

Understanding Mind through Indian Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Mind is a subject widely studied under various discipline, yet, failed to come up with a definition which we could comprehend. These studies had unravelled a number of questions regarding the nature of the mind and leads to serious debates on its composition, i.e., whether it consists only of higher intellectual functions such as memory and reasoning, its activities i.e.; what is the relationship of mind and body, is dualism or monism?, is it accessible to study or only an endeavour of first person and finally, who possess a mind?; do all beings have a mind or only human beings could possess it?, and so on. With two simple models, 'the Epistemological dualism' and the model of 'Mind-Spirit; dichotomy Vs coexistence' based on the concepts in Indian Psychology, the paper throws more light in to the subject mind and its faculty.

Keywords: *Mind, Dualism, Monism, Consciousness, Spirit and Indian psychology*

Although the subject mind is widely studied under various disciplines such as Philosophy, Religion, Psychology and Cognitive Science there is neither a comprehensive definition nor a general consensus on its attributes. In layman's sense, mind is attributed to thoughts or if we go by dictionary, it is "that part of a person which makes it possible for him or her to think, feel emotions and understand things" or it is "the element of a person that enables them to be aware of the world and their experiences, to think, and to feel; the faculty of consciousness and thought". But, don't you think that, these definitions are a bit complex for the human mind to comprehend, since it leads to more questions than answers or really do our mind is all these? With two simple models, 'the Epistemological dualism' and the model of 'Mind-Spirit; dichotomy vs. coexistence' the paper throws more light in to the subject mind and its faculty.

To go a little in to the background of studies in mind we could see a lot of debates are already happened and are still going on about its attributes; what makes up a mind, its activities i.e., whether it consists only of higher intellectual functions such as memory and reasoning, is it accessible to study or only an endeavour of first person; what is the relationship of mind and

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body (Patricia Smith, 1989; Hart, 1997), is it dualism or monism? (Plato, 1995) and finally who possess a mind; do all beings have a mind or only human beings could possess it, with the latest advancement in the Artificial Intelligence the question further extends its conventional boundary and asks do machines could also possess mind? (Russell, et al. 2003). Addressing each of these questions opens a new arena which is equally complex.

But the subject is simply and beautifully explained in Indian Psychology. With the help of two models the 'Epistemological dualism' and the model of 'Mind-Spirit; dichotomy v.s coexistence' its further simplified and explained here in this paper. This model considers mind as an interface between two sources of knowledge, and these two sources are;

- (a) the knowledge about the world which is acquired through one's senses and
- (b) the knowledge from one's own consciousness.

Hence we could say that there exists two different sources of knowledge to which the mind has access to,

- 1) Transactional Knowledge, which involving mind as an interface between the brain and sensory system and,
- 2) Transcendental Knowledge which connects with the consciousness.

This could be further explained with the help of a model called model of epistemological dualism or two state model of knowledge and awareness.

The Model of Epistemological Dualism/ Two state model of knowledge and awareness

As depicted in fig 1, the model consists of two different sources of knowledge to which the mind has access to; the transactional knowledge and the transcendental knowledge. As against the Western bio-centric model, this model is based on the concepts in Indian Philosophy, which considers consciousness as the primary principle irreducible to the brain states. It says that brain does not generate consciousness; it simply reflects consciousness and often by filtering, limiting and embellishing it (Rao, 2008). From this we could understand consciousness lies somewhere in the primary level or above the level of brain or cognitive process.

The model further says, mind is interfacing instrumentally and connects consciousness at one end and body at the other end. When it connects with the world outside through sensory system, we get phenomenal awareness, when it connects with consciousness we have transcendental realization. When mind is consumed by sensory data consciousness is a reflecting source; if one empties this sensory data one could access consciousness there arises the unmediated direct knowledge where the knower and the knowledge blend harmoniously.

Here the concept of dualism is attributed to two sources of knowledge or two levels on which mind operates i.e., 'Transactional knowledge' and 'Transcendental knowledge' hence this model explains the two way exchange of information, with mind as an interface. Whereas the concept

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of dualism explained by Descartes focuses on distinguishing mind and the brain and Descartes identified mind with consciousness and self awareness (Descartes, René , 1998).

In Indian Philosophy, this epistemological dualism has a profound impact for higher level learning called Nididhyasana i.e. meditative learning, and is possible only when, the mind withdraws from participating in sensory process, then it would be in a position to access consciousness there arises the unmediated direct knowledge. If one asks what is the purpose of such knowledge or why man needs it? then, the answer is so simple since this is the only way one could overcome the sufferings and raise oneself to a higher level of awareness and achievement.

As the Upanishads says, ‘to know Brahman is to be Brahman’ and the purpose of the Upanishads is to reveal ‘Brahman’, the supreme ‘self’. And this is the existential quest for every man and consciousness is the ground condition for this awareness.

Why we need to know this supreme ‘self’? This is because, Upanishads says, ‘atma’ or ‘self’ (consciousness) is responsible for the activities of the ‘manas’, (or mind) and mind only plays a secondary role in knowledge. This is why neurological studies are often insufficient to give a complete understanding of the human nature since this phenomenological aspect of consciousness remains the “hard problem” (Chalmers, 1996).

The Model of Epistemological Dualism

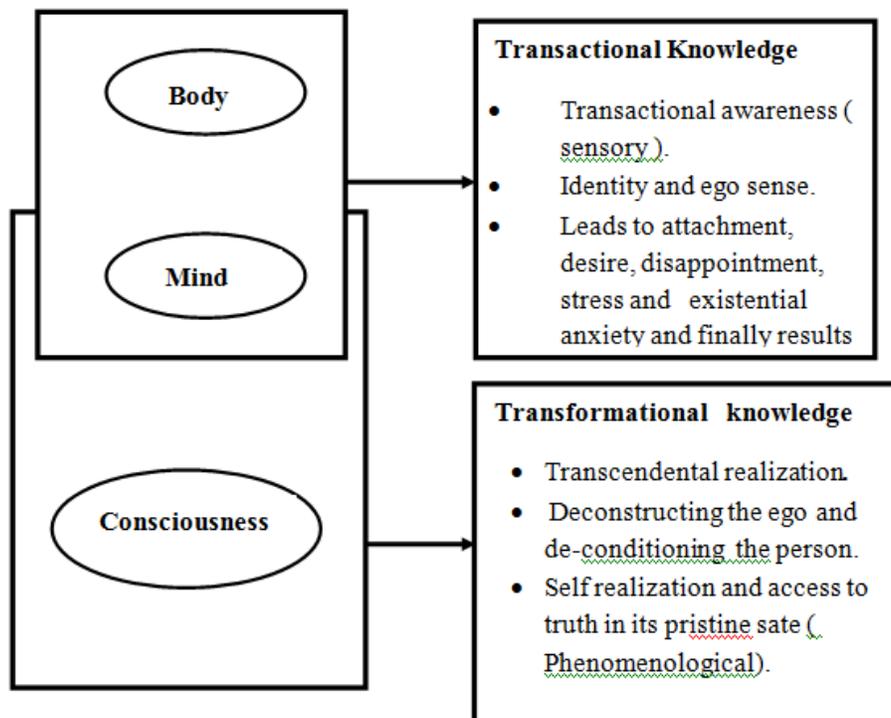


Fig1: Illustrates the model of Epistemological Dualism.

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Due to the glaring gaps in our knowledge in the way human thinks, feel and act, contemporary psychologists had reduced a person to just brain driven machine and believes ones achievements and actions, beliefs and behavior, cognition and conduct can be studied objectively .This gap in our knowledge is unbridgeable without altering the current models, since the activities with in the domain of mind is something restricted to the first person and is not directly accessible to others and they could interpret only what the owner consciously or unconsciously communicate with the researcher or to a third person. Hence consciousness which is largely left out of the main stream psychology needs a better attention (Rao, 2008). The model of Epistemological dualism based on the concepts in Indian Philosophy clearly depicts this.

Indian Psychology, which evolved thousands of years before is rooted in religion and philosophy. Indian Psychology defines the Psyche or self as the product of Sravana, Manana and Nididhasana; which means, sense driven learning (Sravana literally means hearing, at Vedic times it is hearing the truth from the Guru’s mouth, and could be interpreted as sensory processed information such as perceptual learning), intellectual understanding and intuitively obtained realization respectively (Rao, 2008). Hence an individual is a composite of mind, body and consciousness and could be studied from three different levels.

Method of Study

Since, a person is a composite of Mind, body and consciousness, the method of study explains the three different levels in the study of an individual.

The three different levels in the study of an individual

Dimensions	First Person	Second Person	Third person
Nature of Knowledge	Intuitive(Nididhasana /Meditative)	Mind constructed Cognition (Manana)	Sense driven (Sravana)
Method of Study	Indirectly by observing transformational consequences	Introspection	By direct observation
Reflects in	Perfection in thoughts and action	Directs actions	Directs action.

Table 1: Shows 3 operational levels of an individual and its various dimensions

Indian Psychology says, ‘Sravana’, which is third-order knowledge could be objectively recorded and verified and could be obtained through observation, experiment and physical measurement. ‘Manana’, the mind constructed cognition is the first person experience hence introspective observation and second person technique could be employed. Nididhasana, the meditative knowledge is utterly subjective and ineffable, it is experiential and trans cognitive state and hence, could neither be observed nor shared with others, could only be understood by

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indirectly observing the transformational consequences on the person who is presumed to be in that state (Rao, 2008). The tools and techniques in western Psychology could explore an individual in his third and second level only. But this may not complete the study of an individual, since it could not reach to the first level, which is more phenomenological. (Constrained by its bio centric bias, noted behaviourist J. B. Watson (1913) had waged a war to remove consciousness from psychological dictionary.)

The most appropriate starting and ending points in the journey of human enquiry towards the ultimate goal in one's life is this first person i.e., consciousness. This could be explained with the help of another model called Mind– Spirit: Dichotomy Vs Coexistence.

Mind– Spirit: Dichotomy vs. Coexistence

Spirit is the final and the original involitional element. Mental human beings are not aware of the soul or spirit which controls or moulds his actions. Thus spirit, which is concealed by mind and body, also manifests through them. An inner evolution helps to attain supreme reality which reveals oneself to the luminous consciousness and will provide unlimited reach and intensity of love, joy and beauty (Rao, 2008). This could be compared to the need for self actualisation described by Maslow in his need hierarchy. This eternal element is nature's intention and the Spirit should be powerful enough to transform its instrument (mind) to attain this eternal happiness. Eventually, the spirit will exist as something greater than mind as the original and primal evolutionary element. This is depicted in the figure below.

Mind– Spirit: Dichotomy vs. Coexistence

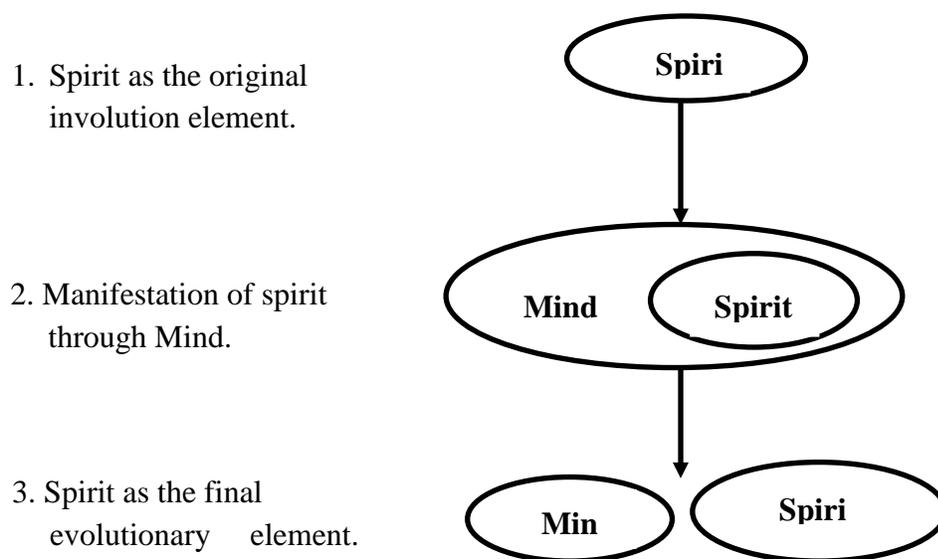


Fig 2: Evolutionary transformation of Spirit

CONCLUSION

The mind, the most complex concept in Psychology is always a mystery to all the discipline which had tried to gain a mastery over it. Throughout the history the subject was open to serious debates on its nature, faculties and even its identity. The paper employs a totally different approach with the help of two models to explain the subject, mind. The two models, 'Epistemological dualism' and the model of 'Mind-Spirit; dichotomy vs. coexistence are based on the concepts of mind in Indian Philosophy and it simplifies the understanding of the mind.

The first model, Epistemological dualism says, that mind is an interface between two different levels of knowledge, the transactional knowledge at one level and transformational knowledge at other level. If the mind is open to the world outside through its sense organs then it is filled with transactional knowledge but if the mind is open to the world inside it gains access to the consciousness there arises the transformational knowledge. Hence to understand a person fully, a researcher should gain access to these three levels, but with the currently available tools in psychology one could access only up to two levels and the first person level could be studied only through transformational consequences.

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