

# Role of Personality in the Practice of Meditation

Mahesh A. Deokar

## Abstract

At present, Vipassana meditation is becoming popular in India and abroad. World-over many meditation masters are teaching *samatha* and Vipassana practice by following different methods in accordance with their own traditions. It is generally observed that people at large benefit from these different meditation methods. However, these benefits are not uniform. Some meditators are successful in attaining certain higher stages of meditative practice and thereby develop further interest in it whereas others fail to make satisfactory progress in their practice and eventually being disappointed with the path turn away from it. A pertinent question in this regard is: Why the benefits of meditation practice differ from person to person? Why some meditators are able to meditate well but others loose their interest in meditation? A possible answer to this question may be that the difference in personality of the meditators is responsible for the differential benefits of meditation.

Psychologists have already carried out some research in this regard with the help of certain prevalent methods in psychology. Their researches have supported the assumption that the differential benefits of meditators depend on their personality. Those meditators having much mental hindrances are unable to concentrate their mind and reflect on the object of meditation whereas others with good mental capacity and less mental hindrances are able not only to concentrate their mind but also to reflect on the object of meditation.

Buddhist scriptures show that the Buddha laid down the meditation method for the benefit of disciples in accordance with their disposition, intention, personality, and mental faculty. Masters such as Buddhaghosa and Aśvaghōṣa have explained in detail how people of different personalities should take a suitable meditation object according to their personality from their meditation masters and how they should cultivate the mind constantly observing the occasionally arising dull or overactive state of mind. However, all these important aspects seem to have been forgotten in the modern era of organized mass meditation training programmes. In this paper, I try to find out whether it is possible to use the traditional Buddhist wisdom to organise and conduct the meditation retreats in a better manner so that its benefits can reach more and more people.

The paper in its first part studies the Theravāda Buddhist understanding of human personality and its role with respect to the progress of the meditation practice. In the second part, there is a discussion on the application of alternative meditation as per one's state of mind on a given occasion as described in Aśvaghōṣa's works. In the third section of the paper, there is an analysis of modern meditation training with reference to its limitations. The paper concludes by making a few suggestions for overcoming the shortcomings in the structure of modern meditation training.