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From Psychoanalysis to Metacognitive Science: A Triadic Framework for Consciousness and Integrative Inquiry

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Abstract:

This paper introduces the "*Tri-Pada*" principle, a conceptual framework designed to synthesize insights from psychoanalysis, Indian philosophical systems (*Vedānta*, *Sāṅkhya*, *Yoga*), and Buddhist epistemology with contemporary theories of scientific metacognition. Addressing the epistemological challenge posed by non-falsifiable foundational principles within science, this work explores the potential integration of analogous universal principles from historically rich intellectual traditions, particularly Indian Knowledge Systems, into mainstream scientific discourse. The *Tri-Pada* model amalgamates various triadic constructs—including Freudian psychodynamics (Id, Ego, Superego), *Vedānta* ontology (*Sthūla Śarīra*, *Sūkṣma Śarīra*, *Kāraṇa Śarīra*), Buddhist *Trikāya* doctrine (*Dharmakāya*, *Sambhogakāya*, *Nirmāṇakāya*), *Vedānta* states of consciousness (*Jāgrit*, *Svapna*, *Suṣupti*), and the *Sāṅkhya* theory of *Guṇa* (*Sattva*, *Rajas*, *Tamas*)—arguing for their reinterpretation beyond mystical connotations towards a framework grounded in observable cognitive, behavioral, and phenomenological patterns. A central element of this synthesis is the "Observer Mode," conceptualized as a transcendental metacognitive process derived from states such as *Turiya*, *Bodhisattva*-hood, and *Purusha*. Functioning as an epistemic tool, Observer Mode facilitates detached self-observation of cognitive processes, bridging subjective experience and objective empirical scrutiny. The paper critically examines parallels and divergences between Western psychoanalytic thought and Eastern introspective traditions, advocating for the cultivation of self-directed metacognitive awareness as emphasized in *Vedānta* and Buddhism. Ultimately, this work proposes a paradigm shift towards a "Spirituos-Scientific" domain, advocating for the integration of rigorous empirical methodologies with systematic introspective practices. It posits that recognizing introspection as a critical scientific asset can lead to a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of human consciousness.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge Systems, *Tri-Pada*, Psychoanalysis, Metacognition

INTRODUCTION

(For the benefit of the readers, definitions of key terms have been provided at the end of the paper)

Epistemological Boundaries of Science

Science, as a discipline, is fundamentally rooted in the principle of falsifiability, ensuring that hypotheses and theories are testable and subject to potential refutation (Popper, 1959). Paradoxically, certain foundational principles within science, such as the laws of thermodynamics, the law of conservation, and the principle of relativity, are inherently non-falsifiable (Hawking, 1996). These universal laws, though derived from empirical observation, function as axiomatic frameworks within which falsifiable hypotheses are formulated. This duality necessitates a deeper examination of the epistemological boundaries of scientific inquiry and raises pertinent questions regarding the existence of analogous universal principles in less-explored intellectual traditions.

A particularly compelling area of inquiry involves examining disciplines exhibiting proto-scientific characteristics—traditions that, while not conforming strictly to the modern scientific method, offer structured and experiential insights into human cognition and existence.

Integrating Eastern Thought into Scientific Inquiry

Among these are Indian philosophical traditions, which offer sophisticated conceptualizations of causality, self, and consciousness. For example, the concept of causality, as expounded in Indian philosophy, aligns closely with modern statistical inference. The Buddhist doctrine of *Pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) posits that suffering (*dukkha*) arises in correlation with other determining factors (Gethin, 1998), a notion interpretable through the lens of statistical correlation and causation.

This discussion does not seek to challenge or critique established scientific principles with the intent of supplanting them. Rather, it advocates for a paradigm shift emphasizing the practical application of foundational philosophical insights to address contemporary issues, such as mental health, without succumbing to dogmatism. A pertinent example is found in the field of psychology, where psychoanalysis has historically been criticized for its lack of strict falsifiability (Kakar, 1982). Despite this, extensive meta-analytical studies underscore its therapeutic efficacy, demonstrating its continued relevance. This suggests that, akin to physics, psychology may benefit from overarching principles that, while not strictly falsifiable, offer a coherent and universal framework for understanding human behavior and consciousness.

Introduction of *Tri-Pada*

A synthesis of diverse intellectual traditions yields a triadic framework known as the *Tri-Pada* principle—a conceptual model of mind-body interaction and consciousness integrating insights from multiple domains, including psychoanalysis, Indian philosophy, and Buddhist epistemology. The term *Tri-Pada* comes from Sanskrit and translates to 'three steps.' It serves as a bridge between philosophical inquiry, spiritual traditions, and modern psychological theories.

This paper argues against the outright dismissal of complex, historically rich frameworks as mere mysticism and instead advocates for their reinterpretation through the lens of scientific metacognition. This approach fosters novel avenues for empirical research while preserving the depth of these intellectual traditions. The central objective of this paper is to establish *Tri-Pada* as a conceptual foundation that, rather than being mystical, is firmly grounded in observable cognitive, behavioral, and phenomenological patterns.

The *Tri-Pada* model synthesizes parallels across various intellectual traditions, including:

- Freud's psychoanalytic constructs of the Id, Ego, and Superego (Freud, 1923).
- The *Vedānta* framework of *Sthūla Śarīra* (gross body), *Sūkṣma Śarīra* (subtle body), and *Kāraṇa Śarīra* (Chakrabarti, 1999).
- The Buddhist *Trikāya* doctrine, comprising *Dharmakāya*, *Sambhogakāya*, and *Nirmāṇakāya* (Williams, 2009).
- The *Vedānta* states of consciousness: *Jāgrit* (waking state), *Svapna* (dream state), and *Suṣupti* (Menon, 2005).
- The triadic interplay of *Guṇas* in *Sāṅkhya* philosophy: *Sattva* (balance), *Rajas* (activity), and *Tamas* (Sinha & Tripathi, 2013).

An essential aspect of the *Tri-Pada* framework is the notion of transcendence, referred to as the "observer mode." This raises a fundamental question: What cognitive or phenomenological process within sentient beings facilitates the observation of thought itself? By systematically integrating these archetypal structures, the *Tri-Pada* model aspires to establish a cohesive, cross-cultural framework for understanding the human psyche, thereby enhancing both metacognitive awareness and phenomenological inquiry.

SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

This paper undertakes a critical examination of the philosophical foundations, scientific feasibility, and epistemological implications of adopting *Tri-Pada* as a foundational model for future research. In doing so, it seeks to lay the groundwork for the emergence of a systematic "Spirituo-Scientific" domain that can synthesize spirituality and science.

While the *Tri-Pada* framework is conceptual and cross-disciplinary, it lends itself to empirical investigation through multiple methodological avenues. For instance, the component may be explored through neuroimaging studies on mindfulness and meta-awareness, particularly using fMRI to track activation in brain regions associated with self-regulation and attentional control. The triadic elements of the model—such as the Gross, Subtle, and Causal bodies—could be operationalized in phenomenological interviews to assess subjective experiences during meditative or therapeutic states. Likewise, parallels with Freud's tripartite psyche suggest applications in psychodynamic psychotherapy, where awareness of egoic structures and their

transcendence through insight can be studied through both qualitative analysis and therapeutic outcome metrics.

By proposing an integrative principle, this paper endeavors to illuminate an alternative epistemic pathway that synthesizes science, spirituality, and human experience into a universal framework, fostering the highest level of metacognitive refinement. This paper is intended for an interdisciplinary audience spanning psychology, philosophy, traditions, cognitive science, and contemplative studies. While some foundational concepts are drawn from psychoanalysis and Indian/Buddhist metaphysics, the goal is to present them in a way that is accessible and relevant to empirical researchers, clinicians, and scholars of consciousness alike. Readers unfamiliar with any one tradition are encouraged to approach the material through the lens of integrative inquiry.

FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS: ID, EGO, SUPEREGO

Sigmund Freud remains one of the most influential yet contentious figures in the modern study of the human mind. His groundbreaking work on the unconscious has profoundly shaped the trajectory of psychology and psychoanalysis, establishing a framework that continues to inspire contemporary inquiry. Freud's conceptualization of the unconscious mind, along with his methodological innovations such as free association and dream analysis, has offered significant insights into the intricacies of human thought and behavior (Freud, 1900).

Freud's seminal work, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), underscores the symbolic nature of dreams, which he regarded as the "royal road to the unconscious." His interpretation of dream symbols, such as the snake representing repressed sexual desires, illustrates his theory that unconscious material often manifests through metaphor and displacement. This interpretation, however, has been critiqued for its cultural specificity. For instance, while Judeo-Christian traditions frequently associate the snake with temptation and sin (e.g., the story of Adam and Eve), in Indian traditions, the snake (*Nāga*) is revered as a deity symbolizing protection, wisdom, and fertility. This contrast highlights the extent to which cultural frameworks shape both unconscious symbolism and the interpretive lenses through which they are understood.

Freud's structural model of the psyche—the Id, Ego, and Superego—offers a foundational perspective on the dynamics of human consciousness. The Id, representing primal instincts and desires, operates on the pleasure principle, seeking immediate gratification. The Ego, functioning as a mediator, engages with reality to balance the demands of the Id and the moral imperatives of the Superego. The Superego internalizes societal norms and ethical principles, exerting influence over an individual's sense of morality and self-regulation (Freud, 1923). This dynamic interplay between the three structures provides a compelling explanation for psychological conflicts, defense mechanisms, and behavioral patterns.

While Freud's theoretical contributions have been instrumental in the development of clinical psychology, psychoanalysis has been criticized for its emphasis on therapist-driven interpretation. This reliance on an external analyst to decode unconscious material raises questions about individual agency in psychological self-discovery. One notable limitation is the lack of an inherent mechanism within Freudian psychoanalysis for fostering metacognition—the ability to understand and regulate one's own cognitive processes (Mitra, 2020). This critique invites an important consideration: How can individuals cultivate an autonomous, self-reflective approach to understanding their psyche and achieving psychological well-being?

Previous efforts to bridge psychoanalysis and Eastern thought can be found in fields such as transpersonal psychology, which integrates spirituality with therapeutic practice, and in Jungian psychology, which interprets Eastern concepts like mandalas, archetypes, and individuation through a psycho-symbolic lens (Jung, 1959). While these approaches opened important pathways, they often remained either symbolic or therapeutically oriented without developing a unified metacognitive model. The *Tri-Pada* framework proposed in this paper builds upon these foundations by offering a structured, cross-cultural model that integrates not just symbolic parallels, but cognitive, behavioral, and phenomenological dimensions into a coherent system. In doing so, it seeks to move beyond comparative insight toward a testable and operational metatheory of consciousness.

Eastern philosophical traditions provide an alternative perspective that emphasizes self-directed introspection and transformation. Schools of thought rooted in *Vedānta*, Buddhism, and *Yoga* advocate for inner discipline through practices such as meditation, mindfulness, and self-inquiry. The *Vedānta* concept of *Antaranga Sādhana* (inner discipline) encourages individuals to engage in deep self-exploration to transcend the limitations of the ego and realize their true self (Menon, 2005). Similarly, Buddhist practices such as *Vipāsanā* meditation promote direct awareness of mental processes, allowing individuals to observe and ultimately transcend conditioned responses (Williams, 2009). These traditions prioritize cultivating self-awareness without reliance on an external authority, positioning introspection as an intrinsic psychological tool rather than an externally mediated process.

Despite their depth and sophistication, these traditions have historically been constrained by the *Guru-Shishya* (teacher-disciple) framework, which often restricted access to esoteric knowledge. However, the increasing academic recognition of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) presents an opportunity to integrate these philosophical insights into contemporary psychological discourse. By treating IKS as an evolved, structured adaptation of the traditional *Guru-Shishya* model, modern psychology can develop new frameworks for understanding consciousness, fostering metacognition, and achieving self-sustained mental well-being.

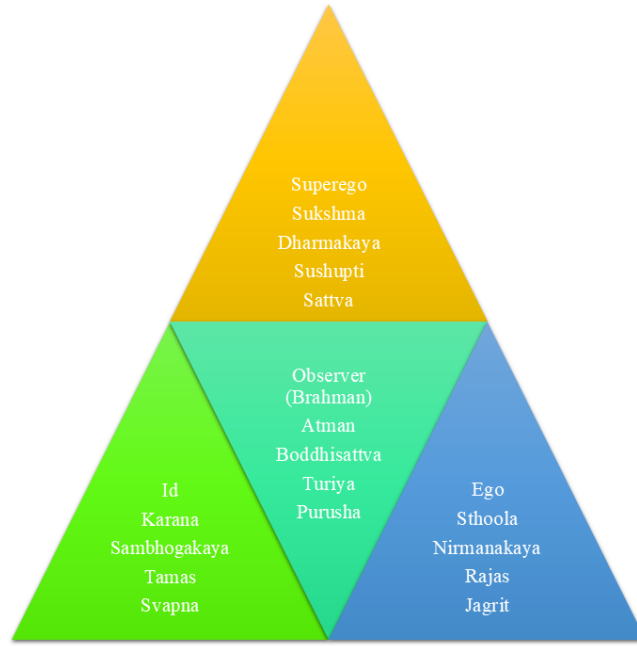


Figure 1: Representation of *Tri-Pada* model of human psyche

TRI-ŚARĪRA DOCTRINE OF INDIC PHILOSOPHY: STHŪLA ŚARĪRA, SŪKṢMA ŚARĪRA, KĀRAṆA ŚARĪRA

The concept of *Tri-Śarīra* (three bodies) is the fundamental framework rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), providing a holistic understanding of human existence. It delineates three interrelated layers of being: the *Sthūla Śarīra* (gross body), *Sūkṣma Śarīra* (subtle body), and *Kāraṇa Śarīra* (causal body). This framework is not merely a metaphysical construct but serves as an epistemological and ontological tool for advancing metacognition, offering a nuanced perspective on consciousness, behavior, and human potential. It resonates with and, in certain respects, extends the paradigms of Western psychology while also addressing its limitations.

Sthūla Śarīra (Gross Body): The Material Basis of Experience

स्थूलशरीरं किम्? पञ्चीकृतपञ्चमहाभूतैः कृतं सत्कर्मजन्यं सुखदुःखादिभोगायतनं शरीरम्।
अस्ति जायते वर्धते विपरिणमते अपक्षीयते विनश्यतीति षड्विकारवदेतत् स्थूलशरीरम्।

Translation: "What is the *Sthūla Śarīra*? It is the body made of the five grossified elements (*pancha-mahabhutas*) that serves as the locus for experiencing pleasure and pain due to manifested deeds (*sat-karma*). It undergoes six transformations (*shadvikara*): existence (*asti*), birth (*jayate*), growth (*vardhate*), transformation (*viparinamate*), decay (*apakshiyate*), and destruction (*vinashyati*)."

The *Sthūla Śarīra* underscores the transient and mutable nature of the physical body. The detailed exegesis of Shankaracharya emphasizes its impermanence, aligning with modern

biological understandings of aging and cellular degeneration. However, unlike purely biological perspectives, this framework recognizes the body as both an instrument of sensory experience and a foundation for higher-order introspection.

Western psychological models, notably Freud's structural theory of the psyche, often underemphasize the role of the body in shaping cognition and emotional states. Freud's model—comprising the Id, Ego, and Superego—primarily focuses on intrapsychic dynamics rather than the physiological basis of experience (Freud, 1923/1990). However, contemporary neuropsychological research, including Damasio's (1994) somatic marker hypothesis, highlights the integration of bodily states in decision-making and emotional regulation, an idea that aligns closely with the holistic understanding of the *Sthūla Śarīra*.

Metacognitive practices related to the *Sthūla Śarīra* involve acknowledging the impermanence of bodily experiences and their influence on cognition. This aligns with mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), a framework pioneered by Kabat-Zinn (1990), which emphasizes bodily awareness for emotional regulation.

***Sūkṣma Śarīra* (Subtle Body): The Cognitive and Energetic Interface**

सूक्ष्मशरीरं किम्? अपञ्चीकृतपञ्चमहाभूतैः कृतं सत्कर्मजन्यं सुखदुःखादिभोगसाधनं
पञ्चज्ञानेन्द्रियाणि पञ्चकर्मेन्द्रियाणि पञ्चप्राणादयः मनश्चैकं बुद्धिश्चैका एवं सप्तदशाकलाभिः
सह यत्तिष्ठति तत्सूक्ष्मशरीरम्।

Translation: "What is the *Sūkṣma Śarīra*? It is the body made of the five subtle elements (*tanmātra*), arising from virtuous deeds (*sat-karma*), and serves as the means for experiencing pleasure and pain. It comprises the five sense organs (*jnānendriyā*), five organs of action (*karmendriyā*), five vital airs (*prāna*), mind (*manas*), and intellect (*buddhi*), totalling 17 components."

The *Sūkṣma Śarīra* bridges the physical and metaphysical, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and energetic dimensions. It parallels Freud's unconscious and preconscious constructs but also incorporates elements akin to Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, which postulates universal archetypal patterns across human cultures (Jung, 1968).

A critical metacognitive insight from the *Sūkṣma Śarīra* is the recognition of subtle mental patterns and energies (*prāna*) that shape human experience. This aligns with cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which identifies and restructures maladaptive cognitive patterns (Beck, 1976). Furthermore, practices such as *prānāyāma* (breath control) and *dhyāna* (meditation) are instrumental in regulating these patterns, enhancing self-awareness and emotional intelligence.

Daniel Siegel's (2012) work on interpersonal neurobiology further supports this framework by elucidating the brain-body connection, demonstrating how embodied cognition impacts

psychological functioning. This perspective reinforces the *Sūkṣma Śarīra*'s role as an intermediary between sensory inputs and deeper cognitive structures.

***Kāraṇa Śarīra* (Causal Body): The Foundation of Human Existence**

कारणशरीरं किम्? अनिर्वच्यानाद्यविद्यारूपं शरीरद्वयस्य कारणमात्रं सत्स्वरूपाऽज्ञानं
निर्विकल्पकरूपं यदस्ति तत्कारणशरीरम्।

Translation: "What is the *Kāraṇa Śarīra*? It is the indescribable (*anirvāchya*) form of primal ignorance (*avidyā*), serving as the cause of the other two bodies. It is the essence of being (*sat*) in a state of ignorance, devoid of distinctions (*nirvikalpa*)."

The *Kāraṇa Śarīra* represents the deepest substratum of existence, housing latent tendencies (*samskāra*) and karmic imprints. This conceptualization finds a distant parallel in Jung's individuation process, which seeks to integrate unconscious elements into conscious awareness (Jung, 1959). However, the *Kāraṇa Śarīra* extends beyond psychological integration to encompass spiritual realization and liberation (*moksha*).

Metacognition at this level entails transcending conditioned perception and self-limiting constructs, a pursuit emphasized in *Advaita Vedānta*'s self-inquiry (*ātma-vichāra*) and Buddhist mindfulness techniques, which aim to dissolve dualistic thinking and reveal the non-dual nature of consciousness. Viktor Frankl's (1959) logotherapy, which underscores meaning-seeking as a fundamental human drive, similarly aligns with the causal body's role in guiding spiritual evolution.

TRIKĀYA DOCTRINE OF BUDDHISM: DHARMAKĀYA, SAMBHOGAKĀYA, NIRMĀṆAKĀYA

The *Trikāya* Doctrine in Buddhism articulates three dimensions of the Buddha's being: *Dharmakāya* (truth body), *Sambhogakāya* (enjoyment body), and *Nirmāṇakāya* (manifestation body). These levels represent distinct but interconnected facets of enlightenment, offering insights into the dynamics of consciousness, morality, and self-realization. While these ideas emerge from Buddhist metaphysics, they resonate with certain psychological and philosophical frameworks, such as Freud's structural model of the psyche and Hinduism's *Tri-Śarīra* (three-body) doctrine. By exploring these intersections, we can identify valuable pathways for integrating spiritual and scientific perspectives on consciousness (Williams, 2009).

The *Dharmakāya*, often described as the "truth body," is the embodiment of ultimate reality and pure morality. It signifies the unconditioned, formless essence of the Buddha, transcending dualistic perceptions and representing universal wisdom. Freud's Superego offers a structural parallel to the *Dharmakāya* in its role as a moral compass (Rosenfeld, 1962). However, there is a significant divergence in their underlying principles. While Freud's Superego is shaped by

societal norms and cultural conditioning, often producing conflict and repression within the psyche, the *Dharmakāya* operates as a state of absolute morality—universal and unconditioned. This highlights a key distinction: Freud's Superego addresses morality in the context of personal and cultural dynamics, whereas the *Dharmakāya* embodies a transcendent, universally applicable ethical consciousness (Lusthaus, 2002).

The *Sambhogakāya*, or "enjoyment body," represents the Buddha's capacity to engage with others through the fulfillment of spiritual and existential desires. It is described as the dimension in which enlightened beings, such as *Bodhisattvas*, experience and share the bliss of enlightenment. From a psychological perspective, this aligns with the function of Freud's Id, which is driven by primal desires and the pursuit of satisfaction (Freud, 1923/1961). However, while the Id is often associated with unconscious and instinctual drives, the *Sambhogakāya* transcends these limitations by transforming desire into a harmonious expression of fulfillment. It bridges the personal and the universal, enabling a compassionate engagement with the world that fosters metacognitive awareness of one's deeper motivations and their integration into higher spiritual goals (Gethin, 1998).

The *Nirmāṇakāya*, or "manifestation body," is the Buddha's tangible form in the physical world. This body allows the Buddha to interact with beings in their own realm of existence, serving as a direct means of guiding them toward enlightenment. This aspect can be likened to Freud's Ego, which functions as the mediator between the external world and the internal demands of the psyche (Freud, 1923/1961). However, Freud's Ego primarily navigates the complexities of the individual's immediate environment and personal reality, often with a focus on psychological survival and adaptation. In contrast, the represents a fully realized ego that operates not for self-preservation but for the benefit of others, embodying a form of altruistic agency that is deeply rooted in metacognitive and moral clarity (Harvey, 2013).

The *Trikāya* doctrine and the *Tri-Śarīra* framework offer unique perspectives on human existence and consciousness, with both differences *Nirmāṇakāya* and complements in their philosophical treatment. In Buddhism, the three kayas—*Dharmakāya* (truth body), *Sambhogakāya* (enjoyment body), and *Nirmāṇakāya* (manifestation body)—are seen as enlightened states attained through the realization of pure consciousness. In contrast, Hinduism's three *Śarīra* — *Sthūla Śarīra* (gross body), *Sūkṣma Śarīra* (subtle body), and *Kāraṇa Śarīra* (causal body)—are seen as temporary constructs to be transcended, with only the *Ātman* as the ultimate and eternal reality (Dasgupta, 1922).

In this synthesis, *Nirmāṇakāya* aligns with the *Sthūla Śarīra*, as both represent the physical form. In Buddhism, the *Nirmāṇakāya* is the Buddha's physical manifestation, engaging compassionately in the world to guide others toward liberation. However, in Hinduism, the *Sthūla Śarīra* is regarded as transient and subject to the cycle of birth, decay, and death. It is something to be comprehended and ultimately transcended, as it is a temporary vehicle for experiencing the material world. Despite this difference, both concepts recognize the

importance of the physical realm in spiritual practice, whether through compassionate action or as a starting point for self-inquiry (Krishnamurti, 1983).

Sambhogakāya, the enjoyment body, represents the fulfillment of desires in Buddhism, not in a hedonistic sense but as an enlightened engagement with bliss and wisdom. It aligns with the *Kāraṇa Śarīra*, which houses latent impressions (*samskāra*) and is the cause of both suffering and liberation. While Buddhism elevates the *Sambhogakāya* as a transformative state of spiritual enjoyment, Hinduism emphasizes transcending the *Kāraṇa Śarīra*, dissolving its karmic bonds to achieve liberation (*moksha*) (Olivelle, 1998). The complementarity here lies in their shared focus on the deeper causality of human experience, even as their approaches diverge.

Dharmakāya, the truth body, aligns with the *Sūkṣma Śarīra*, as both represent a connection to higher consciousness. The *Dharmakāya* embodies pure morality and unconditioned reality, the ultimate realization of Buddha-nature. Similarly, the *Sūkṣma Śarīra* connects the physical and causal realms, encompassing the mind, intellect, and subtle energies. However, while the *Dharmakāya* is an enlightened state in itself, the *Sūkṣma Śarīra* is still a layer to be transcended in Hinduism. The *Ātman*, as the eternal self, encompasses and surpasses all the *Śarīras*, pointing to a fundamental divergence between the two systems (Flood, 1996).

STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS OF *VEDĀNTA*: *JĀGRIT, SVAPNA, SUṢUPTI*

The *Vedānta* philosophy offers a profound framework for understanding human consciousness through three fundamental states: *Jāgrit* (wakefulness), *Svapna* (dreaming), and *Suṣupti* (deep sleep). These states delineate different levels of human experience and cognition, integrating ancient spiritual insights with modern psychological paradigms.

In *Vedānta* philosophy, *Jāgrit* refers to the waking state, in which the mind actively engages with the external world. This state is closely tied to the ego, as the self identifies most strongly with sensory and cognitive experiences. From a psychological perspective, this aligns with Freud's concept of the Ego, which mediates between the individual's desires and external reality (Freud, 1923). However, *Vedānta* underscores the necessity of metacognition—conscious awareness of one's thoughts and actions—to transcend the ego's limitations. By critically evaluating the self-identity derived from external interactions, an individual may begin to perceive the *Jāgrit* state as a construct rather than an ultimate reality. While the ego facilitates survival and social functioning, *Vedānta* posits that it is a surface-level identity to be transcended in the pursuit of higher consciousness.

The *Svapna* state corresponds to the dream realm, where the mind turns inward and engages with subconscious imagery, desires, and impressions. In Freudian theory, this state is where

the Id, the reservoir of primal instincts and unconscious drives, operates most freely (Freud, 1900). Both *Vedānta* and Freudian perspectives recognize dreams as reflections of deeper aspects of the psyche, often revealing latent thoughts and unresolved emotions. However, *Vedānta* extends beyond Freud's notion of repressed desires, viewing the *Svapna* state as an opportunity for self-reflection. Through conscious observation and interpretation of symbolic dream elements, an individual can gain awareness of subconscious influences and karmic impressions (*samskāra*) that shape identity (Rama, Ballentine, & Ajaya, 1976). Transcending this state is not merely about decoding these influences but also about recognizing the limitations of the Id and progressing toward self-awareness.

The *Suṣupti* state, or deep sleep, is a phase in which conscious mental activity ceases entirely. In Freudian terms, the Superego—representing internalized moral and social constructs—operates actively in waking and dreaming states but becomes dormant in deep sleep (Freud, 1923). *Vedānta*, however, interprets *Suṣupti* as more than a mere physiological necessity; it is considered a temporary dissolution of ego-driven consciousness, offering a glimpse into universal awareness (Nikhilananda, 1936). Modern neuroscience correlates deep sleep with essential cognitive functions such as memory consolidation (Diekelmann & Born, 2010), but *Vedānta* emphasizes its spiritual dimension. The *Sushupti* state serves as an experiential bridge, revealing that even in the absence of ego and Id, a substratum of moral awareness persists.

Vedānta introduces *Turiya*, a state beyond wakefulness, dreaming, and deep sleep. *Turiya* is not merely an additional phase of consciousness but the foundational reality underlying all other states. It aligns with concepts found in Buddhist philosophy, such as the realization of Buddhahood, and in Hindu thought as the recognition of the *Ātman*, or true self (Nikhilananda, 1936). In this state, one fully transcends the constructs of the ego, Id, and Superego, attaining a non-dual awareness that integrates all experiences into a singular, undivided reality.

Experientially, this state can be characterized by a profound sense of non-duality (*advaita*), silence of mental fluctuations (*chitta vritti nirodha*), and an unshakable awareness that is conscious of consciousness itself. While not ordinarily accessible through sensory or discursive cognition, practices like *Ātma-Vichāra* (self-inquiry) and meditative absorption (*dhyāna*) are traditional pathways for accessing this state. These practices direct attention inward, stripping away identification with body, thought, and ego, until only the witnessing awareness remains. In this sense, *Turiya* is not attained but revealed, as the ever-present Observer that is otherwise obscured by mental conditioning.

SĀṆKHYA & YOGA PHILOSOPHYS' THREE GUṆA: SATTVA, RAJAS, TAMAS

In the deeper layers of the triadic framework of Indian philosophy, the concept of the three *Guṇa*—*Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*—offers profound insight into the dynamics of human behavior, cognition, and existence. These *Guṇa*, rooted in the *Sāṅkhya* philosophy, function as

the fundamental qualities that govern all of nature (*Prakriti*), including the human mind and body. They are not merely psychological attributes but also metaphysical principles, presenting a holistic approach to understanding existence (Rao, 2011).

Sattva, characterized by clarity, balance, and harmony, closely aligns with the Superego in Freudian psychology. Just as the Superego embodies moral values and ideals, *Sattva* represents the higher virtues of the mind—purity, wisdom, and the pursuit of truth (Dasgupta, 1992). An individual dominated by *Sattva* is inclined toward ethical behavior, selflessness, and spiritual growth.

In modern psychological terms, *Sattva* functions as an internalized moral compass, guiding individuals toward altruistic actions and higher aspirations. It resonates with psychological constructs such as mindfulness and ethical reasoning, both of which cultivate inner peace and clarity (Davidson & Dahl, 2018). However, unlike the Superego, which is shaped by societal conditioning, *Sattva* is believed to emerge from a deeper connection with universal truth, transcending cultural and personal biases.

Rajas, defined by activity, desire, and dynamism, corresponds to the Ego in its role of navigating day-to-day life. The Ego mediates between the internal drives of the Id and the external demands of reality, much like *Rajas* propels individuals to engage with the world (Kakar, 1982). *Rajas* is the force behind ambition, competition, and effort, but it is also the source of restlessness and attachment.

While *Rajas* is essential for functioning and progress, its dominance can lead to stress, conflict, and over-identification with worldly pursuits. *Vedānta* and *Sāṅkhya* traditions encourage individuals to balance *Rajas* by channeling its energy toward purposeful action rather than unregulated desire (Prabhupada, 1972). This perspective aligns with modern psychological approaches that emphasize goal-setting and emotional regulation to maintain equilibrium in one's life (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Tamas, associated with inertia, ignorance, and darkness, mirrors the Id, which represents primal instincts and unconscious drives (Freud, 1961). *Tamas* manifests as stagnation, lethargy, and indulgence, reflecting the Id's instinctual, often unregulated impulses.

However, while Freud's Id is primarily a psychological construct, *Tamas* encompasses both physical and metaphysical aspects. It is the force that resists change and binds individuals to material limitations (Rao, 2011). Overcoming *Tamas* involves developing awareness and discipline, akin to psychological efforts aimed at bringing unconscious drives into conscious awareness through self-reflection and intentionality (Jung, 1968).

The *Sāṅkhya* philosophy, within which the concept of *Guṇa* originates, extends beyond psychology to encompass the metaphysics of existence. Unlike Western psychological models, which primarily analyze the mind, *Sāṅkhya* integrates the physical body and its connection to

the cosmos. The *Guṇa* are not merely qualities of the mind but are inherent in the *Panchabhūta* (five elements: earth, water, fire, air, and ether), which constitute both the human body and the material world (Hiriyanna, 1949).

For example, *Tamas* corresponds to denser elements such as earth and water, symbolizing inertia and stability. *Rajas* aligns with fire and air, representing activity and transformation, while *Sattva* resonates with ether, signifying clarity and transcendence. This integration of psychological and physical principles highlights the deeply interconnected nature of consciousness, matter, and existence in *Sāṅkhya* thought.

While Freud's model of the psyche aims to explain human behavior in therapeutic contexts, the *Sāṅkhya* framework extends this inquiry to include the physics of the body and the universe. This dual psychological-metaphysical inquiry seeks to uncover the interplay between individual consciousness and cosmic principles, presenting a holistic framework for self-realization (Dasgupta, 1922).

The ultimate goal in *Sāṅkhya* and *Vedānta* traditions is to transcend the *Guṇa* and realize *Purusha*—pure consciousness or the true self. This transcendence is comparable to the concept of self-actualization in modern psychology, where an individual moves beyond basic drives and societal conditioning to achieve their highest potential (Maslow, 1971).

Transcending *Tamas* requires overcoming ignorance and inertia through knowledge and self-discipline. Mastery over *Rajas* involves detaching from desires and channeling energy toward selfless action. Finally, transcending *Sattva*—despite its association with virtue—requires recognizing that even moral excellence is a construct of the material world. Only by rising above all three *Guṇa* can one attain liberation (*moksha*) and unity with the higher self (Prabhupada, 1972).

OBSERVER MODE: A PARADIGM FOR SCIENTIFIC METACOGNITION

Observer represents a crucial transcendental function within the broader framework of metacognition. It refers to the cognitive capacity to observe and reflect upon one's own thoughts, emotions, and behavioral impulses as distinct phenomena. This mode directly correlates with self-awareness—the ability to recognize oneself as an agent within experience—and meta-awareness, which involves monitoring the contents of consciousness itself (e.g., "I notice that I am feeling anxious" rather than just *being* anxious).

It is a structured stance of the mind that allows for detached observation, enabling an individual to deconstruct automatic reactions and habitual thought patterns. For example, during a moment of anger, a person in a mode of observation might notice the physiological arousal (e.g., clenched fists), the mental narrative ("This is unfair"), and the impulse to react. Instead of being swept away by these processes, observation allows one to pause, label the experience,

and choose a conscious response. This moment of reflective distance is what distinguishes a person who observes subtle mind related processes from ordinary self-awareness.

The ideas of *Turiya/Bodhisattva/Purusha* state represent similar concept i.e. metacognition in a broader systematic way. Hence, this state can be named as ‘Observer mode’. The concept of Observer Mode represents a crucial transcendental process within the broader framework of metacognition, wherein an individual attains the capacity to observe and reflect upon their own cognitive processes as discrete phenomena. This self-referential stance is not merely an abstract state of consciousness; rather, it functions as an epistemic tool, enabling the practitioner to dissociate from immediate thought patterns and engage in a systematic, objective evaluation of mental operations. The cultivation of Observer Mode, therefore, emerges as a foundational requirement for advancing scientific inquiry into the dynamics of consciousness and cognition.

Central to this discourse is the recognition that traditional scientific methodologies often prioritize external observation and measurement while relegating introspective insight to the margins of inquiry. In contrast, Observer Mode encapsulates an integrative approach that synthesizes internal subjective awareness with external empirical scrutiny. This dual perspective is reminiscent of the dialectical interplay between the idiosyncratic experiences of subjectivity and the objective demands of scientific falsifiability—a tension that has long been acknowledged in both Western scientific paradigms (Popper, 1959) and Eastern contemplative traditions (Menon, 2005).

From a neurocognitive standpoint, the emergence of Observer Mode can be understood as an evolution of metacognitive regulation. Recent advances in interpersonal neurobiology suggest that the ability to adopt an observer stance is underpinned by complex neural circuits that mediate self-awareness and executive control (Siegel, 2012). This cerebral architecture enables an individual to effectively decouple from immediate emotional and cognitive reactivity, thereby fostering a reflective state that is essential for adaptive learning and the reassessment of entrenched behavioral patterns. In this respect, Observer Mode functions analogously to the concept of mindfulness as operationalized in contemporary cognitive-behavioral therapies and stress reduction protocols (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Philosophically, the integration of Observer Mode into scientific metacognition extends the dialogue between ancient epistemologies and modern cognitive science. Eastern philosophies, particularly those rooted in *Vedānta* and Buddhist traditions, have long posited that self-observation is a transformative practice that transcends mere sensory experience. The introspective methodologies of Vipassana meditation and *Ātma-Vichāra* (self-inquiry) illustrate how disciplined introspection can yield insights into the impermanent nature of thought and the constructed nature of the self (Williams, 2009). I argue that, a systematic approach like that of science is required for achieving metacognition—drawing inference from these mindfulness traditions. By drawing on these diverse intellectual traditions, Observer Mode bridges the apparent dichotomy between the subjective realm of consciousness and the objective demands of empirical validation.

Moreover, the adoption of Observer Mode as a scientific paradigm necessitates a reconfiguration of traditional research methodologies. It invites a paradigm shift wherein the observer is not an inert spectator but an active participant in the generation of knowledge. This stance aligns with emerging frameworks in which the act of observation is itself a critical variable in the construction of scientific theories. Such a reorientation echoes the challenges posed by the non-falsifiability of certain universal laws and axiomatic principles, urging a re-examination of the epistemological foundations upon which modern science is built (Hawking, 1996).

In practical terms, the cultivation of Observer Mode can enhance the rigor of scientific metacognition by promoting a reflective detachment from cognitive biases and preconceptions. This self-regulatory process is instrumental in enabling researchers to critically evaluate their methodologies, thereby fostering a more robust and dynamic engagement with the scientific process. As demonstrated in various meta-analytical studies, such introspective practices can yield therapeutic benefits and contribute to the overall refinement of both personal and collective scientific inquiry (Mitra, 2020).

The theoretical construct of Observer Mode—as a metacognitive stance of detached self-awareness—also has tangible implications for therapeutic contexts, particularly in modalities such as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), and psychodynamic treatment. Within mindfulness practices, Observer Mode closely aligns with the cultivation of non-reactive awareness, helping individuals identify and pause habitual emotional responses. In cognitive restructuring, it supports the distancing from automatic thoughts, allowing clients to reflect on cognitive distortions without immediate identification or judgment. From this perspective, Observer Mode becomes a practical scaffold for emotional regulation and insight generation.

The broader *Tri-Pada* framework can also offer therapists an integrative lens through which to understand client challenges—not merely as behavioral symptoms or unconscious drives, but as expressions of imbalances across the somatic, cognitive/emotional, and existential/identity-based levels of experience. This holistic view does not prescribe specific techniques but can guide therapeutic formulation and deepen case conceptualization, especially in multicultural or transpersonal therapy settings.

More broadly, the emphasis on metacognition within this framework speaks directly to contemporary needs in psychological practice: helping clients become more aware of their thought processes, identify patterns in their emotional responses, and cultivate the reflective distance necessary for change. As such, the *Tri-Pada*–Observer Mode synthesis offers a promising direction for integrating introspective traditions with evidence-based therapeutic work, advancing both conceptual richness and clinical utility.

In sum, Observer Mode is not simply an ancillary aspect of cognitive functioning but a pivotal mechanism for achieving a higher degree of self-awareness and metacognitive clarity. Its integration into scientific paradigms underscores the potential for a more holistic understanding of consciousness—one that embraces both the empirical and the experiential. By recognizing and harnessing the transformative power of Observer Mode, researchers can pave the way for a new era of scientific metacognition that is as rigorous as it is reflective.

CONCLUSION

The *Tri-Pada* framework synthesizes multiple triadic systems from psychoanalysis, *Vedānta*, Buddhism, and Indian philosophical psychology into a unified model of consciousness. According to this refined alignment, Freud's Superego, *Sūkṣma Śarīra* (subtle body), the *Dharmakāya* (truth body), the *Suṣupti* (deep sleep) state, and the *Sattva Guṇa* collectively represent the higher introspective and ethical dimension of being—associated with clarity, equilibrium, and moral discernment. The Id, by contrast, aligns with the *Kāraṇa Śarīra* (causal body), the *Sambhogakāya* (enjoyment body), the *Svapna* (dream) state, and the *Tamas Guṇa*—representing unconscious drives, karmic residue, and inertia. Meanwhile, Freud's Ego corresponds to the *Sthūla Śarīra* (gross body), the *Nirmāṇakāya* (manifest body), the *Jāgrit* (waking) state, and the *Rajas Guṇa*—capturing the dynamic interface between self and world, marked by activity, desire, and mediation. At the center of the model (Figure 1) lies the Observer Mode, conceptualized as the *Ātman*, *Brahman*, *Turiya*, *Purusha*, or *Bodhisattva*—a transcendental, metacognitive witnessing consciousness that integrates, regulates, and ultimately transcends the triadic structures.

In synthesizing diverse intellectual traditions, this paper has endeavored to forge a cohesive framework that bridges the domains of psychoanalysis, Eastern philosophical inquiry, and contemporary scientific metacognition. The integrative approach articulated through the *Tri-Pada* framework, and particularly through the lens of Observer Mode, underscores the necessity of transcending conventional cognitive boundaries to achieve a more holistic understanding of the human mind. This synthesis, rooted in both empirical evidence and ancient wisdom, advocates for a paradigm that recognizes introspection as not only a therapeutic tool but also a critical scientific asset.

The discourse has illuminated how foundational constructs—ranging from Freud's structural model of the psyche to *Vedānta* states of consciousness—can be reinterpreted to support a dynamic model of self-reflective inquiry. Observer Mode, as elaborated herein, emerges as a pivotal mechanism that enables individuals to critically observe and recalibrate their internal processes. This capacity for metacognitive self-regulation is vital not only for personal psychological well-being but also for advancing a scientific understanding that embraces the full spectrum of human experience. Such a reorientation challenges the traditional dichotomy between objective observation and subjective introspection, offering instead a unified approach that is both empirically rigorous and phenomenologically rich.

Ultimately, the integration of these varied perspectives invites a re-examination of long-held epistemological assumptions within modern science. By reconciling the objective methodologies of empirical research with the introspective practices inherent in ancient traditions, this paper lays the groundwork for a more comprehensive model of consciousness. Future research may benefit from further exploring these intersections, thereby fostering an enriched dialogue between scientific inquiry and the perennial quest for self-understanding.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS USED

Antaranga Sadhāna

A *Vedānta* practice of inner discipline, involving self-exploration through meditation, mindfulness, or self-inquiry to transcend ego and realize the true self.

Example: Reflecting on “Who am I?” to uncover deeper aspects of identity beyond roles or emotions.

Ātma-Vichāra

A *Vedānta* method of self-inquiry, where one questions the nature of the self to realize the eternal Atman (true self) beyond temporary mental or physical constructs.

Example: Asking, “What remains when all thoughts stop?” to discover a core sense of awareness.

Ego

In Freudian psychoanalysis, the Ego is the conscious, rational part of the psyche that mediates between the Id’s desires, the Superego’s moral standards, and external reality.

Example: Deciding to study for an exam instead of watching TV, balancing desire with responsibility.

Id

In Freudian psychoanalysis, the Id is the unconscious part of the psyche that contains primal instincts, desires, and drives, operating on the pleasure principle to seek immediate gratification.

Example: Feeling an impulsive urge to eat a snack despite being full, driven by instinct rather than reason.

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)

A collective term for philosophical, scientific, and spiritual traditions from India, including *Vedānta*, *Sāṅkhya*, *Yoga*, and *Āyurveda*. These systems emphasize introspection, holistic understanding, and the interconnectedness of mind, body, and cosmos.

Example: Using Yoga's breathing exercises (prāṇāyāma) to calm the mind, based on the belief that breath links physical and mental states.

Jāgrit, Svapna, Suṣupti

Vedānta states of consciousness: *Jāgrit* (waking, engaging with the external world), *Svapna* (dreaming, processing subconscious impressions), and *Suṣupti* (deep sleep, where ego-driven awareness dissolves). These states reflect different modes of mental activity.

Example: Planning a project (Jāgrit), dreaming of flying (Svapna), or sub conscious processes happening without one's will (Suṣupti).

Kāraṇa Śarīra (Causal Body)

The deepest layer in *Vedānta*, representing the root of existence and storing latent tendencies (*samskāra*) or karmic imprints. It is the cause of the *Sthūla Śarīra* (gross body) and *Sūkṣma Śarīra* (subtle body) and is transcended through spiritual liberation.

Example: Unconscious habits or fears that influence behavior, rooted in past experiences or conditioning.

Metacognitive Refinement

The process of improving one's ability to understand, monitor, and regulate their own thinking processes. It involves becoming more aware of how thoughts arise and influence behavior, often through practices like mindfulness or self-reflection.

Example: Recognizing a recurring anxious thought during meditation and consciously choosing to focus on self instead.

Non-Falsifiable Principles

Concepts or laws that cannot be proven false through experiments, yet serve as foundational assumptions in science or philosophy. In the paper, these are compared to universal principles in IKS, like causality.

Example: The law of conservation of energy, which is assumed true but not directly testable in every scenario.

Observer Mode

A metacognitive state where an individual observes their own thoughts, emotions, or behaviors as if from an outside perspective, without being fully immersed in them. Derived

from concepts like *Turiya* (*Vedānta*), *Bodhisattva*-hood (Buddhism), and *Purusha* (*Sāṅkhya*), it enables objective self-analysis.

Example: Noticing anger arising during an argument but choosing to pause and reflect rather than react impulsively.

***Pratītyasamutpāda* (Dependent Origination)**

A Buddhist concept stating that all phenomena arise due to interdependent causes and conditions. It suggests that suffering (*dukkha*) results from specific factors, akin to statistical correlations in science.

Example: Stress arising from overworking, which depends on choices, environment, and habits.

Purusha

In *Sāṅkhya* philosophy, the pure consciousness or true self, distinct from nature (*Prakriti*) and its qualities (*Guṇa*). It is the unchanging witness of all experiences.

Example: The part of you that silently observes thoughts, unchanged by joy or sorrow.

***Sattva, Rajas, Tamas* (Three *Guṇa*)**

Qualities in *Sāṅkhya* philosophy that govern nature and human behavior: *Sattva* (clarity, balance), *Rajas* (activity, desire), and *Tamas* (inertia, ignorance). They interact to shape thoughts, actions, and personality.

Example: Feeling calm and focused (Sattva), driven to achieve a goal (Rajas), or procrastinating (Tamas).

Spirituo-Scientific Domain

A proposed interdisciplinary field that integrates rigorous scientific methods (e.g., empirical research, hypothesis testing) with introspective practices from spiritual traditions (e.g., meditation, self-inquiry). It aims to study consciousness holistically by combining objective data with subjective experiences.

Example: Using neuroimaging to study brain activity during meditation, while also analyzing participants' self-reported insights.

***Sthūla Śarīra* (Gross Body)**

The physical body in *Vedānta* philosophy, composed of the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, ether). It is the temporary, material vessel for sensory experiences and is subject to birth, growth, decay, and death.

Example: The body one sees in the mirror, which feels hunger or pain, but is distinct from thoughts or deeper identity.

Sūkṣma Śarīra (Subtle Body)

The non-physical layer in *Vedānta*, encompassing the mind, intellect, senses, and vital energies (*prāṇa*). It processes thoughts, emotions, and subtle experiences, bridging the physical body and deeper consciousness.

Example: The mind that dreams or feels emotions, which persists even when the physical body is asleep.

Superego

In Freudian psychoanalysis, the Superego is the moral conscience, internalizing societal norms and ethical values to guide behavior.

Example: Feeling guilty for lying because it violates personal or societal standards of honesty.

Transcendence

The act of moving beyond ordinary mental or physical limitations to achieve a higher state of awareness or understanding. In the *Tri-Pada* framework, it refers to rising above ego-driven thoughts or conditioned behaviors to access a detached, universal perspective (e.g., Observer Mode).

Example: Feeling a sense of unity with others during deep meditation, beyond personal identity.

Trikāya Doctrine

A Buddhist framework describing three aspects of a Buddha's being: *Dharmakāya* (truth body, ultimate reality), *Sambhogakāya* (enjoyment body, spiritual fulfillment), and *Nirmāṇakāya* (manifestation body, physical presence). It illustrates levels of consciousness and enlightenment.

Example: A teacher (Nirmāṇakāya) shares wisdom (Dharmakāya) through compassionate actions (Sambhogakāya).

Tri-Pada Principle

A conceptual framework that synthesizes triadic (three-part) models from various traditions to understand consciousness, behavior, and cognition. It integrates constructs like Freud's Id/Ego/Superego, *Vedānta*'s three bodies (*Sthūla Śarīra*, *Sūkṣma Śarīra*, *Kāraṇa Śarīra*), Buddhist *Trikāya* doctrine (*Dharmakāya*, *Sambhogakāya*, *Nirmāṇakāya*), *Vedānta* states of consciousness (*Jāgrit*, *Svapna*, *Suṣupti*), and *Sāṅkhya*'s three *Guṇa* (*Sattva*, *Rajas*, *Tamas*).

Example: Viewing a person's behavior as influenced by primal instincts, sub conscious behaviours, and moral ideals.

Turiya

The fourth state of consciousness in *Vedānta*, beyond waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. It is a state of pure, non-dual awareness, where the self realizes its true nature (*Ātman*) beyond mental constructs.

Example: A moment of profound clarity during meditation, feeling connected to all existence without personal thoughts.

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