

Understanding the Dynamics of the Chitta: Chitta Vrittis, Abhyasa, and Vairagya

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Abstract. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali present a sophisticated psychological framework for understanding the human mind. Central to this philosophy is chitta, the mind-field composed of consciousness, intellect, and ego, and its disturbances, known as chitta vrittis. These mental fluctuations influence perception, emotional stability, and spiritual development. Patanjali proposes Abhyasa (consistent practice) and Vairagya (detachment) as the primary methods to regulate the vrittis and attain a state of mental clarity. This paper explores the dynamics of chitta, including its structure, functions, and the five types of vrittis, while also examining the transformative role of Abhyasa and vairagya. Drawing upon the teachings of Pandit Shriram Sharma Acharya and contemporary insights from Dr. Chinmay Pandya, this research highlights the relevance of Patanjali's psychological model to modern life, particularly in the context of students navigating emotional fluctuations, imagination, and memory.

Keywords. Chitta, Chitta Vrittis, Abhyasa, Vairagya, Yoga Sutras, Patanjali, Antahkarana, Ahamkara, Smriti, Vikalpa, Pramana, Viparyaya, Nidra.

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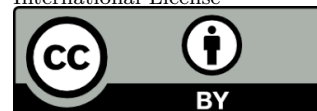
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Introduction

Yoga is traditionally defined not as a physical discipline, but as a mental and spiritual science. Patanjali states in Yoga Sutra (1.2): योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥२॥ Yogash chitta vritti nirodhah. Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind (Patanjali, trans. Har-iharananda Aranya, 1990) [1].

The process of yoga involves regulating the mind to access deeper states of consciousness and ultimately achieve samādhi. According to Pandit Shri-ram Sharma Acharya (1997) [2], “the transformation of human consciousness begins with mastery over one’s inner tendencies, and the conquest of mental restlessness is the foundation of spiritual life.”

The mental disturbances described by Patanjali mirror the psychological obstacles encountered by modern individuals—anxiety, fear, attachments, imagination, and memory.

Dr. Chinmay Pandya emphasizes that yoga in the contemporary world is not merely a traditional philosophy but “a practical method to harmonize human consciousness with the inner and outer world” (Pandya, 2022) [3]. Understanding the nature of the mind and its disturbances is essential to maintaining inner stability, mental clarity, and spiritual progress.

Research Problem

Despite yoga’s widespread popularity, its core psychological principles are often misunderstood. Modern discourse tends to focus on physical postures (āsanas) while neglecting foundational concepts such as chitta and its vrittis. Students and practitioners struggle with emotional fluctuations, attachments, and mental distractions—yet lack a clear understanding of how yogic psychology interprets and manages these disturbances. The question arises: How can Patanjali’s framework of chitta vrittis, when paired with Abhyasa and vairagya, create a sustainable path for mental regulation and spiritual growth?

Research Aim

This research aims to:

- Explain the structure of chitta and its components.
- Analyze the five types of chitta vrittis according to Patanjali.
- Explore the complementary roles of Abhyasa and vairagya in regulating mental fluctuations.
- Demonstrate the practical application of these principles in real-life contexts, particularly for students navigating emotional and cognitive challenges.

Research Importance

This study contributes to the understanding of yoga as a psychological science rather than solely a physical discipline. By exploring Patanjali’s mental model, the paper:

- Provides clarity to students and practitioners seeking inner balance.
- Demonstrates how classical yogic teachings apply to mental well-being and spiritual development.
- Shows how modern interpretations (e.g., Pandya, 2022) [3] align with ancient teachings.
- Integrates practical reflections relevant to the environment of Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, where students face the tension between smriti (memory), vikalpa (imagination), and present awareness.

What is Chitta?

In Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras, chitta refers to the totality of the mind-field through which experiences are processed. It consists of three interconnected components: 1) Manas (Mind): Receives sensory input and processes immediate impressions, 2) Buddhi (Intellect): Discriminates, evaluates, and makes decisions. 3) Ahamkara (Ego): Provides a sense of individuality and “I-ness.”

Together, these layers create the inner instrument (Antahkarana), governing perception and internal experience (Feuerstein, 2001) [4]. When balanced, they enable clarity and inner harmony. When disturbed, they produce instability and emotional suffering.

What Are The Chitta Vrittis?

वृत्तिसारूप्यमितरत्र ॥४॥ Vritti sarupyamitaratra (1.4)

The term vrittis refers to fluctuations or modifications within the mind. Chitta vrittis are the mental disturbances or patterns that disrupt the stillness of the mind. Yoga seeks to quiet these fluctuations, fostering clarity and inner peace as a path to self-realization.

The Five Types of Chitta Vrittis

वृत्तयः पञ्चतयः क्लिष्टाक्लिष्टाः ॥५॥ Vrittayah pancatayah klistha aklistha (1.5)

According to Yoga Sutra (1.5–1.11), the vrittis are classified into five types, each of which can be either painful (Klista) or non-painful (aklista), depending on their influence on mental clarity:

1) *Pramana (Right Knowledge, Correct information)*

This refers to accurate cognition based on three valid sources: direct perception (pratyaksha), inference or Assumption (anumana), and Authoritative testimony (agama). It reflects a clear understanding of reality.

2) *Viparyaya (Misconception, Incorrect information)*

This is false or distorted understanding, where reality is perceived incorrectly, leading to delusion. For example, mistaking a rope for a snake.

3) *Vikalpa (Imagination)*

Dependent upon verbal knowledge only but devoid of a real object.

4) *Nidra (Sleep)*

The vibrational mode which is supported by the absence of objective awareness.

5) *Smriti (Memory)*

Not letting the experienced objects escape from the mind is memory. Memory (Smriti) constantly pulls us backward - a song triggering past joys or regrets.

The role of Chitta Vrittis

Through direct knowledge (Pramana), we grasp reality clearly, feeling morning sunshine, tasting coffee, reading messages. Yet misconceptions (Viparyaya) often cloud our judgment, like mistaking a friend's tired expression for anger, creating needless worry.

Our imagination (Vikalpa) weaves endless scenarios, rehearsing future conversations, dwelling on "what-ifs," building castles in air. While sleep (Nidra) brings temporary stillness, it's unconscious rather than aware. And memory (Smriti) constantly pulls us backward, a song triggering past joys or regrets.

These mental waves create unrest, by pulling us from present awareness, draining energy through constant fluctuation. Like storms disturbing the lake's surface. They fuel anxiety about tomorrow, regret about yesterday, and misunderstandings about today. Each thought pattern drains our energy and disturbs our peace.

These patterns keep us tied to the surface of life, strengthening the ego and separating us from our true selves. But, as Patanjali teaches, with steady practice (Abhyasa) and letting go of attachments (vairagya), we can quiet these disturbances. In that stillness, our

true self is revealed, bringing deep peace, clarity, and a path to spiritual freedom.

These vrittis, when uncontrolled, pull consciousness outward, creating instability.

As Pandit Shriram Sharma Acharya (1997) [2] notes:

"The mental waves keep the soul tied to the material surface of life, preventing the revelation of true inner identity."

The Role of Abhyasa and Vairagya

अभ्यासवैराग्याभ्यां तन्निरोधः ॥१२॥ Abhyasa vairagyabhyam tat nirodhah (1.12)

Yogash citta vṛitti nirodhah Achieved by Abhyasa and Vairagya

Abhyasa (Practice)

Abhyasa refers to consistent, disciplined, and dedicated practice.

तत्र स्थितौ यत्नोऽभ्यासः ॥१३॥ tatra sthitau yatnah abhyasa (1.13)

Abhyasa becomes if there are Five things:

1. Consistency (Nairantarya): Regular and uninterrupted practice over time.
2. Duration (Dirgha Kala): Sustained effort over a long period.
3. Sincerity (Satkara): A genuine and heartfelt commitment to the practice.
4. Devotion (Asevita): An absolute termination to the practice
5. Steadiness (Dridha Bhumi): Arises (asanas) but includes meditation, self-discipline, and the cultivation of positive mental states.

स तु दीर्घकालनैरन्तर्यसत्कारादरासेवितो दृढभूमिः ॥१४॥ sah tu dirgha kala nairantaira satkara asevitah dridha bhumih (1.14)

As Dr. Chinmay Pandya states:

"Discipline of inner development must be measured not in days but in lifetimes. Practice is not an activity, it is a lifestyle of awareness" (Pandya, 2022) [3].

Vairagya (Detachment)

Vairagya is the practice of detachment or non-attachment to the fruits of actions, sensory pleasures, and worldly desires. Patanjali describes Vairagya in Yoga Sutra 1.15 as: दृष्टानुश्रविकविषयवितृष्णस्य वशीकारसंज्ञा वैराग्यम् ॥१५॥ drishtanushravika vishaya vitrishnasya vashikara sanjna vairagyam (1.15)

There are two stages of Detachment (Vairagya). Vairagya is not a sudden state but a gradual process of letting go. Patanjali describes two stages of Vairagya in Yoga Sutra 1.16: तत्परं पुरुषख्यातेः गुणवैतृष्यम् ॥१६॥ tat param purusha khyateh guna Vaitrshnyam

Apara Vairagya (Lower Detachment)

- Detachment from external objects, sensory pleasures, and worldly desires.
- This stage involves conscious effort to resist temptations and reduce attachments.

Para Vairagya (Higher Detachment)

- Detachment from the gunas (sattva, rajas, and tamas) and the realization of the true Self (Purusha).
- This stage arises spontaneously through deep spiritual insight and self-realization.

Pandit Shriram Sharma Acharya links this state to Atmabodh (soul awakening):

“When attachment dissolves, the divine light of the inner self becomes visible.” (Acharya, 1997) [2]

Abhyasa and Vairagya

Abhyasa and Vairagya are two of the most important foundation principles of Yoga. Balancing these two companions is a key to spiritual life, allowing one to pursue the subtler meditation practices.

They work together: Practice leads you in the right direction, while non-attachment allows you to continue the inner journey without getting sidetracked into the pains and pleasures along the way.

Application and Reflection

In Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya university, we sit, our minds caught between “Smriti” and “Vikalpa”. Memories of home, our families, and the streets once walked flood our thoughts, vivid and bittersweet. At the same time, our imagination conjures visions of the future: ourselves as wise teachers, or perhaps a failure, lost in uncertainty. These mental fluctuations leave us torn between the past and the unknown.

Plan Using Abhyasa and Vairagya

Abhyasa (Practice)

- Meditate daily to anchor the mind in the present.
- Practice mindfulness to observe thoughts without being consumed.
- Journal to reflect on emotions and progress.

Vairagya (Detachment)

- Let go of clinging to memories or imagined futures.
- Focus on the present, trusting the journey.
- Embrace uncertainty without fear.

Reflection on Challenges and Benefits Challenges:

- Homesickness and anxiety may arise.
- Consistency in practice requires discipline.
- Detachment feels unnatural at first.
- Abhyasa builds mental resilience.
- Vairagya fosters inner freedom.
- Together, they create balance, allowing us to honor the past and future while living fully in the present.

Through Abhyasa and Vairagya, we will learn to navigate the dance of Smriti and Vikalpa, finding peace in the journey itself.

As Dr. Pandya emphasizes:

“Freedom is not achieved by suppressing emotion, but by understanding its origin and gently redirecting awareness” (Pandya, 2022) [3].

Conclusion

The psychology of yoga offers profound insight into the human mind. Chitta, with its vrittis, governs how individuals experience life. Unregulated mental fluctuations bind consciousness, giving rise to anxiety, confusion, and attachment. Patanjali’s prescription, Abhyasa and vairagya, provides a sustainable, balanced approach to mental transformation. Guided by the wisdom of Pandit Shriram Sharma Acharya and contextualized by contemporary teachings of Dr. Chinmay Pandya, these principles remain deeply relevant today, offering practical tools to cultivate clarity, emotional balance, and spiritual freedom.

COMPLIANCE Not required.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST None.

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