# 21

# Anchoring Cognition, Emotion and Behaviour in Desire: A Model from the *Bhagavad-Gītā*

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Psychologists have argued about the primacy of cognition and emotion for decades without any resolution. Deriving ideas from the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, in this paper, cognition, emotion, and behaviour are examined by anchoring them in desire. The model presented here posits that cognition, emotion, and behaviour derive significance when examined in the context of human desires, and starting with perception and volition, cognition emerges when a desire crystallizes. Desires lead to behaviours, and the achievement or non-achievement of a desire causes positive or negative emotions. Through self-reflection, contemplation, and the practise of *karmayoga*, desires can be better managed, which can help facilitate healthy management of emotions. It is hoped that insights provided by this model would stimulate research for further examination of the role of desire in understanding and predicting cognition, emotion, and behaviour. The model presented here is yet another example of how indigenous psychologies can contribute to universal psychology (see Bhawuk, 1999, 2000, 2003 and 2005 for other examples).

Presenting the template of "global-community psychology", Marsella (1998) entreated researchers to replace the Western cultural traditions by more encompassing multicultural traditions, and reiterated the need to emphasize the cultural determinants of human behaviour, which has been discussed in the literature (Triandis, 1972, 1977, 1994; Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, and Mishra, 1996; Pawlik, 1991). He recommended the systems orientation and noted that many indigenous psychologies are well equipped to deal with ascending dimensions of behavioural contexts, from individual to family to society to nature to spirituality. He further proposed that qualitative research including such methods as narrative accounts, discourse analysis, and ethnographic analysis should be encouraged.

The *Bhagavad-Gītā*, a sacred Hindu text, is a popular source of knowledge and wisdom for the global community (Prabhupad, 1986). It has been studied by international scholars and has been translated in about 50 languages. This paper provides an example of how psychological models can be distilled from such texts. Specifically, a model of how cognition and emotion are related is presented in the context of desires. It is hoped that psychologists would pay

attention to the insights provided by the model, and examine its relevance in light of existing theories. This paper attempts to advance research in indigenous psychology by starting with a non-Western model. Starting from a Western perspective often ends up imposing pseudo-etics[1] upon indigenous concepts. It is hoped that by starting with non-Western literature, a more neutral balance between indigenous and Western concepts can be achieved (Bhawuk, 2000, 2005).

I start the paper with a brief review of Indian thoughts in psychology to show the paucity of indigenous ideas in literature. Following this, I briefly review the literature on emotion to set the stage for the presentation of an indigenous model. Since I utilize an ecological perspective, the Indian concept of self is discussed before presenting the indigenous model derived from the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. The model shows how the self interacts with the environment to develop cognition, emotion, and desire, and how the person performs actions to achieve the desire leading to positive or negative affects. The generalizability of the model is examined by testing how it fits with other Indian texts like Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtras* and Vedāntic texts like *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and *Vivekcudāmaṇī*. Finally, implications of this model for global community psychology and future research are discussed.
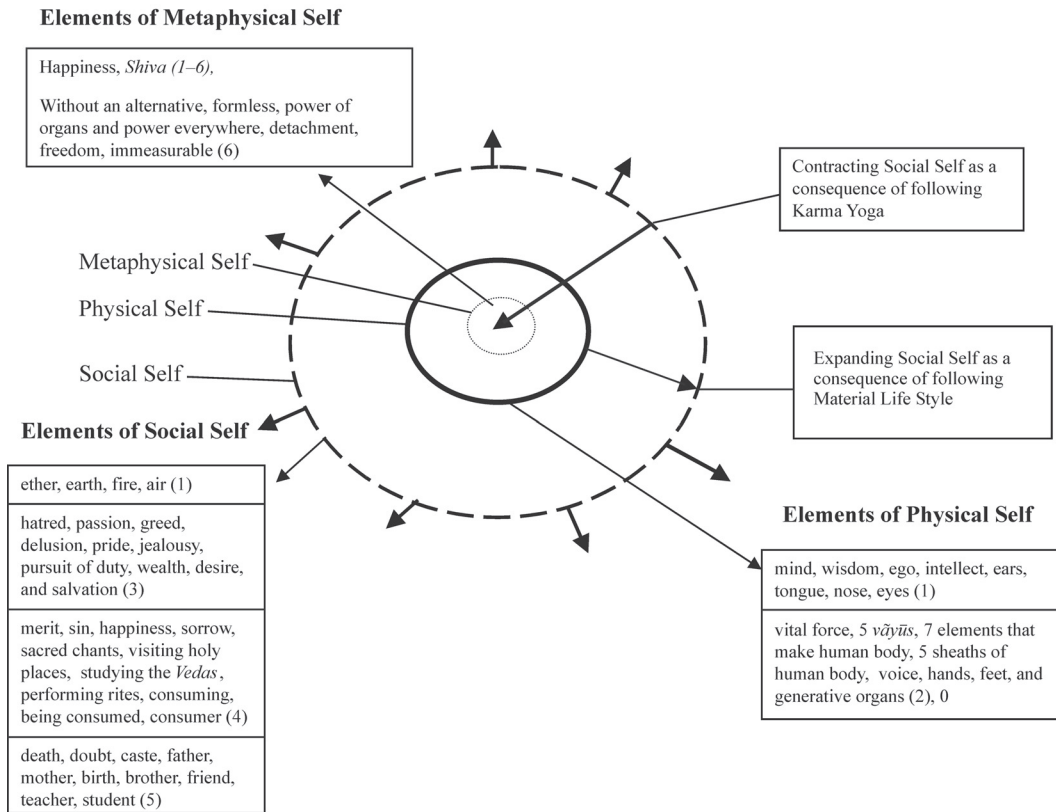
## Indian Thoughts in Psychology

In traditional Indian thought, psychology was never a subject independent of metaphysics. Thus, it is not surprising that no single traditional work devoted to psychological processes can be found. Sinha (1933) was the first scholar to attempt a constructive survey of Hindu psychology in two volumes; volume one focused on perception and volume two on emotion and will. He stressed in these early volumes that Indian psychology was based on introspection and observation. It was not empirical or experimental, but was based on metaphysics. He discussed the nature of perception and emotion in light of various schools of Indian philosophy like Buddhism, Jainism, Nyāya, Mīmāṁsā, Sāṃkhya, and Vedānta. In the following fifty years, psychology in India moved away from its Indian roots to mimic Western method and theory. As a result, it has become largely irrelevant to the Indian populace.

In this period, Indian psychologists seldom attempted to derive psychological principles from their philosophical or folk traditions. For example, not one chapter was dedicated to indigenous concepts in the three volume survey of psychology (Pandey, 1998, 2001). Mishra (Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, and Mishra, 1996) provided a succinct analysis of the development of indigenous psychology in India, and posited that psychology, like all other sciences, was imported to India from the West, and for a long time psychological concepts that did not fit Western assumed etics or universals were considered anomalies. The evolution of cross-cultural psychology has helped change this "look to the West" thinking and researchers are seeking local conceptualizations, insights, and understanding. Sinha (1965) was one of the first researchers who related Indian thoughts to Western psychology, and his work has contributed to our understanding of the psychology of economic development (Sinha and Kao, 1988).

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[1]  Pseudo-etic refers to the process of starting research with a Western view of some psychological concept, which is then implicitly imposed in understanding or interpreting non-Western concepts. It leaves no room for ideas to start from non-Western cultural contexts and is the dominant research tradition in psychology today.

**Elements of Metaphysical Self**

Happiness, *Shiva (1–6),*

Without an alternative, formless, power of
organs and power everywhere, detachment,
freedom, immeasurable (6)

Contracting Social Self as a
consequence of following
Karma Yoga

Metaphysical Self

Physical Self

Social Self

Expanding Social Self as a
consequence of following
Material Life Style

**Elements of Social Self**

ether, earth, fire, air (1)

hatred, passion, greed,
delusion, pride, jealousy,
pursuit of duty, wealth, desire,
and salvation (3)

merit, sin, happiness, sorrow,
sacred chants, visiting holy
places,  studying the *Vedas*,
performing rites, consuming,
being consumed, consumer (4)

death, doubt, caste, father,
mother, birth, brother, friend,
teacher, student (5)

**Elements of Physical Self**

mind, wisdom, ego, intellect, ears,
tongue, nose, eyes (1)

vital force, 5 *vāyūs*, 7 elements that
make human body,  5 sheaths of
human body,  voice, hands, feet, and
generative organs (2), 0

**Figure 1**  Indian concept of self (with examples from Śaṅkarāchārya's *Śiva Stōtra*)
(Adapted from Bhawuk, 2005)

The metaphysical self, the *ātman* or soul[2] is defined as the real or true self in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, and its characteristics are presented in verses 2.17 through 22. *Ātman* is that which is not susceptible to destruction, something that does not go through modification, is unfathomable or unknowable and eternal.[3]  The *ātman* does not kill or get killed;[4] it is never born, nor does it ever die; and it transcends time.[5] The *ātman* is unborn, eternal, permanent, and ancient, and it does not die with the body.[6] Using the metaphor of clothes, the human body is viewed like the

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[2]  Some scholars argue that the translation of *ātman* as soul is inaccurate, and should be avoided (Bharati, 1985). Though most Indian psychologists that I know use the word soul as a translation of *ātman*. To be consistent with the scholarly tradition I use the word *ātman* instead of soul in this paper. The Western reader is stuck with an emic construct that at best is "somewhat similar" to soul in their cognitive framework, or at worst is a totally alien construct without translation.

[3]  *Avīnāśī* or *anāshin, avyaya, aprāmeya,* and *nitya.*

[4]  Verse 2.19b: *nāyama hanti na hanyate*

[5]  Verse 2.20a: *nāyama bhūtva bhavitā va na bhūyaḥ*

[6]  Verse 2.20b: *ajo, nityaḥ, śāṣvatoyaṃ, purāṇo*

clothes of the *ātman*; as we get rid of old clothes, so does the *ātman* leave the human body.[7] The *ātman* is characterized as one that cannot be cut into pieces by weapons (i.e., it is unbreakable or that which cannot be pierced), burned by fire, soaked by water (i.e., it is insoluble), or dried by wind.[8] In verses 2.24, 25, and 29, the *ātman* is further characterized as all pervading, stable, immobile, and eternal;[9] as unmanifest, beyond perception, and unmodifiable;[10] and described to be simply amazing to see, amazing to talk about, and amazing to listen to; so amazing that most of us do not understand it.[11] These verses categorically state that there are two aspects of human existence – the body and the *ātman*; the body is temporary, and the *ātman* is eternal.

We find support for the model presented in Figure 1 in the literature (Bhawuk, 2005). For example, the six verses of the *Śivoham stōtra* written by Śaṅkarāchārya clearly alludes to the metaphysical, physical, and the social self. Śaṅkarāchārya starts by negating the physical self – I am not the mind, intellect, ego,[12] ear, tongue, nose, or eyes. Then he negates the social self – I am not ether, earth, fire, or air,[13] and he ends the verse by declaring the real self to be the metaphysical self – I am happiness (*chidānand*), I am *Śiva*, I am *Śiva*. He also denies such socially constructed concepts as merit, sin, sacred chants, visiting of holy places, studying of the *Vedas*, performance of spiritual rites (*yajna*), as well as emotions like happiness and sorrow. In the final verse he describes the real self as one without an alternative, formless, as the power everywhere, and as the power of all the physical organs. He further defines the metaphysical self as something immeasurable or non-discernable, and negates even non-attachment and the desire for ultimate freedom. All six verses end with – I am happiness, I am *Śiva*, I am *Śiva*. Thus, we can see that the Indian concept of self does include physical, social and metaphysical self, but the metaphysical self is considered the real self, and the objective of human life is to realize the real self.

The social self not only consists of physical or psychological traits sampled more often by individualists who have an independent concept of self, but also the social relationships and identity descriptors sampled more frequently by collectivists who have an interdependent concept of self. Besides these there are other "Elements of the Growing Self" (See Figure 2) that get added to our identity box as we advance in our careers and acquire wealth, house, special equipment, and professional success. There are many ecological factors that also affect the

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[7] Verse 2.22: *vasaṁsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya navāni gṛhnati naro aparaṇi, tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇānynyāni saṁyati navani dehī.*

[8] Verse 2.23: *nainaṁ chindanit śstrāṇi nainaṁ dahati pāvkaḥ, na cainaṃ kledyantyāpo na śoṣayati mārutaḥ.*

[9] Verse 2.24: *accheḍyo'yam adāhyo'yam akledyo'śoṣya eva ca, nitya sarvagataḥ sthāṇurachalo'yam sanātanaḥ*

[10] Verse 2.25a: *avyakto'yamacintyo'yamvikāryo'yamucyte.*

[11] Verse 2.29: *āṣcaryavatpaśyati kaṣcidenamāshcaryadvadati tathaiva cānyaḥ, āshcaryavatcaenamanyaḥ ṣrinoti śrutvāpyenaṁ Veda na caiva kaṣcit*

[12] Though mind, intellect, and ego are not a part of our physical self and are more a part of our psychological self, they seem to be as concrete as the other organs, and we talk about them much like our physical organs.

[13] In the Indian social construction of self, self is argued to be made of five elements: ether, earth, fire, air, and ego. Since this not a physiological fact, I am positing that it is the part of the Indian socially constructed self.

socially for the true self to expand to be infinite metaphysically (Bhawuk, 2004; see Figure 3 below). This conceptualization of the self is critical to the understanding of psychological processes in the Indian cultural context, and is useful in developing an indigenous model to analyse how cognition, emotion, and behaviour interact through desire, which clearly could not be done if we only adhere to the Western concepts of selves.
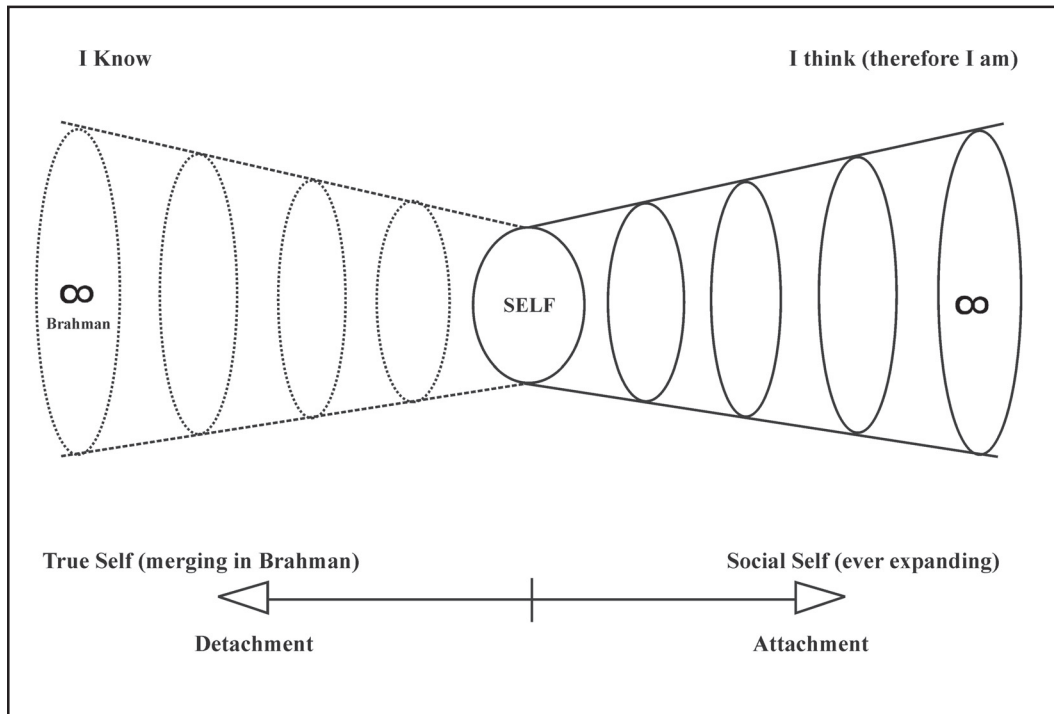


**Figure 3** Indian concept of self: Expanding social and true self

The above model is consistent with the *pancha kośa* (or five sheaths) model of the self presented in the *Taittrīya Upaniṣad*, which is used by health practitioners who use *Āyurveda*. The *pancha kośa* include *annamaya*, *prāṇamaya*, *manomaya*, *vijñānmaya*, and *ānandamaya* in decreasing order of grossness; *annamaya* is the most gross and *ānandamaya* is the most subtle. In fact only the first two *annamaya* and *prāṇamaya* refer to concrete elements like human body and breathing, whereas the other three are what psychologists would call constructs, or socially constructed ideas whose effects can be studied. *Annamaya* refers to the body, which is nourished by the grains or *anna*, thus acquiring this label. *Prāṇamaya* refers to the breathing and the related bodily processes and consequences. *Manomaya* refers to *manas* or human mind. *Vijñānmaya* refers to the faculty that helps us evaluate and discriminate, and *ānandamaya* refers to the metaphysical self. In the *pancha kośa* model of the self, the social self is neglected, which is important to understand human psychology as well as emotion, therefore the models presented in Figures 1, 2, and 3 may be more useful.

## Anchoring Cognition, Emotion and Behaviour in Desire

In the second canto of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, a process of how anger is generated is presented, which is delineated in the sixty-second verse.[14] When a person thinks about an object (or a subject), he or she develops an attachment for it. Attachment leads to desire, and from desire anger is manifested. The above process is captured in Figure 4.
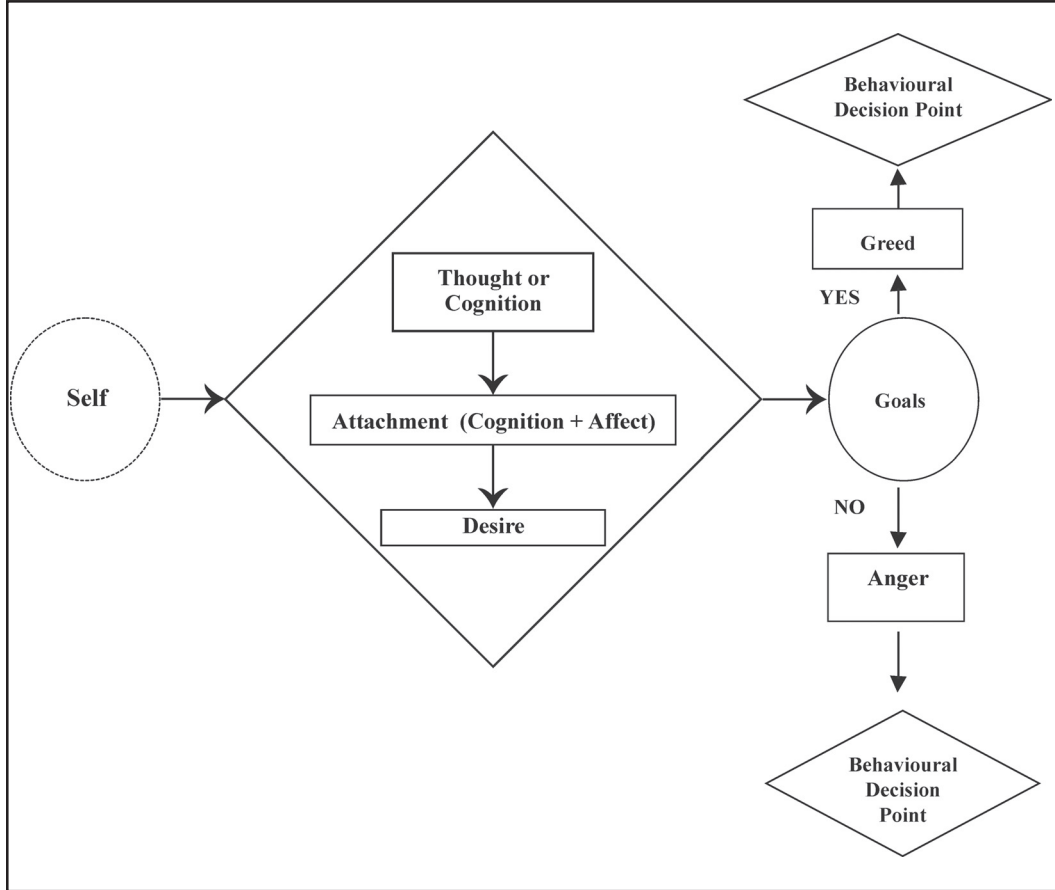


**Figure 4** Desire as the locus of cognition, emotion and behaviour

As stated in the verse, and shown in the schematic diagram, through the process of perception, a person develops the cognition or thinks (*dhyāyato*) about an object. Constant thinking about the object leads to attachment (*saṇga*) to the object. Attachment clearly has an affective component, which is built on the cognitive component coming from the thinking or cognitive stage. Thus, attachment has both cognitive and affective components. Attachment leads to desire (*kāma*) for the object. Thus, as a desire crystallizes emotion and cognition become clear to the person, and in effect should be describable or measurable. Since the human mind is a thought factory that constantly churns out thoughts, thoughts in themselves may be difficult to

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[14]  *Dhyāyato viṣyānpunsaḥ sangsteṣūpajayate; Sangātsanjāyate kamaḥ kāmātkrodho'bhijāyate*

14.12 and 14.17) and unhappiness (verse 14.16). Thus, all desires in the end become the cause of unhappiness, even though they may bring some happiness early on.[22]

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* recommends the practise of *karma yoga*, or the path of work (or doing one's prescribed duties), as the intervention to avoid the unhappiness resulting from pursuing desires. This is done through *manan* and *cintan* or self-reflection and contemplation. By constantly reflecting on our desires and their consequences, we can develop an awareness of how our mind is drawn to the elements of the world. We can slowly wean ourselves from desires by negotiating with our inner-selves and by recognizing the futility of the cycle of fulfilment and insatiable reemergence. Thus, self-reflection and contemplation are necessary for us to adopt the path of karma yoga, or any spiritual path, which can help us veer away from the fetters of desires.

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* recommends *karma yoga* as superior to all other methods of self-realization. In verse twelve of the twelfth canto it is stated that the path of *jñāna* (or knowledge) is superior to the path of practise (constantly trying to think about God); *dhyāna* (or meditation) is superior to the path of *jñāna;* and giving up the fruits of one's endeavour is superior to *dhyāna*.[23] It further states that giving up the fruits of one's endeavour leads to peace of mind (see footnote 19). This peaceful state of mind is described in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* as the *sthitaprajñā* state or the state of equanimity in which a person goes beyond cognition, emotion, and behaviour.

In the second canto of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* the characteristics of a person in the state of *sthitaprajñā* are described. To arrive at this state a person gives up all desires that come to the mind, and remains contented within one's true self or the *ātman* (2.55). In this state, the person is free from all emotions like attachment, fear, and anger, and neither gets agitated when facing miseries, nor does he or she pursue happiness (2.56). In this state, the person does not have affection for anybody, and neither feels delighted when good things happen, nor feels bad when bad things happen (2.57). The person is able to withdraw all senses from the sense organs and objects, much like a tortoise is able to withdraw itself under its shield (2.58), and the sense organs are under complete control of the person (2.61, 2.68). Thus, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* describes the possibility of a state in which we can actually rise above cognition, emotion, and behaviour, and presents karma yoga as a process to achieve this state. In other words, despite engaging in our prescribed duties (behaviour) we can go beyond cognition and emotion if we take our mind away from the fruits of our effort i.e., by managing our desires[24] (see Bhawuk, 2005 for a discussion of this process).

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[22]  In the Bhāgavatam (9.19.14) it is stated that desires are never satisfied by their fulfilment; instead they grow just like fire grows when ghee is offered to it (*nā jatu kāmah kamanāmupabhogena śamyati; haviṣa kṛṣṇavartmev bhūya evabhivardhate*). This is explicated in the story of Yayati (the son of Nahuśa) who borrows the youth of his son Pūrūrava, and his desires still remained unsatisfied.

[23]  Verse 12.12: *śreyo hi jñānamabhyāsāt jñānāddhyānaṁ viśiṣyate; dhyānātkarmaphalatyāgahstyāgacchāntir anantaram.*

[24]  Verse 4.20: *Tyaktvā karmaphalāsangam nityatripto nirāṣryah; karmanyabhipravṛtto'pi naiva kinchitkaroti saḥ.* Verse 3.37: *Kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ; mahāśano mahāpāpma viddhyenamiha vairiṇam.* Verse 3.43: *Evam buddheḥ param buddhvā saṁstabhyātmānamātmanā; jahi śatruṁ mahābāho kāmarūpaṁ durāsadam.* Verse 2.71: *vihāy kāmānya sarvānpumāṅścarati niḥsprihaḥ; nirmamo nirahankārh sa śāntimadhigacchti.* Verse 5.23: *śaknotīhaiva yaḥ sodhuṁ prāk*

## Support for the Model in Other Indian Texts

We can find support for the model in other important Indian texts like Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtra*s, *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, and Saṅkarāchārya's *Vivekcudāmani* (or the Crest-jewel of Discriminating Intellect). The two paths leading to positive and negative emotions are succinctly captured by the seventh and eighth aphorisms of the second canto of Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtras*. The aphorisms state that *rāga* (or positive emotion) is generated by happiness and *dveśa* (or hostility or negative emotion) is generated by unhappiness.[25] In other words, when desires are fulfilled we are happy and have positive emotions, which then lead us to seek more such desires.

On the other hand, when desires are not fulfilled, we become angry, unhappy, and hostile to events or people that are roadblocks in the path of the fulfilment of our desires. In an extreme case, the thought of such unfulfilled desires may arouse frustration, anger, and hostility, which is often the case with unresolved issues from childhood that hinder many people to function effectively as adults.

The development of the emotions of *rāga* (or positive emotion) and *dveśa* (or hostility or negative emotion) clearly has a developmental aspect in that happy moments go on to act as positive reinforcement, whereas negative experiences act as negative reinforcements. From childhood and other socialization experiences, we may be hard wired to react positively to the fulfilment of desires and negatively to the unfulfilment of desires. That even fulfilment of desires ultimately lead to unhappiness is also supported in Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtras*, and it is stated that the wise regard all experiences as painful.[26] Swami Prabhavananda (2005) explains it as follows:

> But the man of spiritual discrimination regards all these experiences as painful. For even the enjoyment of present pleasure is painful, since we already fear its loss. Past pleasure is painful because renewed cravings arise from the impressions it has left upon the mind. And how can any happiness be lasting if it depends only upon our moods? For these moods are constantly changing, as one or another of the ever-warring *guṇas* seizes control of the mind.
>
> (Swami Prabhavananda, 2005, pp. 84–85)

Further in Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtras, vairāgya* (detachment or non-attachment) is proposed as a tool to control the wandering nature of mind[27] (*citta vṛitti*), and *vairāgya* is defined as not hankering after the objects of the material world that we come into contact with through our sense organs, e.g., our eyes and ears (Swami Abhedananda, 1967).[28] *Vairāgya* is the opposite of attachment (see Figure 5, the block labeled "cognition + affect" = attachment), and since

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*śarīrvimokṣaṇāt; kāmakrodhodbhavaṁ vegaṁ sa yuktaḥ sa sukhi naraḥ.* Verse 4.19: *yasya sarve samārambhāḥ kāmasaṅkalpavarjitāḥ; jñānādnidagdhakarmāṇam tamāhuḥ paṇḍitaṁ budhāḥ.*

[25] Aphorism 2.7: *2.7 sukhānuśayī ragah; 2.8 dukhānuśayī dveṣaḥ*

[26] Aphorism *2.15 pariṇamtāpa saṁskāraduḥkhai gurṇavṛitti virodhacca duḥkhameva sarvaṁ vivekinaḥ.*

[27] Aphorism 1.12: *abhyāsavairagyābhyāṁ tannirodhaḥ* The five types of *vṛitti* discussed in aphorisms 1.5 to 1.11 are controlled by cultivating a regimen of practice and non-attachment.

[28] Aphorism 1.15: *dṛṣṭānuśravika viṣaya vitṛṣṇasya vāśīkarasaṁjñā vairāgyaṁ* is the taming of the self by not hankering after the objects that we sample from the material world through our senses, e.g., our eyes and ears.

attachment develops when we keep thinking about a material object, *vairāgya* correctly is cultivated by taking our mind away from these objects. *Vairāgya* is further defined as the rejection of all the elements of the material world by realizing the true nature of our self or the *ātman*[29] (Prabhavananda, 2005). Thus, we see that in Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtras* the focus is on realizing the true nature of self through the development of an attitude of non-attachment to or detachment from the material world or the environment. This approach does not even allow a desire to be born, thus avoiding the consequent suffering that desires lead to through either achievement or non-achievement of desires shown in the model in Figure 5. Thus, understanding one's desires and managing them is critical to the practise of yoga proposed by Patañjali.

In *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, the material world is compared to a mirage, or the optical illusion of water in the desert,[30] and the true self is said to be beyond mind and the five senses[31] (Bharati, 1982). The "evolving creation"[32] is said to be reflected on the true self, and in that sense the world and the physical self are mere reflections on the true self. We see that in *Yogavāsiṣṭha* the concepts of self and the world are clearly viewed as unique Indian emics, emphasizing the spirituality of human life, and underplaying the physical nature of both self and the environment. Further, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* discusses how *saṇga* or attachment is the cause of the existence of the material world, all our affairs, hopes, and calamities.[33] Like the *Bhagavad-Gītā* the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* uses the word "*saṇga*" (or attachment), and further defines the absence of attachment as the state of mind when one accepts whatever comes his or her way as it is (i.e., one does not desire any object or activity, and is satisfied with naturally evolving events in one's life), without any emotion, e.g., without delighting in happiness or mourning unhappiness, maintaining a balance in prosperity and adversity.[34] Clearly, the absence of *saṇga* or attachment would preempt any desire (i.e., if there is no attachment, there will be no desire) as shown in the model in Figure 5.

*The Yogavāsiṣṭha* compares desires to an intoxicated elephant, which is the cause of infinite calamities, and recommends that we vanquish it using *dhairya* (or patience).[35] The *Yogavāsiṣṭha*

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[29] Aphorism 1.16: *tatparaṁ puruṣakhyāterguṇa vaitṛṣṇyam* entails the rejection of all material entities through the knowledge of the *ātman*, or the true self.

[30] Verse 30.5: *Yat idaṁ dṛśhyate kincit tat nāsti nṛpa kincan; marusthale yathā vāri khe vā gandharvapattnam*. Oh, King! Whatever is seen here is nothing but a mirage or optical illusion that appears to be water in the desert, or the fantasy of city of angels in the sky.

[31] Verse 30.6: *Manaḥṣaṣṭhendriyātītaṁ yattu no dṛṣyate kvacit; avināsham tadastīha tat sat ātmeti kathyate*. That reality, which cannot be comprehended by the five senses and the mind, or can be seen anywhere, is called the *Ātman*, and that is the truth or reality.

[32] It is interesting to note that the universe is referred to as "*sargaparamparā*". *Sarga* literally means the creation, and *paramparā* means tradition. The compound word *sargaparamparā* means a world that has been passed on from generation to generation as tradition, and could mean an evolving world, without using the word in the Darwinian sense of evolution.

[33] Verse 19.49: *Sangah kāraṇamarthaṇām sangah saṁsārakāraṇam; sangah kāraṇamāśānaṁ sangah kāraṇamāpadām*.

[34] Verses 19.52 and 53: *Kathayate saṇgaśabadena vāsanā bhavakārinī; sampadi vipadicātmā yadi te lakṣayate samah. Duhkhai na glānimāyāsi yadi hriṣayati no sukhaih; yathāprāptanuvartī ca tadāsangosi Rāghava.*

[35] Verse 31.56–58: *Astyatyantamadonmattā kariṇīncchasamāhavaya; sā chet na hanyate nūnaṁ anantānarthakāriṇi* (31.56). *Bhūmikāsu ca sarvāsu sancāro naiva sādhyate; vāsanehā manah cittam saṅkalpo bhāvanaṁ spṛha* (31.57). *Ityādīni ca nāmāni tasyā eva bhavanti hi; dhairyanāmanā varāstreṇa*

also supports the idea that positive affects ultimately lead to unhappiness[36] as they come to an end, and suggests that when we maintain a balance between what is pleasing and what is not, we are able to avoid negative affect.[37] Thus, it is concluded in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* that desires are fetters and their absence is freedom.[38]

The stage beyond cognition and emotion is captured in the notion of "*jīvanmuktā*" in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, which is similar to the notion of *sthitaprajñā* in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. When a person is in this state of mind, he or she lives like an emperor without having any concern about what he or she eats or wears, or where he or she sleeps.[39] In this stage the person is free of all prescribed roles and responsibilities, and happily enjoys the true self with profoundness, sagacity, and earnestness.[40] Having renounced the fruits of all actions, in this stage the person is untainted by virtue and sin and is ever satisfied – not in need of any support whatsoever.[41] In this stage, the person may stop chanting the hymns or performing other kinds of worship as they lose their significance for him or her, who may carry out or even ignore proper behaviours.[42] A person in this stage does not fear anybody nor does anybody fear him or her, and it does not matter whether this person departs from this world i.e., leaves the human body, in a holy place or an undesirable place.[43] As a crystal reflects colours without getting tinted by the colours it reflects, so does the person who has realized the true self does not get affected by the fruits of his or her actions.[44] The importance of this stage and the value attached to this stage in the Indian culture becomes transparent in the verse where it is stated that a person who has achieved this stage is fit to be worshipped, praised, and saluted.[45]

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*caitam sarvātmanā jayat* (31.58). In verses 30.38 and 39 it is stated that when desire is destroyed one realizes the ultimate reality that the self or *ātman* is the same as *Brahman. Yavat viṣyabhogāśā jīvakhyā tavat ātmanaḥ; avivekena sampanā sāpyāśā hi nā vastutaḥ* (30.38). *Vivekavaśato yata kṣayaṁ āshā yadā tadā; ātmā jīvatvaṁ utsrijya brahmātaṁ atyanāmayaḥ* (30.39).

[36] Verse 30.32: *Baddhavāsanaṁ artho yah sevyate sukhayatyasau; yat suchāya tadevāshu vastu duhkhāya nāśataḥ.*

[37] Verse 30.17: *Idam ramyam idam neti bījam tat duhkhasanteateh; tasmin sāmyāgninā dagdhye duhkhasyāvasaraḥ kutaḥ.*

[38] Verse 31.63: *Bahunā'tra kim uktena sankṣepāt idam ucyate; saṅkalpanaṃ paro bandhah tadabhāvo vimuktatā.*

[39] Verse 30.42: *Prakṛtih bhāvanānamni mokṣah syāt eṣa eva sah; yena kenacit ācachnno yena kenacit āśitah.*

[40] Verse 30.43: *yatra kvacan śayī ca sa samrādiva rājate; varṇadharmāśramācāraśāstraṇyantraṇayojjhitaḥ.*

[41] Verse 30.44: *gambhīraśca prasannaśca ramate svātmanā'tmani sarvakarmaphalatyāgī nityatripto nirāśrayah.*

[42] Verse 30.46: *tajjnah karmaphalenāntah tathā nāyāti ranjanam. Niḥstotro nirvikāraśca pūjyapūjāvivarjitah;*

[43] Verse 30.47: *samyuktaśca viyuktaśca sarvācāranayakramaih. Tasmāt nodvijate loko lokāt nodvijate ca saḥ;*

[44] Verse 30.45: *Na puṇyena pāpena netreṇa ca lipyate; sphatikah pratibimbena na yāti ranjanaṁ yathā;*

[45] Verse 49: *Sa pūjaniyah sa stutyo namaskāryah sa yatnatah; sa nirīkṣyo'bhivādyaśca vibhūtivibhavaiṣinā*. The qualities of a *Jīvanmuktā* are also captured in many other places in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (see for example verses 19.50, 19.51, 30.30, 30.31, 30.33, 31.4, 31.22 and 31.25).

The model presented in Figure 5 is also consistent with the Advaita Vedāntic school of thought. In Vedānta the human body is considered the non-self that is made of food and dies without food as compared to the *ātman*, which is the true-self (see Figures 1 and 3).[46] The material world is referred to as something unreal or as a prison.[47] An aspirant of spirituality is advised to go beyond the physical self and the world. This is clearly stated in the *Vivekcudāmani*, especially in verses 268 to 291, where Śaṅkara enjoins the seeker to do away with the mistaken superimposition of the non-self on the true self. In Vedānta, the self is constantly examined with the focus on the true self or the *ātman*, and the interaction of the body with the outside world is kept to a bare minimum in that a spiritual aspirant does not engage in too many activities.

The objective in Vedānta is to reduce the vector (arrow going from the interaction of the self and elements of the material world to cognition, see Figure 5) to zero, or to make it as close to zero as possible. Thus, a person practicing Advaita Vedāntic type of meditation works to prevent desires to be formed at its root, where the self interacts with the environment, by not allowing cognition or thoughts to take shape. This is done by practicing meditation in which a vedāntist watches his or her thoughts constantly, and lets them go. This process allows him or her to go beyond cognition and emotion by virtue of having minimal engagement with the world. As stated in Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtras*, the yogic practitioner uses meditation to avoid the false identification of the experiencer with the experience, which causes pain.[48] The description of *sthitaprajñā* and *jeevanmuktā* apply to the vedāntist also, except that they do not go through the painful cycle of desiring and then giving up desires. Clearly, this is not a journey for most people who have strong physical identities, and are passionate about the physical and social worlds. The model captures the two paths quite well – the vedāntist and the yogis follow, what has been referred to as the path of *nivṛtti* (controlling the mind and its inclination to entangle with the material world), whereas the rest of us follow the path of *pravṛtti* (getting engaged in the world) as we are drawn into the world with our cognition and emotion.

## Discussion

The ecology with which we interact includes both the physical and cultural environment (Marsella, 1985), or the objective and subjective cultures (Triandis, 1972). Marsella (1985) presented an interactional model of behaviour in which the person interacts with both the physical environment and the cultural environment with biological and psychological aspects

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[46] Verse 154: *deho'yamannabhavanoannamayastu kośaścannena jīvati vinaśyati tadvihīnah; tvak carma māṃsarudhirāsthi purīṣa rāśirnāyam nā no na svayam bhavitumarhati nityaśuddha.* "This body is a building of food, is constituted of food material, sustains on food, and dies without it. It is constituted of skin, flesh, blood, skeleton or bones, and faeces. Therefore, it cannot be the ātman, which is eternally pure and self-existent.

[47] Verse 293: *sarvātmanā dṛṣyamidam mṛṣaiva naivāhamarthah kṣaṇikatvadarśnāt; jānāmyaham sarvamiti pratītih kuto'ahmādeh kṣaṇikasya sidhyet.* Whatever is seen here is unreal, and so is the ego that is momentary. "I know everything" is a perception that cannot be true because our existence is momentary. In verse 272, the world is referred to as a prison – *saṃsārkārāgṛhamokṣamicchhorayomayam pādanibandhaśrinkhalam; vadanti tajjnāh patu vāsanātrayam yo'smādvimuktah samupaiti muktim.* The wise considers to the three desires (related to the body, the world and the scriptures) as iron fetters that keep those who aspire for liberation tied in the prison of the world. One who is free of these desires finds liberation.

[48] Aphorism 2.17: *draṣṭṛ dṛśyayoḥ saṃyogo heya hetuḥ*. In aphorism 2.11 (*dhyāna heyās tad vṛttayaḥ*) meditation is stated as the tool to cleanse the desires.

of his or her self, and this interaction leads to normal or abnormal behaviours that are couched in the interactional space of person and situation. He argued that behaviour is never free of context, even though people may show some predisposition to act in a certain way. The model presented here builds on Marsella's interactional model by positioning desire as the mediator of behaviour; and since desires do precede both normal and abnormal behaviours, the model enriches Marsella's framework.

Except for the work of Gollowitzer, Bagozzi, and their colleagues, the Western psychological literature is quite sparse on desire.[49] Psychologists have not studied the construct of desire. The closest construct would be "drive" in motivation literature, or motivation in general. Interestingly, desire is something that can be easily measured by simply asking people to fill in twenty sentences starting with "I want _____." Similarly, we can also ask people what they aspire for (I aspire … or One of my aspirations is …) to capture their desires. We can also use the antecedents and consequents method (Triandis, 1972) to map other constructs and emotions that are related to desire. We can also study desire by using qualitative research methods. For example, we can ask people to think about what they do when they desire something (When you desire something, what do you do?), and by asking them to narrate stories about their desires (Tell us a story about when you got a desire, and how? When you knew what you desired, what did you do? What happened in the immediate future? In the long-term?). The strength of desires can also be measured by asking people to prioritize their desires or wants, and this may also provide some insights on what has been studied as achievement motivation (McClelland, 1961). Desire can also offer much to the burgeoning field of positive psychology, spirituality in the workplace, and management of work and personal stress.

There has been some interest in desire from researchers who study AIDS (Lucey, 1996; Mischewski, 1996). These researchers have noted that the construct of desire has been rather marginalized in psychological research. They argued in the context of sexual behaviour that being aware about safe sex, or having the knowledge of the risks involved in unsafe sex is not enough. People get overpowered by the desire for sex, which trumps consideration of risks and sometimes results in the contraction of AIDS. Though Mischewski (1996) only questioned the primacy of rationality in sexual behaviour, it could be argued that desire clouds rational thinking in other domains of behaviour also, which is what the *Bhagavad-Gītā* clearly states – desire clouds all *jñān* or knowledge (see footnote 17).

Desire is an important construct because it captures both emotion and cognition. It can add value to many of our current research streams in organizational psychology and management. For example, there is much research on goal setting, but the way the literature has evolved (Locke, 1986), it is made to be a cognitive construct, as if no emotion is involved in setting goals. We teach our students about SMART goals or objectives, that they should set Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound goals because goals with such characteristics are self-motivating. Interestingly, emotion is nowhere to be found in this schema of goals. It is apparent that desire is the antecedent of all goal-setting processes, but instead of studying its role in goal setting, we study other less directly related constructs and processes like what

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[49] One plausible explanation lies in the thrust of Western psychologists, particularly the American psychologists, to study only negative psychological constructs, namely depression, aggression, phobias.

motivates the goal setting process or who is motivated to set goals. A shift towards research on desire is likely to allow us to understand why people set the goals they set, why they invest the time and effort that they do, and may even help us understanding how leaders and managers help subordinates visualize and realize their desires, thus also enriching the leadership literature.

Building on the work of Gollowitzer and colleagues (Gollowitzer, Heckhausen, and Steller, 1990), in the context of Fishbein's theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), Bagozzi (1992) proposed that desires provide the missing motivational link between behavioural intentions and its antecedents – attitudes and subjective norms. Bagozzi and colleagues have contributed to the enrichment of the theory of reasoned action and the more recent adaptation of this theory, the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). By interjecting desires as the antecedent of behavioural intentions, it was shown that the new model of goal-directed behaviour explained significantly more variance compared to the theory of reasoned action or the theory of planned behaviour (Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001).

These researchers (Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001) also proposed the addition of anticipated emotion to attitudes and subjective norms as antecedents of desires to further broaden the theory of planned behaviour. However, the relationship between desires and attitudes and anticipated emotions were not consistent across the two studies (Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001), raising doubts about these variables being predictable antecedents of desires; whereas subjective norms were consistently found in the two studies to be antecedents of desires. The work of these researchers has clearly made desires a critical variable in the study of planned behaviours, but also limits the use of desires to a great extent by boxing it as the antecedent of behavioural intent. The process model of how desires are formed, and how they are related to cognition and emotion presented in this paper offers a much broader and deeper role to desires as a psychological construct, and may help us go beyond the Western perspectives of what desires are and how they operate.

The sceptics may find the idea of *sthitaprajñā* far-fetched or only relevant for people who are pursuing a spiritual path. However, the Western concept of stoicism is akin to the notion of *sthitaprajñā*. We also see a semblance of *sthitaprajñā* in the field of sports captured in the spirit of "sportsmanship" where trying your best and playing a good game is more important than winning. Unlike most of us who do not face loss or gain in everyday life, sportspeople face defeat or victory in every game, and it is quite plausible that they develop a defence mechanism to loss by thinking about playing. *Sthitaprajñā* generalizes this idea to every walk of life, and thus is applicable not only to spiritually inclined people but also to other people. We may have an etic or universal waiting to be explored in this emic construct.

Another universal may be found in the idea that happiness may be related to the shrinking of the social self not only for people with the Indian concept of self (as shown in figures one to three) but also for people from other cultures. It is encouraging to note the recent finding, albeit in its nascent stage, which cautions that money and happiness should not be equated, and that materialistic goals may cause paranoia and dissatisfaction with life in general rather than giving happiness (Tricks, 2005). There is some evidence that spending money on experiences that put people closer to nature and themselves like scuba diving, trekking in the wilderness, and so forth, are more satisfying than buying material possessions like a Ferrari. Though researchers think the explanation lies in the uniqueness of the experience contrasted to the

material goods that anybody can buy,[50] it is plausible that such experience in nature (see the fascinating work of Milton on nature loving and its emotional implications, 2002) allows us to reflect and connect with our own self, and thus we start the internal journey, whereas the purchase of the material goods leads to further expansion of our social self, which is a source of unhappiness in the end (see footnote 18).

Following Marsella's (1998) encouragement to pursue multi-disciplinary and qualitative research, an attempt was made here to distill an indigenous model from non-psychological literature. As discussed by Marsella (1998) and others (Gergen, Gulerce, Lock, and Mishra, 1996; Pawlik, 1991), it is clear from the above that an indigenous model is deeply rooted in its culture and is derived from the cultural worldview. It would be difficult to understand the process model presented in Figure 4 and 5 if one does not have the advantage of Figures 1, 2, and 3, which explain the implicit cultural worldview and assumptions in which the models are embedded. The model provides a grip on variables that are important to psychologists. It proposes how cognition, emotion, and behaviours are anchored in desires, and even offers an indigenous cultural mechanism to go beyond them. Since Indian thinkers have been introspective, the model is insightful, but more research is needed to determine whether it is empirically testable and valid cross-culturally.

The model presented in this paper is clearly grounded in the socially constructed worldview of India, and is necessarily a culture specific or emic model. It is derived from the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, which is a popular source of knowledge and wisdom for the global community since much has been written about it (Lipner, 1997) in many languages of the world. The paper raises some questions and suggests the value of studying desires, which has been neglected in the mainstream psychology and organizational literature as well as in cross-cultural research. Theory and models should not be used only to predict and explain behaviours. Quality cross-cultural research demands that we welcome indigenous models and theories that question our contemporary values and beliefs, which is one of the contributions of this paper.

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[50] For this research to make the front page of *The Financial Times* is quite significant in itself. The article is based on the work of Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstrin, which was quoted by James Montier, DrKW global equity strategist.

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