance at some relevant aspects of that view.

The word Asmita is derived from *Asmi* which means literally “I am”. In the *Yoga Sutras* Asmita is defined as the identification of the power of consciousness (purusha) with the power or vehicle of cognition (buddhi), this identification being considered as the fundamental cause of the miseries of life. “When the pure consciousness gets involved in matter, and owing to the power of Maya, knowledge of its Real nature is lost, the pure “I am” changes into “I am this.”” “Asmita is the principle of individuality in man which forms, as it were, the core of the individual soul and maintains in an integrated condition all the vehicles of consciousness functioning at different levels. It is this principle which on identification with the different vehicles produces egoism.” (Taimni)

As in Samkhya, Yoga called the actionless, absolutely pure and simple intelligence the purusha, and regarded this intelligence as quite distinct from the mental states which became intelligent by coming into connection with it. Yoga makes this analysis of the mental states: “Thought, when seen as divested of its sensuous contents, seems to exhibit one universal form of knowledge, which assumes the form of all the sensuous contents that are presented to it. It is the universal of all our particular concepts or ideas--the basis or substratum of all the different shapes imposed upon itself. All the contents of our thought are but modes and limitations of this universal form and are thus made intelligible. It is the one principle of intelligibility of all our conscious states.”

“Intellectual life consists in a series of shining ideas or concepts, which shine forth in the light of the pure intelligence and pass away. But each concept is but a limitation of the pure universal of our knowledge which underlies all its changing modes. This is what is called pure knowledge in which there is neither knower nor known. This pure knowledge differs from the pure intelligence or purusha only in that later on it is liable to suffer various modifications, as the ego, the senses, and the infinite percepts and concepts, whereas the pure intelligence remains ever pure and changeless and is never the substratum of any change.” (Dasgupta)

The contentless pure knowing of the universal mind or buddhi passes into the phase of the ego as knower or ego as subject. “Thus the ego as the subject of all cognition--the subject I--the knower of all the mental states is derived... and we see that this self-consciousness is but a modification of the universal mind.”

“The contentless subject-objectless “I” is the passive aspect of the buddhi catching the reflection of the spirit (the pure intelligence) of purusha. In its active aspect, however, it feels itself one with the spirit and appears as the ego or subject which knows, wills, and feels.... the ego now essentially knows itself to be active, and holds itself as the permanent energizing activity which connects with itself all the phenomena of our life.”

“Egoism is only a moment in the development of *avidya* as it unfolds itself in its concreteness, and must, from the point of ethical value, be distinguished from its theoretical aspect as a cosmic principle of creation (or manifestation) in metaphysics.” (Dasgupta)

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