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Research Paper

Antahkarana and Cognition: A Psychological Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

The present study is concerned with the concept of 'Antahkarana' in Indian literature and the concept of 'Cognition' in modern psychology. In view of the complexities of human behaviour, attention has been focused on its various aspects. Diverse patterns of behaviour have compelled us to think about the present subject. It has been observed that one person may not be able to perform properly even a task that has been explained and taught to him, while another person can create Artificial Intelligence (AI) resembling human intelligence without being explicitly told how to do so. Thus, from zero performance to space research, the extent to which human cognition, or its Antahkarana, possesses unlimited energy is a matter worthy of consideration. In this way, the power of Antahkarana and the depth of cognitive processes constitute the central elements of this research topic. An attempt has also been made to understand the extent of similarity and difference between the two concepts. The role of neuroscience has been examined so that their interrelationships may be understood. Finally, suggesting an integrative perspective is also an outcome of this research paper.

Keywords: *Antahkarana, Cognition, Neuroscience, Artificial Intelligence, Holistic Model, Integrative Perspective*

Modern psychology gives an important place in its studies to one of the important elements of Antahkarana, namely 'intellect', but it does not give effective emphasis to the remaining elements. Psychologists have found intellect measurable and have worked on it, but comparatively little work has been done on mind, chitta and ego. Modern psychologists are giving cognition a very important place in psychology, much as physicists once gave importance to the 'God particle' and gradually moved away from it.

To understand psychology, it is appropriate to understand Antahkarana. It is also necessary to understand what similarities and differences exist between cognition and Antahkarana. At some level, are these two concepts actually the same? If they are the same, why are they known by two different names? Cognition is generally regarded as a function of the nervous system; therefore, is Antahkarana also related to the nervous system? The integrated system of mind, intellect, chitta and ego is known as Antahkarana. Modern psychology, meanwhile, regards cognition as the coordination of mental processes such as attention, perception, memory, learning, reasoning, decision-making and problem-solving.

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In the Indian intellectual tradition, Antahkarana has been given a prominent place. It is not limited merely to mental processes; rather, these processes are accepted as instruments of the Self (consciousness). Cognition, on the other hand, is acceptable as a function of the brain. The present research paper attempts to examine these diverse aspects.

Every human experience is associated with a mental process. Indian psychology and philosophy regard this as the subject matter of Antahkarana. The Bhagavad Gita, Yoga, Vedanta, Sankhya and the Upanishads interpret experience through Antahkarana and regard it as a central instrument. This study also attempts to understand the structure of Antahkarana, how cognitive processes are connected with it, and whether Antahkarana can clarify psychology and provide a holistic perspective.

Objectives

- To understand what cognition is and to understand its modern concept.
- To understand what is meant by Antahkarana and to analyse the concept of Antahkarana.
- To understand the interrelationship between the two concepts.
- To undertake a comparative study of the perspectives of modern psychology and Indian philosophy.
- To understand the contemporary relevance of the theory of Antahkarana.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative and philosophical-analytical method has been used for the present study. Since the research is theoretical, an attempt has been made to understand it on the basis of its merits and limitations. Primary sources include the Sankhya Karika, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Vedanta and Yoga Sutra, among others. Secondary sources include research conducted in Indian psychology and books on psychology.

Concept of Antahkarana

Antahkarana refers to the internal instruments of the human being through which knowledge, experience, memory and decision-making are accomplished. They contain immense possibilities, and almost all activities of human life are operated through them. They also make use of the body. Antahkarana has four principal components: mind (manas), intellect (buddhi), chitta and ego (ahamkara).

(a) Mind (Manas)

Mind is a major component of Antahkarana. It is formless, yet possesses an arising capacity. It performs the functions of resolve and doubt/alternative consideration (sankalpa-vikalpa). The senses provide all information to the mind and thus act as carriers of information to it.

A question arises: where does this formless mind reside? Does it reside in the brain or somewhere else in the body? There is no unanimous answer to this question, but an attempt has been made to answer it in the Indian knowledge tradition. A mantra in the Shiva Sankalpa Sukta of the Shukla Yajurveda (Chapter 34, Mantra 1) states:

सुषारथिरश्वानिव यन्मनुष्यान् नेनीयतेऽभीशुभिर्वाजिन इव।
हृत्प्रतिष्ठं यदजिरं जविष्ठं तन्मे मनः शिवसंकल्पमस्तु॥

"Just as a good charioteer keeps horses under control, so may that mind which controls human beings, which is established in the heart, unborn and exceedingly swift, be filled with auspicious resolves."

Thus, in Indian literature, the seat of the mind is described as the heart region. The principal functions of mind are attending to something, understanding the meaning of information, determining alternatives, and expressing emotions.

It is also said in the Brahmabindu Upanishad:

मन एव मनुष्याणां कारणं बन्धमोक्षयोः।

"The mind alone is the cause of bondage and liberation for a human being."
Thus, the mind is presented as both a source of bondage and a means of liberation.

(b) Intellect (Buddhi)
The intellect determines, from among the information received, what is correct. Its principal functions are reasoning, thinking, problem-solving, decision-making and finding accurate answers. Therefore, it is described as the charioteer.

(c) Chitta
Chitta is a storehouse in which all human memories and impressions (samskaras) are organised. The preservation of subconscious impressions also takes place here. All kinds of experiences, learning and memories are stored and preserved in it. In this sense, it may also be called the repository of human behaviour. It is therefore extremely important.

(d) Ego (Ahamkara)
Ahamkara provides unity to mind, brain and body and gives rise to the overall sense of "I" and "mine". It establishes the identity "I am". Through it, self-identity, self-concept, ownership and personality acquire a concrete form, which is referred to as ahamkara.

Thus, the elements of Antahkarana collect information from the external world and operate upon it. As the information reaches chitta, it becomes organised in its corresponding category. The intellect analyses it, reasons about it and arrives at an appropriate decision. Ahamkara connects it with the organisation of personality, giving momentum to action. This is broadly similar to the process of information processing.

This describes the Indian perspective of Antahkarana, which is a fundamental element of Indian psychology. Modern psychology will now be considered with reference to these same processes, which are described as cognition.

Cognition
Today considerable emphasis is placed on cognition because cognition is an important component in organising human life, keeping it active, promoting innovation and fostering creativity. Through cognition, a person receives information from the external world, analyses it, connects it with memory, and subsequently makes a decision regarding that information and acts accordingly.

In this way, cognition receives information from different systems, preserves it in memory, and through thinking, reflection and analysis reaches a decision and produces a response. This creates an Information Processing System, through which an individual responds to stimuli.

The major processes included under cognition are Sensation, Perception, Attention, Memory, Learning, Reasoning, Decision Making, Problem Solving and Language. In these

processes, stimuli are received through the sense organs. Under perception, meaning is assigned to those stimuli or pieces of information. Attention remains where relevance is understood. Memory then performs its function: information, knowledge and experience are accumulated, stored and preserved, and are recalled when necessary.

When knowledge or experience becomes associated in memory with previously stored similar experiences, a new experience is formed, which the person applies in behaviour; this is called learning. Cognition draws conclusions on the basis of available facts, which is known as reasoning. Many alternatives arise simultaneously in the brain, and selecting the correct alternative is known as decision-making.

Problems also arise continuously in human life, and they need to be solved. Developing an appropriate course of action or strategy to reach a goal is the process of problem-solving. During thinking, reflection and reasoning, numerous thoughts arise in the brain, but not all of them are expressed through language. They arise and disappear like bubbles in water. Thoughts that need to be expressed externally are communicated among people through language. Thoughts that were previously inside the brain are communicated to others through language. Language is the medium through which thought takes concrete form. In this way, the cognitive process is completed.

This research paper has attempted to understand the basic processes of Antahkarana and cognition in a simple manner. The next question is what similarities and differences exist in the events occurring within Antahkarana and cognition. This may help determine whether these two concepts or mysteries are separate from each other, or whether their processes are essentially the same and they are simply known by two different names.

Comparison of Antahkarana and Cognition

When these two concepts are examined on the test of reason, it appears that they have greater similarity than opposition. There is no fact described under modern psychology as cognition that is wholly absent from the processes associated with Antahkarana. The difference is mainly that the understanding of cognition is becoming increasingly scientific and empirically testable, whereas the processes of Antahkarana are deeper and more extensive.

Psychologists have performed important work by making intellect and ego observable and testable, but mind and chitta have not yet fully entered the domain of science. More work is expected in this area. Nevertheless, Indian sages described mind and chitta on the basis of their realised knowledge in ways for which psychology does not yet possess an equivalent account.

The following similarities are identified between the instruments of Antahkarana and cognitive processes:

- Perception, attention, acquisition of information and information processing.
- Reasoning and decision-making.
- Impressions (samskaras), memory and experience.
- Self, self-concept, ‘I’, personality and organisation.

Thus, approximately similar processes are embedded in Antahkarana, cognition and cognitive processing. Mind and chitta have been given greater importance in Indian

psychology. They are not merely information stores receiving input from the senses; the Ashtavakra Gita gives them very high importance.

According to the Indian view presented here, after the completion of the play of life, the subtle body travels along with the Self. The subtle body carries the impressions of the individual to the next birth. It contains nineteen elements: five organs of knowledge, five organs of action, five vital airs (prana, apana, vyana, udana and samana), and the fourfold Antahkarana. In contrast, modern psychology generally treats the cognitive aspect as ending with the body.

Jung, through the concept of the Collective Unconscious, attempted to explain that impressions from previous births remain in the collective unconscious. The paper interprets this as suggesting that consciousness travels along with the Self and that some elements of cognition may continue into a subsequent birth, thereby supporting the idea of rebirth.

Antahkarana and Neuroscience

Neuroscience studies brain structure and seeks to understand cognitive processes because the brain is formed from vast networks of nerve cells. Modern neuroscientists have given particular importance to major brain systems and regions such as the prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, amygdala and the default mode network.

Planning, reasoning, decision-making and thinking are among the major functions associated with the prefrontal cortex, and these are also functions attributed to the intellect. Thus, neuroscience has a direct relationship with cognition and, in the framework proposed in the paper, with Antahkarana.

Similarly, the hippocampus is associated with memory. Memory is connected with cognition and, in the Antahkarana model, with chitta. Thus, the functions associated with the hippocampus and the experiential aspect of chitta are presented as related to the field of memory.

The amygdala is associated with emotional processes, while emotion is directly connected with the human mind. Accordingly, the paper relates the amygdala, mind and emotional response. The default mode network is associated with self-awareness, while ahamkara in Antahkarana is also connected with self-concept and self-awareness.

Therefore, Antahkarana, cognition and neuroscience can be regarded as interconnected, with functional relationships among them. The four elements of Antahkarana—mind, intellect, chitta and ego—are not presented merely as abstract or spiritual ideas; the paper argues that they also have physical, mental and spiritual foundations.

Consciousness and Antahkarana

Indian philosophy and Indian literature regard consciousness as an extremely important element. It is pure awareness, self-luminous and of the nature of a witness. It is regarded as the fundamental basis of the entire universe, all-pervading and an independent reality. It is understood in relation to the nature of the Self, qualities or nature, and Purusha.

Western approaches generally treat consciousness as a function of the brain, whereas the Indian perspective presented here regards consciousness not as a physical entity but as an

eternal and self-luminous principle. The uninterrupted flow of consciousness is referred to as the Self. In this way, consciousness is regarded as a life principle for the entire universe.

Antahkarana is described as an instrument of consciousness. One may take the analogy that consciousness is the sun and Antahkarana is a mirror. The reflection produced by it is experience. Similarly, when the light of consciousness falls upon mind, intellect, chitta and ego, the resulting reflection is called experience. When the reflection of consciousness falls upon Antahkarana, the mind thinks, the intellect decides, and all the instruments are able to perform their respective functions. Without consciousness, Antahkarana cannot function.

In the Indian approach to knowledge, consciousness is regarded as the fundamental principle. Antahkarana is considered an instrument of consciousness, and the existence of the Self is given the highest status. The expansion of knowledge enables an individual to become fully human. In contrast, the development of cognitive science gives primary importance to the scientific study of brain processes.

The paper raises an important question: if modern psychologists and neuroscientists study the structure and functioning of the human brain and the behaviour arising from it, can this by itself unravel the mysteries of being human? How will the deeper knots of human mystery be resolved?

CONCLUSION

When we study the functioning of Antahkarana and cognition and discuss their mutual relationships, we find that Western and modern psychology continuously attempts to provide a scientific basis for human mysteries and to bring every area of human behaviour within the scope of direct observation. Indian psychology, on the other hand, emphasises that attainments and knowledge depend upon control of the mind and that great knowledge can also be obtained through austerity and meditation.

The Indian knowledge tradition, presented here as one of the world's richest traditions, provides living examples of the idea that human mysteries may extend beyond the present limits of science and that human capacities which take scientific inventions to their extreme may not be greater than the existence of consciousness.

Modern psychology makes experiment and scientific verification the basis of its study, whereas the Indian tradition regards meditation, self-experience, yoga and philosophical analysis as necessary and reliable sources of knowledge.

In the context of present-day Consciousness Studies, Neuroscience, Cognitive Science and Artificial Intelligence, the concept of Antahkarana can provide an important foundation for new discussions. The Indian psychological model of Antahkarana is not merely a philosophical concept; it can serve as a broad framework for understanding human cognition, personality, consciousness and behaviour.

By establishing a dialogue between modern cognitive psychology and the Indian knowledge tradition, an integrative psychological perspective can be developed—one that is scientific while also capable of incorporating the depth and breadth of human experience.

The Indian knowledge tradition also contains remarkable accounts of capabilities that go beyond some present-day technological achievements. The paper uses such examples to

argue for the need to expand the field of inquiry into Antahkarana and cognition so that the similarities between the two can be established and the unlimited energy associated with mind and chitta can be related to cognition.

This could become a form of Holistic Psychology capable of understanding human behaviour both from within and from outside.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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