

Research Paper

Nature of Consciousness in Yoga Sutra: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

The term consciousness has been discussed in ancient as well as modern philosophy. Even though the modern sciences are trying to enrich the details about consciousness from the eye of easy problem of consciousness. Here one ancient Indian philosophical text discussing about consciousness is Yoga Sūtra. Generally Yoga Sūtra is considered to be the best philosophy to learn about the Aṣṭāṅga Yogic path. However, Yoga Darśana, which existed even before Patañjali formulated the Sūtras, delves into the subject of consciousness with unparalleled depth, describing its existence, nature, and properties in a manner unmatched by other philosophies or texts. Consciousness itself is known by various names in different philosophies, such as soul, Cetanā. Caitanya, etc. When the Yoga Sūtras are examined through the lenses of facts, logic, and evidence, the insights on consciousness are codified with their logic, considered as Āgama evidence, through various discussions, supplemented by empirical facts and reasoning. Therefore, accepting Yoga Darśana as the authentic source to learn about consciousness is not merely an extraordinary sentiment but appears to be logical as it outlines the system of progressive development of the consciousness. The nature of consciousness in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras is thought to be mostly similar to the one described in Sankhya philosophy. But going deeply into both of the text reveals that Sankhya Philosophy is detailing about total 25 tattvas from which 1 is Puruṣa and 24 others are of prakṛiti (Dṛśya). While Patanjali Yoga Sutras are not detailing much about Prakṛiti directly but the details of Puruṣa is described there in direct sutras of Patanjali. These Sutras also present a structured approach to understanding and cultivating consciousness, focusing on the interplay between the citta (mind) and the Cetanā (self). Hence this work will be focusing on exploring the nature of consciousness which is described in Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. This will be helpful to look out on hard problem of consciousness from the perspectives of Patanjali's explanation of consciousness.

Keywords: *Consciousness, Patanjali Yoga Sutra, Nature of Consciousness, Puruṣa, Dṛṣṭā*

Yoga Sutra is one of the most important philosophical text of Yoga from Indian Philosophy. Even though Yoga sutra is the most appropriate text of already established discipline of yoga, structured in the form of crisp sutras, by Maharishi Patanjali. He have presented this text in the language of rules, and their conclusions similar to

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Received: May 28, 2025; Revision Received: June 05, 2025; Accepted: June 08, 2025

the scientific formulas (Pandya, 2013). Due to which this text is very popular among the yoga practitioners, yoga philosophy teachers and scholars of yoga. Sometimes the readers and teachers of Patanjali Yoga Sutra can misunderstand the purpose of these practices only for healthy life. Whereas Patanjali Yoga sutra talks about '*chittavrittinirodh*' in the starting of the text as well as detailed description of Ashtanga Yoga is also given for achieving this state in second chapter Sadhna Pada. If we go in depth to find out the essence and true purpose of this text, it is to direct the journey of one from outer to inner world, and open up the new dimensions of human consciousness.

Consciousness itself is very popular term among many different field of studies like psychology, neuroscience, biology and Indian philosophy. Its area has been spread up from ancient to modern, spiritual to material, and manifested to unmanifested reality. Even though consciousness term is popular enough in many of the fields, the meaning and concepts of this term also differs a lot in every area. Some of the fields mention consciousness to be the by-product of brain activity, while some believes consciousness to be self-illuminating in nature. At many places meaning of consciousness is taken as only the phenomenal and behavioural aspects of it. But the venerable tradition of consciousness exploration in India, historically confined to philosophical inquiry, persists as an uncharted territory within the annals of scientific history (Kak, 1997).

The seminal work of "Patanjali Yoga Sutra," offers the most credible philosophical and psychological insights, alongside a detailed methodology and framework for the attainment or restoration of our 'true nature' or pure consciousness (Raghuwanshi, 2014). This philosophy sets out to explain the universe and consciousness in the form of causes and results of the process. If we go through the studies of consciousness in different fields, we can see that so many different interdisciplinary works has been done on the exploration and explanation of consciousness in the modern ages. But most of the new age explanations deals with the objective and reflexive part of consciousness explanations. The biggest misery is that the consciousness itself is lost somewhere in these explanations and these explanations lost the true nature of it.

Indian philosophy is talking about consciousness and explanations about the existence, nature, levels, and ways to raise the levels of consciousness in so many different texts. We can see the talks about consciousness and universe in many Upanishads, Shrimad Bhagwad Gita, and Indian Knowledge System. Whereas the term consciousness is not used as such in Indian context, terms used for explaining the concept of consciousness are, *ātmā*, *Caitanya*, *cetanā*, etc. At the same place a very popular and authentic text of Indian Knowledge System is Patanjali Yoga Sutra, which talks about the ultimate result of achieving yoga is to let *drṣṭa* (the seer) sits in his own form.

tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe'vasthānam.

In the context of *Yoga Darśana*, synonyms for consciousness include *Puruṣa*, *Drṣṭā*, *Darśana Śakti*, *Citi Śakti*, and *Svāmī Śakti*. Here in PYS consciousness is used in both of the feminine and masculine manner in YS 2.6, 2.23, 4.22, 4.34 and 1.3, 1.16, 2.6, 2.12, 2.17 2,20, 3.35, 3.49, 4.23 respectively. With the use of different names for consciousness, the levels of consciousness, purpose of it, path of achieving its highest state, existence of (*ishwaras*) super conscious, and many more have been discussed in PYS.

Where other sciences are struggling to describe whether consciousness exists or not, whether its subjective or objective, PYS is completely different and answering one way ahead of all these questions.

1. Patanjali Yoga Sutra:

In the last few decades, the advancing comprehension of consciousness within modern science has increasingly reflected the complex and varied viewpoints presented by ancient Indian philosophical schools. Among these, the Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali, written around the 2nd century BCE, is distinguished as a foundational work that provides a profound introspective and methodical exploration of the essence and expressions of consciousness (Raghuwanshi, 2014). Unlike other classical Indian philosophies that elaborate on a wide array of cosmic principles, like the tattvas or elemental components of nature (Prakṛti) - Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra emphasizes an inward focus, highlighting the experiential aspect of puruṣa (pure consciousness), īśvara (superconscious or divine Self), and their interaction with citta (the mind-stuff) and its transformations (vṛttis). At the core of Patañjali's philosophical framework is a strict dualism. This doctrine proposes three eternally coexisting realities: puruṣa (the conscious self), prakṛti (the material foundation), and īśvara (a unique, untouched consciousness often interpreted as God). These are not simple metaphysical concepts, but fundamental principles that dictate human experience. Every jīva, or individual existence, is regarded as a separate puruṣa, distinct from both nature and the divine, yet interconnected with prakṛti through the functions of the mind (citta) (Feuerstein, 2001; Larson, 1998). The Yoga school adapts its cosmogonist outline from the Sāṅkhya system, in which the universe emerges from the primordial framework of prakṛti, as explicitly noted in Yoga Sūtra 2.19. However, a deep philosophical inquiry emerges from this framework: If humans are fundamentally pure consciousness - unchanging, immutable, and unaffected by the material world - how do we perceive and interact with the realm of the non-Self? This question transcends mere theory, touching upon the essence of yogic investigation. The Yoga Sūtra addresses this by asserting that the misidentification of puruṣa with the movements of citta (vṛtti-sārūpyam) causes consciousness to become intertwined with the experiential world. Liberation (kaivalya) is thus achieved through the disengagement from these modifications, allowing puruṣa to dwell in its authentic state (svarūpe avasthānam), as articulated in Yoga Sūtra 1.3 (Bryant, 2009).

This ancient framework, though articulated centuries ago, continues to resonate with contemporary examinations of consciousness, providing a profoundly experiential and introspective layer that complements empirical methods in cognitive science and the philosophy of mind. This dynamic interplay between puruṣa and prakṛti, between the observer and the observed, presents the human experience as one of misidentified essence. Consciousness, in its purest state, remains unaltered, radiant, and self-revealing. However, due to the closeness of puruṣa to citta, the various transformations of the mind - ranging from perceptions and emotions to thoughts and memories - are wrongly ascribed to the self. This state is referred to in the Yoga Sūtras as avidyā (ignorance), the foundational source of suffering (kleśa), which clouds genuine discernment (viveka-khyāti) (Yoga Sūtra 2.5; 2.26) (Bryant, 2009; Rukmani, 2001). Viewed through this lens, the practice of yoga emerges as a discipline of both epistemology and ontology, aimed at freeing consciousness from its misidentifications.

The key practice advocated by Patañjali - ashtāṅga yoga or the eight-limbed path - provides a structured approach for internal transformation. Progressing from ethical principles (yama, niyama) through physical discipline (āsana), breath control (prāṇāyāma), and sensory

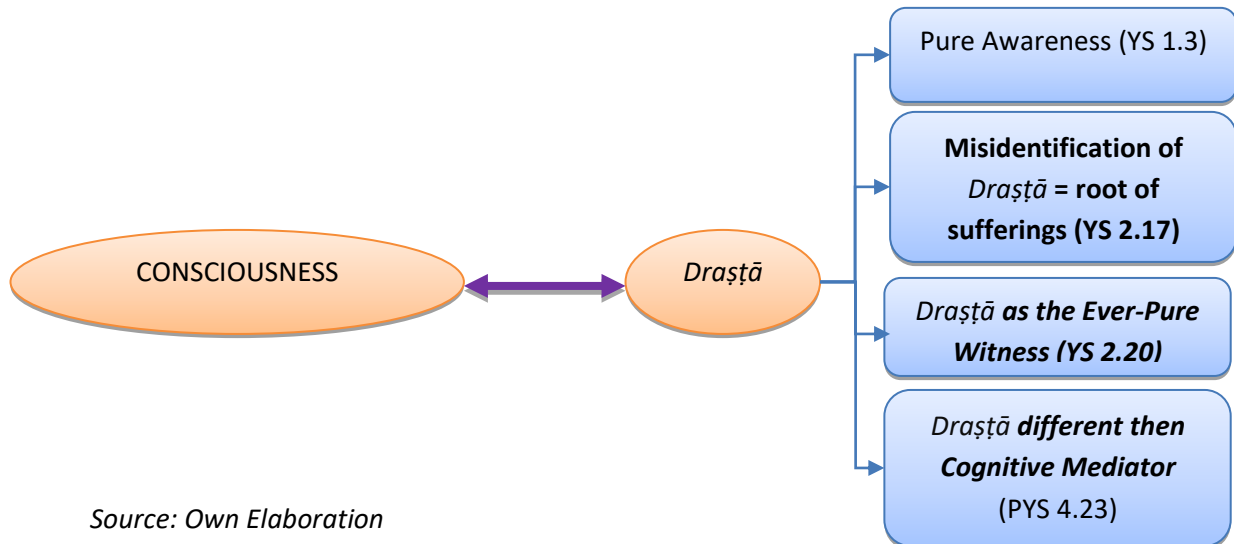
withdrawal (*pratyāhāra*), leads to meditative immersion (*dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*) - each method designed to stabilize and cleanse the fluctuations of *citta*, thereby permitting *puruṣa* to emerge without distortion (Eliade, 1958; Feuerstein, 2008). The ultimate aim of this journey is *kaivalya*, frequently interpreted as liberation or isolation, where *puruṣa* rests in its independent, non-relational condition, completely liberated from the entanglements of *prakṛti* (Yoga Sūtra 4.34).

Interestingly, contemporary theories concerning consciousness reflect similar frictions between subject and object, self and representation. Philosophers such as Thomas Metzinger (2009) and David Chalmers (1996) have grappled with the “hard problem” of consciousness - how and why subjective experiences emerge from physical phenomena. While Western cognitive science typically emphasizes the neural correlates of consciousness (Koch, 2004; Tononi, 2008), the yogic perspective posits that consciousness is not a byproduct of the brain, but a fundamental reality existing independently of neurophysiological foundations. This non-reductive view resonates with certain strands of panpsychism and idealism that are currently garnering renewed interest in the philosophy of mind (Goff, 2019). Furthermore, neuroscientific inquiries into meditative states have provided empirical validation for the transformative potential inherent in the practices detailed in the Yoga Sūtras. Research on long-term practitioners has shown altered activity in brain regions linked to attention, self-referential processing, and emotional regulation (Lutz et al., 2004; Tang et al., 2015). Such results support the assertion that intentional inner practices can recalibrate the mind-brain connection, potentially calming the *vṛttis* and unveiling deeper layers of awareness as illustrated by Patañjali.

On a more profound philosophical plane, the yogic idea that the mind acts as a conduit for both bondage and freedom resonates with modern phenomenological thought. Thinkers like Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty highlighted the intentionality of consciousness - that it is always consciousness of something - and the intrinsic nature of human experience (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012). Patañjali, centuries earlier, articulated this same understanding in terms of the projection and cessation of mental modifications, which shape one's perception of reality. When these modifications are calmed, as stated in Yoga Sūtra 1.2, “*yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*” – yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of consciousness. Consequently, the Yoga Sūtras not only provide a spiritual roadmap for personal transformation but also act as an early phenomenological discourse – rooted in subjective observation and inner exploration – remarkably foresighted in its psychological accuracy and philosophical richness. In a time increasingly focused on the nature and boundaries of conscious awareness, revisiting such ancient wisdom through its own true lens offers true intellectual clarity and existential insight.

2. Consciousness as the Draṣṭā (seer):

In the metaphysical and epistemological framework of Pātañjala Yoga, the term Draṣṭā – meaning "the seer" or "witness" – is used to represent the fundamental essence of



consciousness (puruṣa). This notion is deeply rooted in the sāṅkhya yoga system, where consciousness is viewed not as a byproduct but as an eternal and self-revealing (svayam-prakāśa) reality. Patañjali references this concept in numerous significant aphorisms, providing a logically coherent and spiritually profound understanding of consciousness as the witnessing essence.

3.1 Draṣṭā as Pure Awareness (YS 1.3):

The foundational definition of yoga in *Yoga Sūtra* 1.2 - *yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ* - is immediately followed by the crucial aphorism 1.3:

tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe 'vasthānam (YS 1.3)

"Then the seer (*draṣṭā*) abides in its own true nature."

This sūtra offers the foundational experiential understanding of Yoga. It states that when the fluctuations (vṛttis) of the mind (citta) are controlled (nirodhaḥ), the seer (draṣṭā) remains in its intrinsic state (svarūpa). This svarūpa represents pure consciousness - unchanging, formless, and separate from mental phenomena.

According to the Indian logical system (nyāya), for any entity to be recognized, it must either reveal itself (svayam-prakāśa) or be disclosed through another. Here, Patañjali endorses the position that puruṣa is svayam-prakāśa, illuminating itself and mental activities while remaining unaffected by them (Matilal, 1986). This affirms that *draṣṭā* is not an epiphenomenon of cognition, but the non-objectifiable self-luminous witness.

3.2 Draṣṭā and the Bondage of Karma (YS 2.12)

kleśamūlaḥ karmāśayo dṛṣṭādrṣṭajanmavedanīyaḥ (YS 2.12)

"The karmic impressions rooted in afflictions become manifest in the seen and unseen births."

This sūtra elucidates the causal framework of rebirth, identifying karmic residues (karmāśayas) rooted in afflictions (kleśas) as the origins of both observable (dṛṣṭa) and unobservable (adrṣṭa) future experiences.

Here, *dr̥ṣṭādr̥ṣṭa* refers to the experiences witnessed by the *draṣṭā* throughout different lifetimes. Although the *puruṣa* is not affected by karma, it seemingly endures suffering due to its association with the body-mind complex (*prakṛti*). This differentiation is crucial in *sāṅkhya-yoga* metaphysics and illustrates the illusive nature of bondage, comprehended through inference (*anumāna*) and analytical reasoning (*viveka*) (Dasgupta, 1930).

3.3 Suffering Arises from Misidentification of *Draṣṭā* (YS 2.17)

Patañjali further clarifies the cause of human suffering:

dr̥ṣṭṛ-dr̥śyayoḥ saṁyogo heya-hetuḥ (YS 2.17)

"The conjunction of the seer (*dr̥ṣṭṛ*) and the seen is the cause of suffering."

This sūtra posits that the source of suffering (*duḥkha*) is the erroneous identification (*saṁyoga*) between the seer (*draṣṭā*) and the seen (*dr̥śya*). According to *sāṅkhya*, this connection is not genuine but results from *avidyā* (ignorance).

From the perspective of *nyāya*, this represents an epistemic misjudgment, a false perception (*viparyaya*), where the properties of the non-self are mistakenly assigned to the self (*asat-khyāti*). The remedy lies in *viveka-khyāti* - the discernment of the real (*sat*) from the unreal (*asat*), facilitating liberation (*kaivalya*) (Chatterjee & Datta, 1984).

3.4 *Draṣṭā as the Ever-Pure Witness* (YS 2.20)

One of the direct references of *dr̥ṣṭā* to the pure witness is found in:

draṣṭā dr̥śīmātraḥ śuddho'pi pratyayānupaśyaḥ (YS 2.20)

"The seer is pure consciousness (*śuddhaḥ*), but though pure, he appears to see through the mind's fluctuations."

In this context, the *draṣṭā* is portrayed as "mere seeing" (*dr̥śi-mātraḥ*), and "pure" (*śuddhaḥ*), observing mental constructs (*pratyayas*) without alteration. This directly affirms the role of *puruṣa* as *sākṣin* - the non-participating witness.

In classical Indian epistemology, this aligns with the theory that the self is *jñātā-mātra* - a mere knower - not an actor (*kartā*) or experiencer (*bhoktā*). The *draṣṭā* simply illuminates without engaging in mental processes, as elaborated in *nyāya* by distinguishing between *karāṇa* (means) and *kartā* (agent) (Radhakrishnan & Moore, 1957).

3.5 *Draṣṭā different then Cognitive Mediator of Experience:*

draṣṭṛdr̥śyayoparaktam cittam sarvārtham

"The *citta* (mind), influenced by both the seer (*draṣṭā*) and the seen (*dr̥śya*), is capable of comprehending all objects." (PYS 4.23)

In this final sūtra, Patañjali clarifies the mechanism of cognition. The *citta* (mind-stuff) becomes capable of perceiving all (*sarvārtham*) because it is conditioned (*uparaktam*) by both the seer (*draṣṭā*) and the seen (*dr̥śya*).

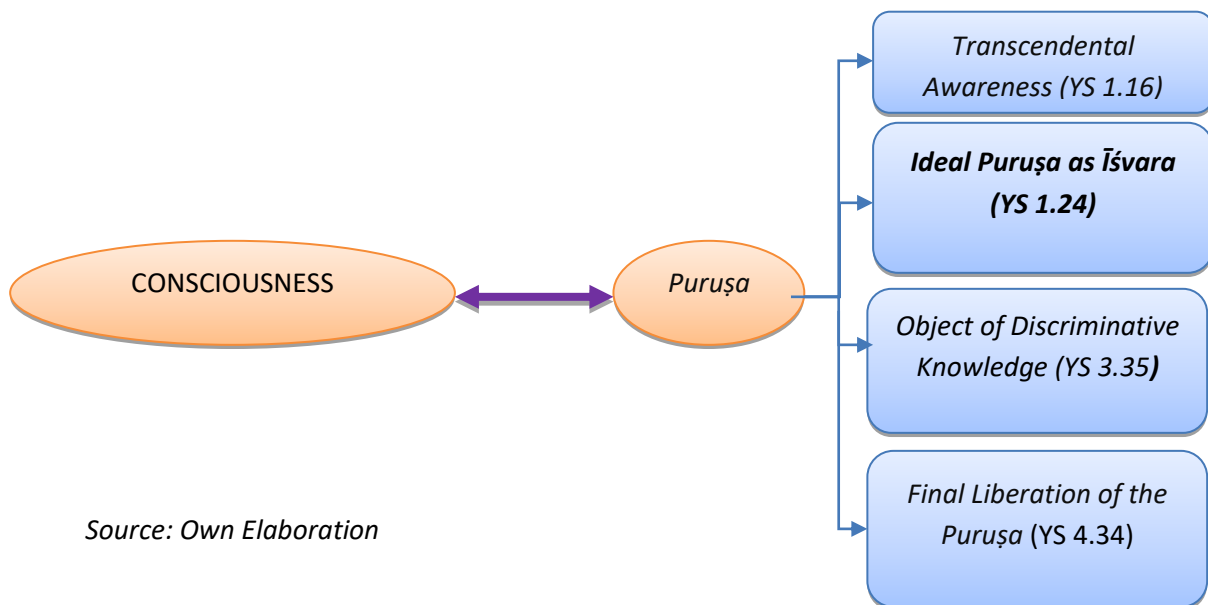
This dual reflection - the form of the object and the illumination of the subject - culminates in the experiential realization of knowledge (*jñāna*). This reflects the classical *pratibimba-vāda* theory, where consciousness acts like light illuminating a mental mirror. The mind, in isolation, is inert; it only attains consciousness in proximity to *puruṣa*, similar to how a crystal appears tinted when near a red flower (Bryant, 2009). Thus, the *patanjali* used this word *draṣṭā* to serve as the illuminator (*prakāśaka*), while the *citta* (mind) serves as the tool (*karāṇa*), and the objects are the forms (*viśaya*). This triad yields valid cognition (*pramā*), a

framework that aligns seamlessly with Indian logical theories of perception and inference. Through these significant sūtras, the term draṣṭā unmistakably signifies the pure witnessing consciousness - puruṣa - that forms the basis of all experiences. Rather than merely an abstract concept, draṣṭā is a rigorously defined ontological and epistemological principle. It parallels the ātman of the Upaniṣads, the jñātā of the nyāya school, and the cit of advaita vedānta, showcasing the interconnected coherence of Indian philosophies in defining consciousness.

Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras provide a profound framework for understanding consciousness as pure, unchanging awareness (*puruṣa*), distinct from the mind's changing activities (*citta*). Through disciplined practice and the cessation of mental fluctuations (*vṛttis*), the practitioner aims to realize the true nature of consciousness, free from misidentification with mental phenomena. This approach, deeply experiential and introspective, offers unique insights that can complement modern scientific inquiries into the nature of consciousness.

4. Consciousness as Puruṣa in Patañjali Yoga Sūtra

Within the philosophical structure of the Yoga Sūtras by Patañjali, the concept puruṣa signifies the ontologically autonomous, conscious essence - non-agentive, eternal, and fundamentally separate from the transient material world (*prakṛti*). Although the term puruṣa is used infrequently, its role and nature are repeatedly alluded through the experiential idea of the draṣṭā (seer). The logical approach adopted in the Yoga Sūtras, which was notably influenced by Sāṅkhya metaphysics, supports the view that the draṣṭā is none other than puruṣa. Draṣṭā/ Puruṣa is a radiant, non-objectifiable witness (*sākṣī*) that facilitates cognition but is never itself an object of cognition (Chakrabarti, 1999; Rukmani, 2001).



4.1 Puruṣa as Transcendental Awareness: YS 1.16

tatparaṁ puruṣakhyāteḥ guṇavairṣṇyam (YS 1.16)

“That highest renunciation arises from the knowledge of puruṣa, resulting in detachment from even the guṇas.”

In this sutra, it is suggested that ultimate dispassion (*vairāgya*) is attained solely through the direct comprehension (*khyāti*) of puruṣa. In traditional Nyāya epistemology, *khyāti* or valid

cognition must correspond with a unique object. Since puruṣa is recognized only when the guṇas are renounced, it cannot consist of guṇas, it must be categorically different. Therefore, what is understood through puruṣa-khyāti is not a mental construct but the draṣṭā, pure awareness itself, uninfluenced by the mind (citta) and its vṛttis. This aligns with the core Sāṅkhya-Yoga belief that the puruṣa is the draṣṭā, the untainted seer who perceives by simply being, not through action (Bryant, 2009).

4.2 Ideal Puruṣa (without any fluctuation) as Īśvara: YS 1.24

kleśa-karma-vipākāśayair aparāmrṣṭaḥ puruṣaviśeṣa īśvaraḥ (YS 1.24)

“Īśvara is a distinct puruṣa, untouched by the afflictions, actions, results, or latent impressions.”

This saying sets Īśvara apart from all other embodied beings (jīvas) by categorizing him as a viśeṣa-puruṣa (a special puruṣa). Whereas all puruṣas are merely draṣṭṛa-mātra (pure seers), Īśvara uniquely remains untainted by karmic limitations. The employment of the term puruṣa here emphasizes that even divine entities are conceived as a type of conscious witness, never as acting agents (kartā). This viśeṣa-puruṣa is therefore not just an empirical observer but a transcendental consciousness, beyond the chains of cause and effect (karma-vipāka). This reaffirms the metaphysical position of draṣṭā as synonymous with puruṣa, unchanging, non-doer, and perpetually conscious (Raju, 1985; Larson & Bhattacharya, 2008).

4.3 Puruṣa as Object of Discriminative Knowledge: YS 3.35

sattva-puruṣayoḥ atyanta-asamkīrṇayoḥ pratyayaḥ aviśeṣaḥ bhogaḥ parārthatvāt svārtha-samyamāt puruṣa-jñānam

“The non-discrimination between sattva and puruṣa, though utterly distinct, results in experience (bhoga); since prakṛti exists for another, through samyama on one’s own nature, knowledge of puruṣa arises.” (YS 3.35)

This sūtra brings to focus the epistemological confusion between sattva (the most luminous form of prakṛti, especially buddhi) and puruṣa. Though fundamentally dissimilar, their proximity in experience leads to aviśeṣa (non-discrimination), causing the experience of bhoga. Indian logic infers that prakṛti is parārtha (existing for the sake of another), because it is mutable, composite (savayava), and goal-oriented - thus it cannot be puruṣa, which is immutable and non-composite (niravayava). Realization of this distinction through disciplined samyama leads to puruṣa-jñāna - direct awareness of the self as pure consciousness (Dasgupta, 1930; Larson, 1987).

4.4 Discrimination Brings Mastery and Omniscience to Draṣṭā: YS 3.49

sattvapuruṣānyatākhyātīmātrasya sarvabhāvādhiṣṭhātṛtvaṃ sarvajñātṛtvaṃ ca (YS 3.49)

“Through mere knowledge of the distinction between sattva and puruṣa, one attains mastery over all states and omniscience.”

This sūtra conveys the transformative result of discriminative knowledge (viveka-khyāti). Mastery (adhiṣṭhātṛtva) and omniscience (sarvajñātṛtva) arise not from acquisition but from realization of ontological distinctness. According to nyāya, such cognition is not inductive but self-evident (svataḥ prāmānya) to the purified mind. The omniscient knower is none other than the puruṣa, reflected clearly when the sattva of the mind becomes transparent like a clean mirror.

4.5 Final Liberation of the Puruṣa – YS 4.34

puruṣārthaśūnyānāṃ guṇānāṃ pratiprasavaḥ kaivalyaṃ svarūpapratīṣṭhā vā citiśaktiriti (YS 4.34)

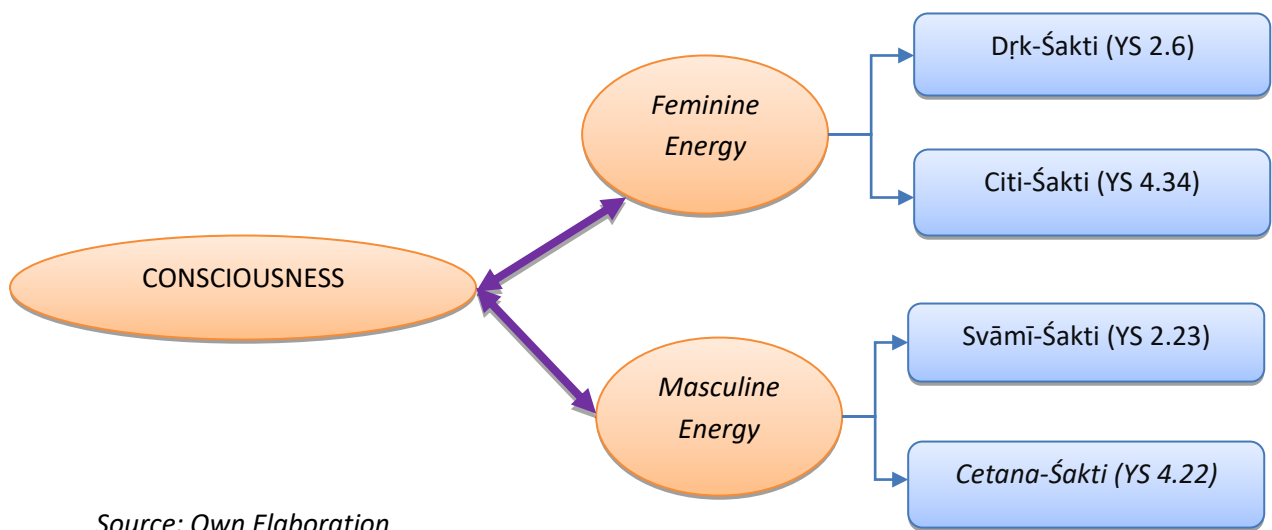
"When the guṇas, devoid of purpose for the puruṣa, return to their source, that is liberation - kaivalya - or the establishment of the power of consciousness in its own nature."

This concluding sūtra reveals the telos of Yoga (kaivalya) - the isolation or liberation of puruṣa from prakṛti. With no further puruṣārtha (purpose) to serve, the guṇas recede, and puruṣa abides in its own svarūpa. The phrase citiśaktiḥ - the power of pure consciousness - underscores that puruṣa is not inert but luminous awareness (prakāśa-svarūpa). As per sāṅkhya-anumāna, what exists independently, is non-composite, and self-aware must be the ground of all experience, and this is precisely the puruṣa.

The consistent use of the term Puruṣa in the Yoga Sūtras - notably in sutras 1.16, 1.24, 3.35, 3.49, and 4.34, functions as an indirect ontological and epistemological reference to consciousness. Through the lens of Indian logical tradition particularly via anumāna or viveka khyāti, Patañjali constructs a coherent perspective in which consciousness is not a product of the mind but the eternally liberated seer (draṣṭā) unveiled through yogic stillness of mental processes. This seer, at its core, is puruṣa, synonymous with the conscious principle recognized across Indian philosophical systems.

5. Consciousness as Feminine and Masculine Energies in Pātañjali Yoga Sūtra:

While Puruṣa is traditionally identified as the static, unchanging witness (draṣṭā), Pātañjali's Yoga Sūtra also accommodates a subtler metaphysical polarity through the language of śakti - indicating dynamic potential or power. Although not overtly gendered in a conventional sense, these śaktis carry an implicit representation of feminine and masculine modalities within consciousness and its interaction with prakṛti. Here, feminine energy is expressed as dṛk-śakti and citi-śakti, and masculine energy is invoked through svāmī-śakti and cetana-śakti. Each of these terms reveals distinct functional attributes of consciousness.



5.1 Feminine Energies of Consciousness: Dṛk-Śakti and Citi-Śakti

5.1.1 Dṛk-Śakti – Power of Seeing (YS 2.6)

dṛg-darśana-śaktyor ekātmatevāsmītā (YS 2.6)

"Egoism (asmitā) is the identification between the power of seeing (dṛk-śakti) and the instrument of seeing (darśana-śakti)."

This sūtra introduces a key metaphysical distinction: the dṛk, the seer or consciousness itself, and darśana, the cognitive faculty through which perception occurs. In Indian logical terms, this is the confusion between the svarūpa-lakṣaṇa (essential nature) and taṭastha-lakṣaṇa (instrumental feature). The dṛk-śakti, therefore, refers to the feminine receptive capacity of awareness- the illuminating power of puruṣa that is mistakenly conflated with mental functions. Feminine here signifies the reflective, non-doing but potent aspect of consciousness, akin to śakti in Śākta-Vedānta traditions (Rukmani, 2001).

5.1.2 Citi-Śakti – Power of Pure Consciousness (YS 4.34)

puruṣārtha-śūnyānām guṇānām pratiprasavaḥ kaivalyaṁ svarūpa-pratiṣṭhā vā citi-śaktir iti
(YS 4.34)

"When the guṇas, having fulfilled their purpose, return to their source, that is kaivalya or the establishment of consciousness in its own form - the power of consciousness (citi-śakti)."

The citi-śakti is the culmination of Yogic realization - a complete withdrawal of prakṛti's operations where only consciousness remains, abiding in its own sovereignty. The term śakti here indicates not passivity, but self-luminosity and intrinsic power (sva-prakāśatva). Feminine here represents the fullness of inner potential, self-sufficient and not dependent on external engagement for its realization. It aligns with the Mīmāṃsaka view of śakti as an eternal potency (nityā śaktiḥ), inherently present in its possessor (Matilal, 1994).

5.2 Masculine Energies of Consciousness: Svāmī-Śakti and Cetana-Śakti

5.2.1 Svāmī-Śakti – Lordship or Control (YS 2.23)

sva-svāmī-śaktyoḥ svarūpopalabdhi-hetuḥ saṁyogaḥ (YS 2.23)

"The conjunction (saṁyoga) of the owner and the owned - svāmī (master) and sva (the owned) - is the cause for the realization of their respective natures."

In this relational schema, puruṣa is the svāmī, the sovereign consciousness, and prakṛti is sva, that which is possessed or utilized. Svāmī-śakti refers to the masculine dynamic of conscious mastery - the power of dominion, control, and discernment. In terms of Indian logic, this is an instance of sambandha-anumāna - recognizing the relation between the enjoyer and the enjoyed as a means to distinguish the self from the non-self. The masculine here does not signify aggressiveness, but the assertive principle of detachment and discernment.

5.2.2 Cetana-Śakti – Sentient or Cognizing Power (YS 4.22)

citer apratisaṅkramāyās tadākārāpattau svabuddhi-saṁvedanam (YS 4.22)

"Although consciousness does not move towards things, it reflects their forms; thus, the mind is known by self-awareness."

This sūtra articulates that citi, though inactive, still reveals the modifications of the mind by virtue of its presence. The cetana-śakti here is the light of pure cognition, which makes mental modifications (vṛttis) available to introspective awareness. This śakti is masculine in the sense of being projective- the outward-facing power that allows for object-recognition and mental illumination. This harmonizes with nyāya views of consciousness as a substratum that enables cognitive acts without itself undergoing change.

By analyzing these sūtras, we see that Yoga Sūtra presents consciousness as possessing both feminine and masculine potentials- śakti-sampanna. The feminine energies (dṛk-śakti, citi-śakti) embody the receptive, self-luminous, and self-contained nature of consciousness. In

contrast, the masculine energies (svāmī-śakti, cetana-śakti) denote consciousness's projective, governing, and illuminating capabilities.

This dual modality resembles the Śiva-Śakti paradigm in non-dual Śaiva traditions, where consciousness (Śiva) is both transcendent and immanent through its śakti (Singh, 2005). The Yoga Sūtra, though rooted in dualism, accommodates a layered understanding of consciousness that includes these polar dynamics. Thus, the identity of consciousness is not monolithic but multidimensional - capable of perception, reflection, governance, and transcendence.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This investigative study examined the essence of consciousness as described in the Pātañjala Yoga Sūtra, focusing specifically on the ideas of draṣṭā (the observer) and puruṣa (pure consciousness). Through a detailed interpretation of significant sūtras such as YS 1.16, 1.24, 2.12, 2.17, 2.20, 3.35, 3.49, and 4.23, it becomes clear that Patañjali offers a complex yet consistently transcendent perspective of consciousness that is both metaphysically separate and psychologically functional. The observer (draṣṭā), although caught up in the empirical structure of mind and body (i.e., citta and its vṛttis), is fundamentally a non-agentive, unchanging, enlightening force (puruṣa). The suffering seen in human existence does not stem from any imperfection in the puruṣa, but rather from its connection (samyoga) with the transient and unconscious prakṛti, particularly the citta, which acts as a barrier and a means of perception (YS 2.17, 2.20). This erroneous identification serves as the foundation of kleśa and karma, which continue the cycle of rebirths (YS 2.12).

Crucially, the Yoga Sūtra's understanding of consciousness is not an emergent characteristic of neurobiological systems, as suggested by various contemporary scientific theories, but is rather a fundamental ontological tenet. Consciousness, or puruṣa, is perpetually liberated (mukta), unaffected by actions, sufferings, or virtue (YS 1.24), and acts solely as the observer of all experiences. Liberation (kaivalya), the aim of yoga, is therefore not a change in consciousness but the recognition of its eternal separateness from prakṛti (YS 4.34). When comparing this traditional Yogic perspective with modern scientific discussions, we uncover a significant divergence in metaphysical beliefs. While numerous scientific theories analyze consciousness through materialist or functionalist lenses, Patañjali presents a dualistic yet introspectively verifiable framework where pure consciousness is evident, self-luminous (svayamprakāśa), and constant. The notion of draṣṭā offers an early, advanced framework of subjectivity that aligns with and, in certain ways, foreshadows contemporary phenomenological and introspective methodologies.

Moreover, the stratified evolution of yogic experience - culminating in siddhis and ultimately kaivalya - illustrates a structured phenomenology of consciousness alteration. Sūtras like YS 3.35 and 3.49 shed light on the epistemological ramifications of profound meditative immersion, wherein consciousness, released from the empirical, reaches a state of pure witnessing. In summary, this study asserts that the Yoga Sūtra provides a solid and intricate model of consciousness, focused on the unchanging puruṣa. This model contrasts with reductionist interpretations and creates opportunities for meaningful conversation with contemporary consciousness theories – particularly those beginning to challenge strictly materialistic views. The comprehensive approach of Yoga, merging metaphysics, psychology, and epistemology, encourages further interdisciplinary investigation into the timeless nature of consciousness.

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Additional Resources

- Patanjali's Yoga Sutras with The Commentary of Vyasa and The Gloss of Vachaspati Misra Rama Prasad Translation*. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/PatanjalisYogaSutraswithTheCommentaryOfVyasaAndTheGlossOfVachaspatiMisraRamaPrasadTranslation>

Nature of Consciousness in Yoga Sutra: An Exploratory Study

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Prajapati, A. & Varma, R. (2025). Nature of Consciousness in Yoga Sutra: An Exploratory Study. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(2), 3129-3141. DIP:18.01.279.20251302, DOI:10.25215/1302.279