

## KNOWING THE SELF

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### Abstract

This paper discusses the intricate relationship between human existence, the environment, and spirituality, drawing inspiration from ancient scriptures, such as the Taittiriya Upanishad, Shrimad Bhagwatam and Bhagavad Gita. Emphasizing the interconnectedness of our being with the universe, the paper explores the cosmic progression of the five elements to the subtler realms of consciousness embodied by the concept of "Brahman: The consciousness." At the core of this investigation, is the intertwined presence of two distinct minds within the broader context of our environment: the individual mind unique to humans and the universal mind governing natural phenomena. These two minds operate in harmony, shaping both the regulated order of the universe and the inventive capacities inherent in the individual mind. The paper concludes that our individual minds and the universal mind share a common origin, encapsulated in the concept "Aham Brahmasmi." It discusses how our actions, influenced by three qualities—Rajas, Tamas, and Satva—shape our lives and proposes that the practice of Yoga, as outlined by Patanjali Yog Sutra, can guide us toward unlocking our full potential.

**Keywords:** Aham Brahmasmi, Vedic Cosmological model, Karmic actions, Essence of yoga according to Patanjali Yog Sutra

## INTRODUCTION

Our existence on this planet is intricately intertwined with the environment. From the air we breathe to the food we eat, from the individuals who bring us into the world to the friends and society that shape our interactions, and from the shelter of our homes to the natural elements like trees, mountains, and rivers — all these components, though seemingly distinct from us, collectively form a harmonious connection. At subtler level we are made up of single unifying element "Brahman: The consciousness". This underlying unity accentuates the interdependence of our being with the world around us. Consequently, our actions hold a profound influence on the environment, and reciprocally, the environment shapes the outcomes of our endeavours. Thus, our actions affect and are affected by the environment.

## OBJECTIVES

- **To understand the interconnectedness of the existence through scriptures:** To examine how human existence is interwoven with the environment as depicted in scriptures: Bhagwad Gita, Shrimad Bhagvatam and Taittiriya Upanishad.
- **Understand the Duality of Minds:** To analyze the interplay between the individual mind and the universal mind within the context of natural laws and human actions.
- **Investigate the Influence of Gunas:** To study how the three qualities (Rajas, Tamas, and Satva) shape our actions and, consequently, our lives.
- **Assess the Role of Yoga:** To evaluate how the practice of Yoga can help transcend the influence of the gunas and unlock human potential.

## DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

### Textual Sources and Analysis:

**Primary Texts:** The core scriptures studied were the Taittiriya Upanishad, Shrimad Bhagwatam, and the Bhagavad Gita along with twenty yoga upanishads. These texts were selected because they clearly explain

cosmology, the mind, the principles of Yoga, and their interrelationships. Their recognized authenticity and reliability make them standard references for exploring these concepts.

**Taittiriya Upanishad:** Explains the emergence of the five elements from Brahman and how they shape consciousness forming five sheaths or layers of human body.

**Shrimad Bhagwatam (Canto 5):** Provides insights into the Vedic cosmology, explaining the intricate relationship between universal laws and human mind.

**Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 15):** Verses 1 to 3 discusses the relationship between the universal and human mind and the influence of the three gunas on human actions.

**Secondary Texts:** Commentaries and scholarly interpretations of the primary texts were also reviewed. These include lectures and works by renowned scholars like Swami Vivekananda, Swami Sarvapriyananda, Dr. Richard L. Thompson (Sadaputa Dasa), Gurudev Shri Shri Ravi Shankarji, Swami Shri Govind Dev Giri and Swami Mukundanandaji.

**Comparative Analysis:** The study involves comparing the philosophical and spiritual insights from the ancient texts with modern scientific understanding of environmental interconnectivity and human psychology.

#### Personal Insight:

Considering the serious effects of climate change, wars, and pandemics on our world. Seeing how human actions cause climate change and disrupt ecosystems, affecting everything from plants and animals to all living and non-living entities, is concerning. However, the way life adapts by making conscious choices in response to the environment around us reveals the intricate relationship between humans and nature. This realization, along with the calming and balancing practices of Yoga, drives me to explore how ancient teachings can help us cope with these changes. Through this paper, I aim to explain how we can align our actions with the natural world to foster a more sustainable and harmonious future.

### DISCUSSION

<p>Bhagavad Gita: Ch. 15 Purushottam Yog          श्रीभगवानुवाच            ऊर्ध्वमूलमधःशाखमश्वत्थं प्राहुर्व्ययम्            छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित्    1            अधश्चोर्ध्वं प्रसृतास्तस्य शाखा          गुणप्रवृद्धा विषयप्रवालाः            अधश्च मूलान्यनुसन्ततानि          कर्मानुबन्धीनि मनुष्यलोके    2            न रूपमस्येह तथोपलभ्यते          नान्तो न चादिर्न च सम्प्रतिष्ठा            अश्वत्थमेनं सुविरूढमूल          मसङ्गशस्त्रेण दृढेन छित्त्वा    3  </p>	<p>The Supreme Divine Personality said.          They speak of an eternal aśhvath tree with its roots above and branches below. Its leaves are the Vedic hymns, and one who knows the secret of this tree is the knower of the Vedas. (1)          The branches of the tree extend upward and downward, nourished by the three gunas, with the objects of the senses as tender buds. The roots of the tree hang downward, causing the flow of karma in the human form. Below, its roots branch out causing (karmic) actions in the world of humans. (2)          Real form of this tree is not perceived in this world, neither its beginning nor end, nor its continued existence. But this deep-rooted aśhvath tree must be cut down with a strong axe of detachment. (3)</p>
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The evolution of the environment is linked to the ancient concept of five elements, progressing from the subtler to the gross: Ether, Air, Fire, Water, and Earth. This cosmic progression is eloquently mentioned in the Brahmanad Valli of the Taittiriya Upanishad, which asserts that from Brahman emerges Ether, from Ether comes Air, from Air arises Fire, from Fire manifests Water, and from Water evolves Earth.

Delving into subtler realms, from Ether evolves the faculties of memory, intellect, and ego. This complex evolution shapes the foundation of the individual mind. Within the subtler domain of mind, the ethereal essence of Ether forms the basis for the memory, the discerning power of intellect, and the nuanced sense of self represented by the ego.

Within the broader context of the environment, two distinct minds coexist: the individual mind, specific to humans, and the universal mind, influencing phenomena such as planetary motion, sunrise, sunset, growing of saplings, blossoming of flowers etc.

The universal mind operates within the framework of natural laws. Whereas the individual mind possesses a unique awareness. It has ability to generate thoughts, apply thoughts paving the way for discovery or invention. The individual mind can transcend the bounds of conventional thinking. This duality reflects the harmonious interplay between the governed order of the universe and the conscious, inventive capacities inherent in the individual mind within the fabric of the environment.

This interplay between the ordered universe and the creative abilities of the individual mind has been represented in the cosmic model elucidated in Shrimad Bhagwatam Canto 5. The cosmic model serves as a timeless representation of the complex interaction between universal principles and the inherent intuitive abilities of the human mind to derive meaningful information from the relationships.

## WORKING OF THE INDIVIDUAL MIND

The human body is composed of five sheaths or layers, known as koshas: Annamaya Kosha (the physical sheath), Pranamaya Kosha (the vital energy sheath), Manomaya Kosha (the mental sheath), Vijnanamaya Kosha (the wisdom sheath), and Anandmaya Kosha (the bliss sheath). The interaction between these koshas gives rise to responses and actions as outlined below.



### Chapter 15 verse 1 to 3 of Bhagavad Gita implies:

- "Aham Brahmasmi". Verse no.1 signifies the connection between the Individual Mind and Universal Mind, both evolving from Brahman, making them relatable. The Vedic Cosmological model presented in Shrimad Bhagavatam is an earth-centric representation with Lord Brahma (The Creator) at its apex and the creation descending below. This model has been developed based on the principle that the Individual and Universal Minds share a common origin "Brahman".

- The Karmic Actions of individuals are influenced by three gunas Rajas, Tamas, and Satva, serving as acting forces shaped in accordance with the objects of the senses.
- There is neither an end nor a beginning to the continuous stream of thought waves, and their source cannot be perceived. However, with strong detachment or volition (Resisting Force), thoughts can be controlled or eliminated before they manifest into Karmic actions.

## CONCLUSION

According to the definition of Yoga in Patanjali Yoga Sutra, "Yogas Citta Vritti Nirodah," the essence of Yoga is to cease the fluctuations of the mind and dwell in the true nature of being which is tranquillity, liberated from the influence of the three gunas—Rajas, Tamas, and Satva. Thus, by attaining this state the inherent capacities of the human mind flourish and reach their full potential.

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