
A Comprehensive Analysis of Antahkarana: Unpacking Its Core Elements

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Abstract:

In the framework of Indian Knowledge Systems, specifically within the Sāṅkhya and Vedāntic traditions, the **Antahkarana** serves as the vital "inner instrument" or interface connecting pure consciousness (*Ātman*) with the physical body (*Sthūla Śarīra*). This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the four functional components of the Antahkarana—**Manas** (the sensory-processing mind), **Buddhi** (the discriminative intellect), **Citta** (the storehouse of memories and impressions), and **Ahankāra** (the ego-sense).

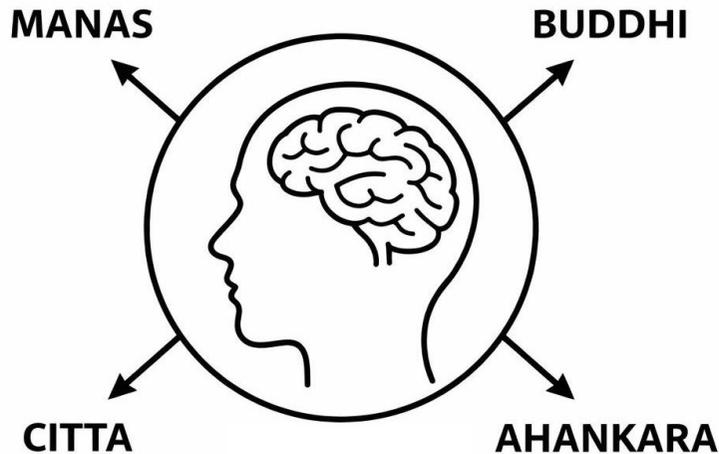
The study explores the mechanism of **Reflected Consciousness** (*Cidābhāsa*), elucidating how the light of awareness permeates these internal organs to facilitate cognition, volition, and self-identity. By unpacking these elements, the paper argues that the Antahkarana is not a singular entity but a dynamic process of "internal functioning." The analysis concludes by highlighting the relevance of this ancient psychological model in providing a holistic alternative to contemporary Western dualistic and reductionist theories of mind.

Keywords: Antahkarana, Manas, Buddhi, Citta, Ahankara, Indian Psychology, Reflected Consciousness, Vedanta.

Introduction:

This paper textual analysis of the concept of Antahkarana in the Sāṅkhya and Advaita Vedānta traditions. The study examines its fourfold structure—Manas, Buddhi, Citta, and Ahaṅkāra—and analyses their functional interrelationship. Special attention is given to the theory of Cidābhāsa (reflected consciousness) to explain cognition and self-awareness. The paper

argues that Antahkarana should be understood not as a substance but as a dynamic functional process. The study concludes by situating this indigenous psychological framework within contemporary discussions on philosophy of mind.



Research Methodology: This study employs textual-hermeneutic methodology with secondary reliance on text sources to examine the concept of *Antahkarana* within the Sāṅkhya and Advaita Vedānta traditions. Key doctrinal ideas analysed through close reading, conceptual interpretation of foundational texts of Indian philosophy.

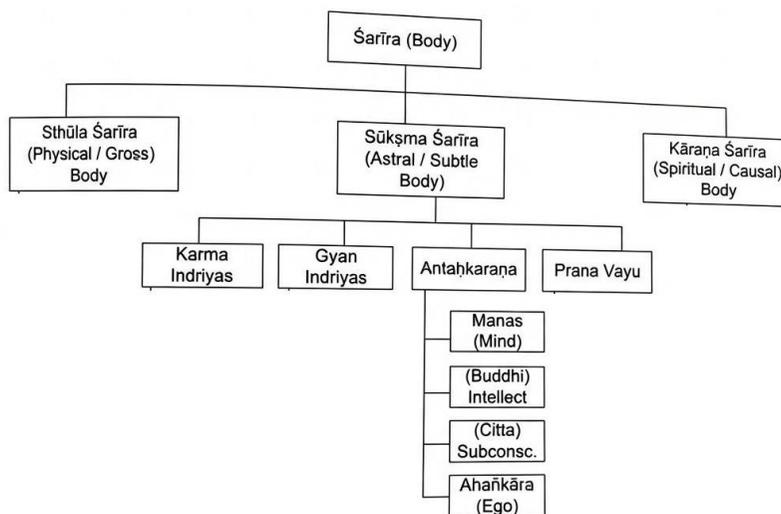
The study employs a **comparative doctrinal approach**, examining how the fourfold structure—*Manas*, *Buddhi*, *Citta*, and *Ahankāra*—is understood within different philosophical frameworks. Special emphasis is placed on the theory of *Cidābhāsa* (Reflected Consciousness) to explain the mechanism of cognition and self-awareness.

Secondary sources, including contemporary works on Indian Knowledge Systems and Indian psychology, are used to contextualize and critically evaluate the classical formulations. The methodology is qualitative in nature and does not involve empirical or experimental analysis. Instead, it relies on textual interpretation, conceptual synthesis.

The scope of the study is limited to the structural, functional analysis of *Antahkarana* within Sāṅkhya and Advaita Vedānta traditions. It does not attempt a full historical survey of all Indian philosophical schools.

The Ontological Framework:

The Three body system The Doctrine of Three Bodies in Hinduism presents a fascinating view of human beings as a complex entity composed of three distinct but interconnected bodies. The concept is integral to various Indian philosophical and religious traditions. The three bodies doctrine provides a Framework for understanding the human experience from a Holistic perspective, completely surrounding physical, mental and casual dimensions.



1. Sthula Shareera (Physical / Gross body) : Gross body not just a biological entity but also composed of and influenced by the five fundamental elements of nature.

2. Sukshma Shareera (Astral / Subtle body) : Astral body plays a critical role in bridging the physical and spiritual aspects of our existence. It's composed of various elements that together facilitate our sensory experiences, thoughts, actions, and emotions.

3. Karana Shareera (Spiritual / Casual body) : The spiritual body represents the deepest layer of our being. It is repository of the soul and the physical and astral bodies. This body carries with it our past actions and experiences, forming the basis of our individual karma.

Four Elements of Antahkarana : > Sukshma Shareera > These four elements constitute the mental and psychological aspects of the subtle / astral body. The

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elements of Antahkarana (Inner Instruments) play a crucial role in the functioning of astral / subtle body. They are integral to our mental and psychological process, shaping our perceptions, reactions and interactions with the world. Understanding of manas, buddhi, citta and ahankara are essential for psychological health and spiritual development. Why it is important ? It enables the mind to have knowledge and awareness.

| Element | Primary Function | Traditional Description |
|-----------------|------------------------|--|
| Manas | Processing & Inquiry | <i>Sankalpa-Vikalpa</i> (Considering pros and cons/Accepting and rejecting). |
| Buddhi | Decision & Discernment | <i>Nischayatmika</i> (The faculty that determines "This is so"). |
| Citta | Memory & Retention | <i>Smrti</i> (The repository of past impressions or <i>Samskaras</i>). |
| Ahankāra | Identification | <i>Abhimāna</i> (The "I-maker" that claims ownership of experiences). |

Functional Analysis of Antahkarana:

Manas (Mind): Processes thoughts, emotions, and sensory data.

It's dynamic, interprets sensory information, and influences perceptions and emotions. Meditation can train and discipline it.

Buddhi (Intellect): Involved in decision-making, critical thinking. It discerns right from wrong and is essential for wisdom, insight. More stable than the mind and important for spiritual growth.

Citta (Subconscious): A storehouse of memories, past experiences. Influences behavior and emotions based on past actions and thoughts. Accessible through meditation for self-awareness and transformation.

Ahaṅkāra (Ego): Creates a sense of individual identity, self-awareness. Necessary for functioning but can lead to selfishness if unchecked.

They are interconnected, and imbalances in one can affect the others, harmonizing these aspects of the subtle body to achieve inner peace, clarity, ultimately - spiritual liberalization.

The Mechanism of Reflection (Cidābhāsa):



For example a visualization : Antahkarana Figure 1.1 (source: yesreach.blogspot.com)

1. **Consciousness** is the Sun. 2. The **Antahkarana** is a mirror. 3. The **Body** is a dark room.

The sun doesn't enter the room directly; it is the *reflected light* from the mirror (the Antahkarana) that illuminates the room. If the mirror (the mind) is dusty or turbulent, the light (knowledge) becomes distorted.

They are interconnected, and imbalances in one can affect the others. Practices in Yoga, meditation, and other spiritual disciplines are often aimed at harmonizing these aspects of the subtle body to achieve inner peace, clarity, and ultimately, spiritual liberation.

Discussion

The analysis of Antahkarana reveals profound insights into the architecture of human consciousness. The fourfold division—Manas, Buddhi, Citta, and Ahaṅkāra—represents not discrete entities but rather functional modalities of a unified internal instrument. This dynamic conception stands in marked contrast to Western Cartesian dualism, which rigidly separates mind and body, or to reductionist neuroscientific approaches that locate consciousness solely in neural substrates.

The doctrine of Cidābhāsa (reflected consciousness) provides a particularly elegant solution to the mind-body problem. By positing that consciousness, itself remains immutable and transcendent, while the Antahkarana serves as the reflecting medium that enables cognitive operations. The mirror analogy — where consciousness is the sun, Antahkarana the mirror, and the body the dark room—illustrates how illumination occurs through reflection rather than through the consciousness itself undergoing transformation. This mechanism explains why mental disturbances (a turbulent or dusty mirror) result in distorted cognition, while spiritual practices aim at purifying the reflecting medium (Antahkarana Śuddhi).

The four components demonstrate an integrative processing system. Manas receives and processes sensory data through its characteristic function of saṅkalpa-vikalpa (deliberation and doubt), presenting multiple possibilities. Buddhi then exercises niścayātmikā (determinative faculty), making decisive judgments based on discriminative intelligence. Citta, as the repository of saṃskāras (latent impressions), continuously influences this process by providing the experiential database from which patterns emerge. Ahaṅkāra then appropriates these experiences, creating the sense of individual agency and identity (the "I-sense" / ego / sense of 'I').

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This understanding has significant implications for addressing contemporary psychological concerns. The recognition that Ahaṅkāra, while necessary for functional identity, can become a source of suffering when hypertrophied. Similarly, the emphasis on Citta as the storehouse of impressions anticipates contemporary understandings of unconscious conditioning and neuroplasticity—though from a decidedly non-materialist perspective.

The pedagogical value of this framework lies in its actionable dimension. Unlike purely descriptive models of mind, the Antahkarana concept understanding the internal instruments is not merely academic but transformative. Practices such as dhyāna (meditation), viveka (discrimination), and vairāgya (dispassion) are prescribed precisely to refine these instruments, suggesting that self-knowledge is inseparable from self-transformation.

The placement of Antahkarana within the Sūkṣma Śarīra (subtle body), mediating between the Sthūla Śarīra (gross body) and Kāraṇa Śarīra (causal body), reveals the holistic anthropology characteristic of Indian Knowledge Systems. This three-body doctrine refuses to reduce human existence to either pure physicality or abstract spirituality, instead presenting a graduated ontology where different dimensions of being interpenetrate and influence one another. The Antahkarana, therefore, is not merely a psychological concept but an ontological bridge—the very mechanism through which karma operates, experiences are processed, and spiritual evolution becomes possible.

Conclusion

Antahkarana represents one of the most sophisticated indigenous models of consciousness and mental functioning in the Indian philosophical tradition. Far from being a static anatomical entity, it emerges as a dynamic functional process—an "internal instrument" composed of four interrelated modalities: the processing capacity of Manas, the discriminative intelligence of Buddhi, the memorial repository of Citta, and the individualizing function of Ahaṅkāra.

The doctrine of Cidābhāsa provides the explanatory mechanism for how insentient mental instruments acquire the appearance of sentience through the reflection of pure consciousness (Ātman). This elegant formulation resolves the explanatory gap between consciousness and cognition without resorting to either materialist reductionism or substance dualism—offering instead a non-dual framework where

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consciousness remains transcendent while its reflection enables empirical mental operations.

The contemporary relevance of this ancient psychological model extends beyond historical or comparative interest. In an era where Western psychology increasingly recognizes the limitations of purely mechanistic approaches to mind and consciousness, the Antahkarana framework offers a holistic alternative that integrates cognitive, affective, volitional, and spiritual dimensions of human experience. Its emphasis on the purification and refinement of internal instruments (Antahkarana Śuddhi) provides practical pathways for psychological well-being and spiritual development.

Future research may fruitfully explore: (1) comparative analyses with other darśanas such as Buddhist Vijñānavāda or Jaina psychology; (2) empirical investigations into whether contemplative practices targeting specific components of Antahkarana yield measurable psychological outcomes; (3) pedagogical applications in mental health, education, and human development.

The Antahkarana doctrine exemplifies the depth and sophistication of Indian Knowledge Systems in articulating the architecture of inner experience. By recognizing it not as substance but as process, not as singular but as fourfold, and not as independent but as reflecting consciousness, we gain access to a framework that honors both the complexity of mental life and the unity of awareness - a framework whose wisdom remains as vital today as when first articulated in the classical texts of Sāṅkhya and Vedānta.

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