

The Conscious Mind and Behaviour in Indian Context

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ABSTRACT

The exploration of consciousness and behavior has long been a fundamental inquiry in both Eastern philosophy and Western science. Indian philosophical traditions such as Vedanta, Yoga, Buddhist, Jainism thought offer rich, multifaceted accounts of the conscious mind and how it shapes human behavior. These ancient frameworks not only present sophisticated metaphysical and epistemological insights but also provide practical pathways through meditation, ethical living, and self-transcendence. This article examines the conscious mind and behavior from the perspective of Indian philosophy by critically analyzing classical texts and contemporary reinterpretations. Several Indian philosophy approaches and methods were discussed. Empirical findings from recent meditation and neuroscience research to demonstrate how these traditional insights continue to inform modern theories of cognition and self-regulation. The Indian perspective on the conscious mind and behaviour offers a holistic framework, A conscious mind helps guide behavior in the right direction, but understanding the main components of the conscious mind (*manas, citta, buddhi, ahamkara* etc.) is difficult.

Key words: Consciousness, mind, behaviour, Indian philosophy.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of the conscious mind occupies a central place in Indian philosophical, psychological, and spiritual traditions. Unlike the Western approach, which often frames consciousness within the mind-body problem and neurobiological correlates, Indian thought presents a nuanced, multi-layered understanding that integrates metaphysics, psychology, and soteriology. Consciousness serves as a pivotal element in understanding human experience. Defined broadly as the state of being aware of and able to think about one's thoughts, emotions, and surroundings, the conscious mind has been explored extensively through various lenses. The conscious mind in the Indian context, drawing on classical schools such as Vedanta, Samkhya, Yoga, and Buddhism, as well as key Sanskrit terms—Atman, Chitta, Manas, Buddhi, and Ahamkar.

In general terms, consciousness can be viewed as the state of being aware of and able to think and respond to one's environment, emotions, and thoughts. Consciousness plays a crucial role in providing self-awareness and guiding voluntary actions (Rao et al.,

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2008). Indian philosophy, with its rich history and diverse traditions, offers unique insights into the workings of the mind and behavior. It encompasses a range of processes from basic sensory perception to complex cognitive functions including reasoning, planning, and decision-making. According to the Indian tradition, consciousness is not merely a psychological phenomenon; it possesses spiritual dimensions, intertwining with concepts of the self (Atman) and ultimate reality (Brahman).

Ancient Indian Philosophies

Vedanta, one of the six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy, posits that the ultimate reality is non-dual consciousness (Advaita). According to this philosophy, the mind (manas) and ego (ahamkara) are seen as instruments that can cloud the true self, which is pure consciousness (Atman) (Sarbadhikary, 2010). In this context, behavior can be understood as the product of identification with the mind and ego, leading to actions driven by illusion. Realizing one's true nature as Atman allows for more deliberate control over behavior.

Buddhism places significant emphasis on the concept of Anatta or non-self, asserting that the sense of a continuous self is an illusion. The conscious mind is seen as a series of fleeting thoughts and experiences, governed by the principles of impermanence (Anicca) and suffering (Dukkha) (Bodhi, 1993). The Four Noble Truths elucidate the path to overcoming this illusion and achieving enlightenment (Nirvana), affecting behavior through mindfulness practices and ethical living.

The Yoga Sutras, compiled by Patanjali, articulate a systematic approach to understanding consciousness. Yoga emphasizes the importance of self-regulation and self-discipline (tapas), meditation (dhyana), and ethical conduct (yamas and niyamas) as means to attain a higher state of consciousness. According to Patanjali (1960), the ultimate goal of Yoga is to quiet the fluctuations of the mind (chitta-vritti) to realize the true self, which enhances the individual's capacity to behave mindfully and in harmony with their environment. This practice encourages individuals to transcend superficial desires and cultivate deeper awareness, thereby transforming behavior.

Aim

This article explores the rich body of knowledge embedded in ancient Indian texts, examining key concepts like *Ātman*, *Puruṣa*, *manas*, *citta*, *karma*, and the *guṇas* to provide an in-depth understanding of the conscious mind and the mechanisms that drive human action. We will critically examine:

- The foundational philosophies underlying Indian approaches to consciousness.
- The influence of conscious thought on behavior.
- Culturally relevant therapeutic practices that integrate these insights.
- Contemporary perspectives on mental health informed by traditional Indian practices.

Approaches and Methods:

Consciousness- Ātman and Puruṣa: The Metaphysical Foundation

At the core of most Indian psychological perspectives is the distinction between the ever-changing material world (*Prakṛti*) and the unchanging, eternal conscious principle (*Puruṣa* or *Ātman*). The *Ātman* is the true, innermost self, a self-existent awareness (*sat-cit-ānanda*) that persists through all changes of the body and mind (Radhakrishnan, 1994). It is often described as a passive witness (*sākṣin* or *drastā*) to the activities of the mind and body, rather than the doer or the experience of pleasure and pain in an ultimate sense.

This perspective sharply contrasts with many Western psychological views that often equate the mind with the brain and its functions. In Indian thought, the mind is an internal instrument (*antahkarana*) illuminated by the power of consciousness (*caitv anya*), but not consciousness itself (Sharan, 2004). The goal of Indian psychological systems is to realize this distinction through self-knowledge (*ātmajñāna*), thereby freeing the individual from the suffering that arises from falsely identifying the self with the impermanent mind-body complex (*avidyā*). The self, or *Ātman*, transcends the material world and the limits of time, space, and the senses, with the realization of its unity with the ultimate reality (*Brahman*) being the path to liberation (*mokṣa*).

The Structural Map of Mind: Citta, Manas, Buddhi, and Ahaṁkāra

The internal instrument (*antahkarana*) is not a monolithic entity but is comprised of several interacting functions, most commonly identified as *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), and *ahamkāra* (ego). In the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patanjali, these are collectively referred to as *citta* or "mind-stuff" (Dasgupta, 1930).

- **Manas:** This is the lower mind, the seat of emotions, desire, and aversion (*rāga* and *dveṣa*). It acts as a liaison between the external senses and the higher faculties, receiving, sorting, and filtering sensory data. It is considered a sense organ in many schools of Indian philosophy, vital for perception to occur (Rao et al., 2008).
- **Buddhi:** The intellect or higher intelligence, *buddhi* is responsible for judgment, discrimination (*viveka*), and ascertainment (Rao et al., 2008). It determines the "good or bad status of information" and helps in decision-making. In its purest state (*sattva* predominant), it is lucid and tranquil.

- **Ahamkāra:** The ego or principle of individuation. It creates the sense of "I" and "mine" by identifying the true self (*Puruṣa*) with the mind and body, thus limiting awareness.
- **Citta:** In the yogic context, *citta* is the entire field of mental operations. Its *vṛttis* (fluctuations or thought-waves) are the sensory impressions, thoughts, and emotions that absorb consciousness and prevent the individual from realizing their true nature. The goal of yoga, *citta-vṛtti-nirodha*, is the cessation of these mental fluctuations (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1994).

The Dynamics of Behaviour: Guṇas, Karma, and the Kleshas

Human behaviour is understood as the outcome of a dynamic interplay of inherent qualities (*guṇas*), actions and their consequences (*karma*), and deep-seated afflictions (*kleśas*). **The Three Guṇas:** *Prakṛti* (primordial nature), including the mind, is composed of three *gunas* (Rao et al., 2008):

- **Sattva:** Characterized by lucidity, purity, tranquility, wisdom, and peace. When *sattva* is predominant, behaviour is ethical, harmonious, and conducive to well-being.
- **Rajas:** Associated with activity, passion, desire, and restlessness. A *rajasic* state drives action and attachment to outcomes.
- **Tamas:** Defined by inertia, dullness, ignorance (*avidyā*), and lethargy. It obstructs clarity and leads to carelessness and delusion. The relative dominance of these *guṇas* at any given moment determines an individual's psychological disposition and subsequent actions. A harmonious state requires managing the balance of these qualities (Singh et al., 2022).

Karma is the principle that every action, whether physical, verbal, or mental, produces a reaction that binds the individual to the cycle of birth and death (*samsāra*). The *kleśas* are the root causes of this suffering and the drivers of *karma* (Dasgupta, 1930). The five *kleśas* are:

- **Avidyā** (Ignorance/Lack of wisdom): The fundamental misconception of taking the non-self (mind-body) to be the self (*Ātman*).
- **Asmitā** (Egoism): The false identification of the seer (*Puruṣa*) with the instrumental power of seeing (the *buddhi*) (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 2005).

- **Rāga** (Desire/Attachment): Hankering for pleasure or the means to attain pleasure, based on past positive memories.
- **Dveṣa** (Aversion/Anger): The resistance or hatred towards pain and its causes, based on past negative memories.
- **Abhiniveśa** (Clinging to life/Fear of death): The instinctive will to live, indicating latent memories of past deaths. These *kleśas* produce *vṛttis* (mental fluctuations), which in turn create *saṃskāras* (subliminal impressions or latent tendencies) in the *citta* that influence future thoughts and behaviours in a self-perpetuating cycle.

The Role of Consciousness in Behavior

In Indian philosophy, the conscious mind operates not only as a vessel for thoughts and feelings but as a fundamental component that influences actions—both positive and negative. The relationship between consciousness and behavior can be distilled down to several key factors: **Awareness:** Higher states of consciousness lead to enhanced awareness of self and surroundings. This awareness can inhibit instinctual behaviors that may be harmful while promoting thoughtful responses (Dilthey, 2002). **Intention:** The conscious mind enables the setting of intentions that guide behavior. An individual's choices stem from their conscious beliefs, values, and understanding of reality. In the Indian context, intention (*sankalpa*) is crucial as it connects individual actions to broader ethical and spiritual frameworks. **Mindfulness:** Mindfulness practices, prevalent in Indian traditions, emphasize living in the moment and fostering a non-judgmental awareness of thoughts and feelings. These practices cultivate greater control over one's responses to stimuli, leading to healthier behavior (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). **Karma:** A core concept in Indian philosophy, karma posits that actions have consequences that extend beyond the physical realm. The conscious mind, therefore, plays a significant role in ethical decision-making and moral behavior, as individuals are encouraged to act with awareness of the potential karmic repercussions (Mishra, 2014).

Integrative Therapeutic Approaches

The holistic view of the individual in Indian psychology has led to therapeutic approaches that combine cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. Techniques such as **Pranayama** (breath control) and **Meditation** are employed to modify patterns of thought and cultivate self-awareness,

leading to behavioral change. These practices are increasingly being validated by empirical research in psychology (Brown et al., 2007; Goyal et al., 2014).

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR): Rooted in both Buddhist and Indian practices, MBSR focuses on cultivating mindfulness to alleviate stress and improve emotional regulation. Research indicates that regular engagement in mindfulness practices can positively transform behavior by reducing anxiety and improving quality of life (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and Indian Context: While CBT is widely accepted in Western psychology, its integration with Indian concepts such as Karma and good conduct creates culturally relevant therapeutic frameworks. By blending cognitive restructuring techniques with traditional values, therapists can encourage clients to engage with their consciousness in a manner that resonates with their cultural identity (Alan, 2017).

Yoga Therapy: Similar to MBSR, Yoga Therapy extends its methodologies to address various psychological conditions. Studies have shown that Yoga creates pathways for self-regulation (Patanjali, 1960), significantly improving mood and behavior by increasing awareness and promoting physiological health.

Discussion

The study of consciousness and its link to human behaviour have been a central inquiry across many disciplines, from ancient philosophy to modern neuroscience. Within the vast landscape of Indian thought- spanning Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism consciousness is not a mere byproduct of neural processes but the fundamental essence of existence itself (Rao et al., 2008). Indian psychology is inherently practical, offering systematic methods to manage the mind and achieve liberation (*mokṣa* or *kaivalya*) (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016). The *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Yoga Sūtras* provide clear frameworks for mental well-being and ethical conduct (Bhatia et al., 2013). The *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* provides a structured approach to calming the mind and achieving liberation, incorporating ethical guidelines and internal disciplines. The *Bhagavad Gītā* emphasizes *niṣkama karma*, or action without attachment to outcomes, as a psychological tool for mental stability (Bhawuk, 2005). These practices aim to purify the *citta* of *saṃskāras* and *kleśas*, leading to a state of profound clarity and peace.

It has been observed many times that when we are more alert and conscious, the opposite result is also seen like we start feeling more stress and anxiety, we become more aware of the events happening and at that time our mind gets busy with many things simultaneously. Practices like mindfulness or hypervigilance have been shown in research to have adverse effects such as irritability, headaches, psychosis, etc (Ingram, 1990; Shapiro, 1992; Sahdra et al, 2017).

Conclusion

The Indian perspective on the conscious mind and behaviour offers a holistic framework, viewing consciousness as the eternal essence (*Ātman* or *Puruṣa*) and the mind as a temporary instrument. Ancient philosophies provide practical methods like Yoga and ethical living (*dharma*) to address mental suffering, guide behaviour, and reach self-realization. These insights resonate with contemporary mental health research and practices. *Manas*, *Citta Buddhi*, *Ahamkāra* etc., these are abstract things within the brain, which are not easy to understand at all. It is just like if we stretch too much, the object will break and if we reduce it, we will not get its result. That is, keeping yourself in balance and developing the art of understanding is a difficult task.

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