

## Conceptual Article

## Education for Sthitha Prajna

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### Abstract

This article explores the concept of Sthitha Prajna—a stable and conscious mode of being emphasized in Indian philosophy—and its relevance to education and personal development. Drawing from global philosophical perspectives and psychoanalytic theories, the paper situates Sthitha Prajna within a framework of emotional resilience, ethical action, and cognitive tranquility. It contrasts Western outward-looking worldviews with the inward, contemplative Indian approach, emphasizing that education should cultivate an individual's inner anchorage and preparedness for life. The article further examines the application of Sthitha Prajna in modern educational contexts, posing research questions about its universality, gender relevance, and applicability across life stages. The discussion underscores the potential of integrating this philosophical concept into contemporary educational practice to foster balanced, resilient, and purposeful learners.

**Keywords :** *Sthitha Prajna; Stable Consciousness; Education; Indian Philosophy; Emotional Resilience; Nishkama Karma; Modes of Being; Inner Anchoring*

### Introduction

Philosophy has been defined as the cultivation of a particular mode of being. Student of philosophy of education known that philosophy and education are two side of the same coin. Thus education also, by implication, is concerned about inculcating a particular mode of being. The international commission on education constitute by the UNESCO some three and a half decades ago under the chairmanship of Edgar Faure rightly titled its report, Learning to Be -using 'be as an intransitive verb: yes, it is not being a boy, being a girl, being rich a poor, being young or being old, being an American or Indian.

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It is 'being' per se, stripped totally naked of all adventitious post-natal identities that is denoted in this rare mode of use of 'be' that *prima facie* violates the rules of English semantics. Being an international commission it was concerned with arriving at a normative prescription of how one should be, with what is ultimate and universal in human nature as the foundation. The subsequent UNESCO report on education submitted a decade ago titled its report, learning: the Treasure Within. While this later report widened the scope of its coverage to 'learning to learn', 'learning to-do', 'learning to live together', it retained to be' as the last but not least pillar for education.

If an individual does not learn how to be he or she totally without anchorage and will be lost like a ship sucked into a tempest--whatever else he or she may have learnt - throughout his or her life-course: because it is the ultimate stance one takes vis-a-vis one's cosmic environment that determines one's density. 'Cosmic' environment connotes both the microcosmic and the macrocosmic dimensions. It is worth recalling here that the Kothari Commission pointed out more than four decades ago that thought man had conquered outer space he has not conquered the inner world and recommended that this dimension be addressed seriously by our education. Whereas the vector of western worldviews and their thrust is outwards that of India worldviews is inwards. Without a strong and sound inner anchorage one cannot engage the world within. It must also be noted that the Delors' report to UNESCO submitted about a decade ago, Learning: the Treasure within--it views learning as a treasure 'within' rather than a treasure in the macrocosmic world out there. The Kothari Commission also pointed to the wide range of resources any myriads of soft technologies for cultivating dimension. This unique and fundamental India mode of being is *sthithaprajna*. We will return to this concept after making a quick global survey of models of being commended by various thinkers.

### **Sthitha Prajna**

What is *sthitha prajna*? How are its dimension conceptualized? What does one who has *sthitha prajna* think about the ultimate nature of reality? Should a *sthitha prajnam* necessarily believe in transcendent God-a God, as Swami Vivekananda put it, Sitting behind the clouds and answering individual prayers?' And in the scriptures? By the way, it is worth recalling here that the *Bhagavad Gita*, which has *sthitha prajna* as the axial concept, declares

that the scriptures and rituals are like a tumbler of water for a man who is surrounded by floods. And

### A Survey of Fundamental Modes of Being

This fundamental mode of being is determined very early in the life cycle of any and every individual. Yes the die is cast even before the Oedipal stage to which Freud traced the origins of the neurosis of his patient and generalized as critical in the formation of the personality of all human beings. Subsequently the 'object relation' school of psychoanalysts traced the coordinates of this fundamental mode of being beyond and behind the Oedipal stage to the constellation of human relations into which the individual was born and developed. Erik Erikson reduced the wide but indeterminate range of modes of being available to an individual to two mutually exclusive alternatives: **trust versus mistrust**.

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche exhorted the being of man to be completely exorcised of any and every notion of God and to 'live dangerously'. Yes, he wanted risk and adventure to become the fundamental characteristics of man's mode of being. Another German philosopher Martin Heidegger wanted man's mode of being never to forget that it is in and on 'borrowed' time and thus be characterized by an unremitting awareness of its fragility and finitude. In other words, Heidegger wanted man's mode of being to have as its epicenter an awareness of death - its mortality. The existential theologian Paul Tillich commended the '**courage to be**' as an appropriate, fundamental stance. The atheistic existentialist philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre, an awardee of the Nobel Prize for literature, commended the experience of **untrammeled 'freedom'** as the appropriate mode of being. He declared 'freedom' lies coiled in the very heart of being and we must live in such a way that we facilitate the unfolding of this freedom.

J.G. Arapura, in his seminal book *Religion as Anxiety and Religion as Tranquility*, which distilled the essence of the worldviews of the East and the West, pointed out that the three major religions of the Biblical tradition exhort man to an active mode of being with an **anxiety** to complete God's scheme of creation within the horizon of history as its remitting ontological undercurrent. On the other hand, Arapura highlighted, the major religions of the Indian tradition- Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, exhort man to adopt a contemplative mode of being as the fundamental one with imperturbable **tranquility** as its foundation. The

Indian mode of being contemplates the turbulence of history from the tranquility of eternity. *Sthitha prajna* is precisely the cognitive component of tranquility.

*Sthitha prajna* which can be roughly translated as 'stable conscious' will lead to *moksha* or liberation which is the ultimate goal of human life in all major Indian philosophies. In the Indian way of thinking the goal of education and the goal of living are identical: the world is a school for the soul where it can and must learn the lesson of liberation.

### **Questions for Research About Sthitha Prajna**

Is the concept of *sthitha prajna* gender - free? In other words, should women also cultivate *sthitha prajna*? Are there gender-specific nuances in the concept of *sthitha prajna*? When should the exercise of cultivating *sthitha prajna* begin? Is it relevant for all life-phases or is it relevant only for old age or, perhaps, there are different nuances for different life-phases and life-contexts - ranging from marriage and nuptials to death and bereavement? Can we inculcate *sthitha prajna* in our schools and colleges within the prevailing secular framework? My own answer is that we can because this concept is a version of the secular psychological concept of achievement motivation shorn of some of its anticipatory and emotional elements. There are as yet no ready-made answer for many of the other questions and they merit research.

Swami Vivekananda has said that so long as one believes in a personal God who can be invoked to come to one's rescue in his cannot attain *moksha*-*thati*, liberation!

Does *sthitha prajna* is a mode of being completely devoid of emotions? If not, how does a *sthitha prajna* feel in the various contexts of his life? How does he react? How does he interact? How does he enact various roles in life?

The *Bagavad Gita* has given a brief description of what the life-world of a *sthitha prajnam* is like. It is a moot point whether this concept is relevant in the context of modern worldviews implied in science and the one indicated by post-modern chaos theory. *Prima facie*, the concept of *sthitha prajna* seems to be more pertinent to the worldview derived from chaos theory than ever before. As for emotions, the *sthitha prajna* is not one who is devoid of emotions. He does experience emotions but they do not overwhelm him. When he is swept off his feet by a flood of emotions say, during bereavement, he quickly recomposes himself and resumes his roles and responsibilities of course, the idea would be for him to continue to

perform his duties concurrently even when he is experiencing overwhelming emotions. In others words, emotional resilience and not catatonic reification-a frozen consciousness desiccated and devoid of any emotion--is integral to the concept of *sthitha prajna*.

At the level of action, *nishkamya karma*, action without expecting its fruits, is the derivative of *sthitha prajna*. Again, there is a sharp and deep different between purposeless and indifferent action on the one hand and action without expecting Arjuna, cannot be done without a goal, an aim. But that is a proximate aim. It should not spring from personal desire for aggrandizement, gratification or enjoyment. It calls for intense instrumental and exclusive concentration. One should expunge from one's consciousness every thought except thought except winning; no, neither hope of success and the benefits that flow from it nor should the fear of failure and the train of disastrous consequences that will follow be left as abetting, facilitating reinforcements for that action. It is an 'Action- for action sake' attitude. One acts as if that action. a head is the only thing one has to do in this world. In this respect, the concept of *sthitha prajna* differs from the construct of achievements motive, popularized by the Harvard psychologist David C.McClelland: McClelland's schema gives about a third of the weightage for cognitive anticipations and positive and negative emotional reinforcements in the conceptual content of achievement motivation.