



The Five Vṛttis According to the Yoga Philosophy: A Philosophical Analysis

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Abstract :

This paper offers a systematic philosophical analysis of the five mental modifications (*vṛttis*) described in the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali, namely: *pramāṇa* (valid cognition), *viparyaya* (misconception), *vikalpa* (verbal imagination), *nidrā* (sleep), and *smṛti* (memory). Grounded in classical Yogic literature and cross referenced with the *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and traditional commentaries, the study investigates the dual nature of each *vṛtti* as either *kliṣṭa* (afflictive) or *akliṣṭa* (non-afflictive). The paper emphasizes that *vṛttis* are not intrinsically binding or liberating, but attain their quality based on their alignment with ignorance or discrimination (*viveka*). By demonstrating how each *vṛtti*, including even seemingly inert states like sleep and memory, influences the spiritual path, the work reinforces the centrality of *citta-vṛtti-nirodha* (the cessation of mental modifications) as the core of Yoga. Further, it analyzes the transformative role of sustained practice (*abhyāsa*) and dispassion (*vairāgya*) in restraining *vṛttis*, ultimately leading to *samādhi* and Self-realization (*svarūpa-avasthāna*). In doing so, the paper contributes not only to the doctrinal understanding of Yoga philosophy but also to its practical relevance in inner transformation. The classification of *vṛttis*, as presented here, becomes a vital map for navigating the internal landscape of consciousness toward *kaivalya* (liberation).

Keywords: Yoga Philosophy, Citta-vṛtti, Mental Modifications, Kliṣṭa and Akliṣṭa, Samādhi, Self-realization.

Introduction :

The present paper is a philosophical and exegetical inquiry into the nature of the five *vṛttis* (mental modifications) as enunciated by the ancient sage Patañjali in his *Yoga Sūtras*. These five *vṛttis*-*pramāṇa* (valid cognition), *viparyaya* (misconception), *vikalpa* (verbal imagination), *nidrā* (sleep), and *smṛti* (memory)-form the very foundation of Yogic psychology and serve as a map of the mind's manifold operations.

Motivated by a sincere desire to bridge the traditional Indian philosophical wisdom with contemporary spiritual practice, this work undertakes a systematic and scriptural analysis of each *vṛtti*, drawing support from the *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and classical commentaries such as the *Vyāsa Bhāṣya*. The study not only categorizes the *vṛttis* as either *kliṣṭa* (afflictive) or *akliṣṭa* (non-afflictive), but also brings out their practical implications for the seeker striving for *samādhi* and *kaivalya* (liberation).

This paper is dedicated to all sincere students of Yoga and Indian philosophy who seek a deeper understanding of the mind as a tool for both bondage and liberation. It is hoped that this humble contribution will assist seekers, scholars, and practitioners alike in their inward journey towards the Self.

Methodology:



This study adopts a **textual-analytical and interpretative philosophical methodology** grounded in the Indian classical tradition. The core method involves critical engagement with primary Sanskrit texts - especially the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali - along with authoritative commentaries such as the Vyāsa Bhāṣya, the Bhagavad Gītā, and selected Upaniṣads. These texts are approached not only as doctrinal sources but as experiential guides in the yogic and metaphysical disciplines.

The analysis focuses on the five vṛttis as epistemological and ontological categories, evaluating their dual nature (kliṣṭa and akliṣṭa) and their role in bondage and liberation. Philosophical hermeneutics is employed to interpret the metaphysical implications of each vṛtti, with a particular emphasis on their relevance to self-realization (svarūpa-avasthāna) and ultimate liberation (kaivalya). Cross-referencing with Yogic psychology and Vedāntic insights supports a multidimensional understanding of mind and consciousness.

This methodology remains faithful to the Sanskrit exegetical approach (śāstra-vicāra) while also engaging with modern philosophical analysis, thereby bridging the traditional and contemporary modes of inquiry.

Philosophical Analysis of the Five Vṛttis :

The Yogadarśana (Yoga philosophy) was composed by the sage Patañjali. It is a philosophical system aimed at the pacification and stilling of the mind (citta). The principal goal of this philosophy is stated as “citta-vṛttinām nirodhaḥ” - the cessation of the modifications of the mind.

At the outset of the Yoga Sūtras, Sage Patañjali declares: “*Atha yogānuśāsanam*” meaning “Now, the discipline of Yoga begins.”

Following the traditional norms and scriptural inference - such as “One who desires a successful completion begins with an auspicious act,” and “Treatises should begin, continue, and conclude with auspiciousness” - the term *atha* (now), though often conveying a technical or contextual reference, is also regarded as auspicious.

Just as in worldly practice, before embarking on a journey to another place, a person seeks auspicious signs - such as consuming curd before leaving or glimpsing a full water pot- similarly, the word ‘*atha*’, although technically indicating commencement or eligibility, is by its mere utterance considered to bring auspiciousness.

Thus, the word *atha* in the first sūtra, while signifying the beginning of the teachings, also serves a dual purpose: it marks both the formal initiation of the system and the invocation of auspiciousness.

The word “**atha**” is considered auspicious because it was the very first utterance of Brahman (the Absolute Reality) at the beginning of creation.

As stated in the **Amarakośa** lexicon:

**om̐ kārāś cāthaśabdaś ca dvāvetau brahmaṇaḥ purā
kaṇṭham̐ bhitvā viniryātau tasmān māṅgalikāvubhau**

Translation:

“The syllable ‘**om̐**’ and the word ‘**atha**’ - these two emerged first from Brahman. Having broken forth from the throat (of the Supreme), both are thus considered auspicious.”

Hence, due to their origin from Brahman’s first articulation, both **om̐** and **atha** are regarded as indicators of auspicious beginnings. The use of **atha** in the opening of the Yoga Sūtras, therefore, is not only grammatical or contextual, but also deeply symbolic, invoking a sacred and propitious start to the teachings.

In the first sūtra, Sage Patañjali employs the term “**anuśāsanam**” along with “**yoga**”, thereby indicating that the discipline of Yoga is part of a long-standing instructional tradition. The word *anuśāsanam* implies that the teaching



of Yoga is not newly created but has existed from time immemorial. This establishes **Hiranyagarbha** as the primordial teacher and proponent of Yoga.

The Mahābhārata confirms this ancient lineage: “*hiranyagarbheṇa yogasya prādurbhāvo mahātmanā*” “This Yoga was taught in ancient times by Hiranyagarbha and is remembered by us.” Again, it states:

hiranyagarbheṇa purā prokto yogo'yaṁ sarvasiddhidahḥ

tamanusṛtya munayaḥ prāpnuvanti sma tattvataḥ॥

“The great soul Hiranyagarbha manifested Yoga to the world.”

Based on such testimony, the commentator in the **Rājamārtaṇḍa Bhāṣya** asserts: “*hiranyagarbhayogasya vaktā nānyapurātanaḥ*” “No one other than Hiranyagarbha is the original teacher of Yoga.”

Thus, Patañjali faithfully preserved this ancient instruction and presented a structured system of Yoga - defining its nature (lakṣaṇa), its various forms (bheda), the means (upāya) to attain it, and the result (phala). Therefore, the phrase “*atha yogānuśāsanam*” signifies the commencement of a well-ordered treatise on Yoga that systematically covers all its essential aspects.

At the beginning of the scripture, the definition of Yoga is given. Then follow its classifications, the methods to achieve it, and finally the results. Patañjali succinctly defines Yoga in the second sūtra: “*yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*” “Yoga is the cessation of the modifications of the mind.”

The commentator Vyāsa identifies Yoga with **samādhi**: “*yogaḥ samādhiḥ*” He further explains that **samādhi** is a quality of the **citta** (mind-stuff), and: “*sa ca sārvaabhaumāś cittasya dharmatḥ*” “It is a universal property of the citta.” By stating sārvaabhauma, he includes all five conditions (bhūmis) of the citta. These five states are:

1. **Kṣipta** (Distracted) - In this state, the mind is predominantly influenced by *rajas* (the quality of restlessness and activity), rendering it agitated, unstable, and excessively drawn toward sensory objects. It is marked by a lack of self-restraint, the presence of afflictions (*kleśas*), and psychological turbulence. This condition is unsuitable for meditative practice and spiritual growth.
2. **Mūḍha** (Stupefied) - Here, the mind is overpowered by *tamas* (inertia, darkness), and becomes dull, inert, and clouded by heedlessness and ignorance (*avidyā*). This state gives rise to lethargy, delusion, and confusion, severely obstructing discernment and inner clarity.
3. **Vikṣipta** (Occasionally Steady) - In this intermediate state, the mind oscillates between distraction and stability. There is a partial dominance of *sattva* (purity and clarity), which allows for temporary focus. Though not consistently steady, this condition reflects the initial emergence of spiritual awareness and receptivity toward yogic discipline.
4. **Ekāgra** (One-Pointed) - When the mind becomes wholly concentrated upon a single object or purpose, it enters the state of *ekāgratā* (one-pointedness). This focused condition serves as the threshold to true Yoga, forming the foundation for *dhāraṇā* (concentration) and *dhyāna* (meditation).
5. **Niruddha** (Restrained) - This is the highest and most refined state of the mind, wherein all modifications (*vṛttis*) are completely restrained. It corresponds to *samādhi*, the profound state of absorption and stillness, representing the culmination of yogic realization and the attainment of inner freedom.

Samādhi, though dormant in the lower states like *kṣipta* and *mūḍha*, begins to emerge subtly in *vikṣipta*, and is fully realized in the advanced stages of *ekāgra* and *niruddha*. In *kṣipta*, the mind is dominated by *rajas* (activity),



leading to restlessness, sorrow, anxiety, grief, etc. This state is marked by ignorance, vice, attachment, powerlessness, and results in a decline of wisdom and virtue.

In *mūḍha*, *tamas* (inertia) dominates, producing sleepiness, delusion, fear, and laziness - again generating ignorance and demerit.

In *vikṣipta*, *sattva* (clarity) begins to dominate. Traits like joy, cheerfulness, forgiveness, faith, courage, enthusiasm, charity, and compassion manifest. This state fosters knowledge, virtue, detachment, and power. Here, *samādhī* exists as a potential, especially in the latent or dream-like condition.

In the first three states - *kṣipta*, *mūḍha*, and *vikṣipta* - the mind is engaged with objects, either virtuous or unvirtuous, knowledgeable or ignorant, attached or detached. Therefore, true *ekāgratā* (one-pointed concentration) is absent.

In *ekāgra*, where *sattva* is predominant but *rajas* and *tamas* remain only in trace form as tendencies (*vyrttimātra*), the mind becomes neutral and acquires discriminative knowledge through intense detachment (*aparavairāgya*). This leads to *samprajñāta samādhī* - a state of cognitive absorption.

By prolonged practice in this state, the practitioner advances toward *niruddha* - the restrained state - where even the *sattva-guṇa* subsides. In this state, the mind transcends all three *guṇas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*) and becomes *guṇātīta* - beyond all qualities. This *guṇātīta* mind abides in the **true nature of the seer** (*draṣṭṛ-svarūpa-sthitiḥ*). Thus, Yoga is not merely a practice but a complete transformation of the mind's condition, leading ultimately to spiritual liberation.

Indeed, the **modifications of the mind** (*citta-vṛttis*) themselves are the true causes of both **bondage and liberation**. This concept is clearly expressed in the *Upaniṣads*, where it is said:

*mana eva manuṣyāṇāṃ kāraṇaṃ bandha-mokṣayoh
bandhāya viṣayāsaktaṃ muktaṃ nirviṣayaṃ smṛtam*

Translation:

“The mind alone is the cause of both bondage and liberation for human beings. Attached to sense objects, it leads to bondage; detached from sense objects, it is considered liberated.”

This profound statement emphasizes that **bondage (bandha)** arises when the mind is engrossed in sense objects and worldly attachments. On the other hand, **liberation (mokṣa)** is achieved when the mind becomes free from all such attachments and is directed inward, away from the distractions of the external world. Thus, mastering the *citta-vṛttis* - as taught in *Yogadarśana* - is essential to transcending suffering and attaining true freedom.

In the *Bhagavad Gītā* as well, *Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa* proclaims:

*"uddhared ātmanātmānaṃ nātmanā avasādayet
ātmāiva hyātmano bandhur ātmāiva ripur ātmanaḥ
bandhur ātmātmanas tasya yenātmaivātmanā jitaḥ
anātmanas tu śatrutve vartetātmaiva śatruvat"*

Translation:

“One must elevate oneself by oneself; let not the self degrade the self. For the self alone is one’s friend, and the self alone is one’s enemy. He who has conquered himself by himself has the self as a friend, but for one who has not mastered himself, the self will behave like an enemy.”

This emphasizes the centrality of the mind in both bondage and liberation, echoing the view of the *Upaniṣads* and *Yoga* philosophy.



What is a "vṛtti"?

The term **vṛtti** refers to an activity or functional mode - **a movement or peration**. In the context of Yoga, **citta-vṛtti** means the **active or dynamic faculty of the mind**, its tendencies to form modifications or waves of thought. This is what creates the multiplicity of perception and experience. This idea also appears in the *Rgveda*, specifically in the *Nāsadīya Sūkta*: “*manaso retaḥ prathamam yad āsīt*” “The first seed (impulse) arose from the mind.” Here, **retaḥ** (seed) symbolizes the **creative power or dynamism** of the mind – its capacity for projection. Therefore, through the cessation (*nirodha*) of these mental movements, the **direct vision of the Self** is attained. This is supported in the *Upaniṣads* as well: “*yatra nānyat paśyati, nānyac chṛṇoti, nānyad vijānāti - sa bhūmā*”

Translation:

“Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, knows nothing else - that is the Infinite (*Bhūmā*). But where one sees something else, hears something else, knows something else - that is finite.”

Thus, when mental modifications are stilled, the practitioner enters **samādhi** -meditative absorption. In this state, Patañjali affirms: “*tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe'vasthānam*” “Then, the seer rests in their true nature.” The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* reinforces this:

“*yad vai tan na paśyati paśyan vai tatra paśyati .*
nāhi draṣṭur draṣṭer viparilopo vidyate
avināśītvān na tu tad dvitīyam asti
tato'nyaḥ vibhaktam yat paśyet”

Meaning:

“That which sees not another, yet sees - it truly sees. For the seer’s seeing never ceases. Since the seer is imperishable, there is nothing second apart from it. If there appears anything distinct, it is seen only through the mental modifications.”

So, even when the seer “does not see” anything else, they truly **see** - that is, they abide in **pure awareness** or **Self-realization**. This is **svarūpa-darśanam**, the vision of one's own essence.

According to Yoga philosophy, the *puruṣa* (Self) is ever the **eternal witness** (**nitya-sākṣin**). The *puruṣa* is unchanging, immutable, and many in number, yet each one is a distinct embodiment of pure consciousness, unattached, and inherently knowing.

Whenever there is a perception of “otherness,” it is not pure Self-realization but rather a perception mediated by the mind - **a product of citta-vṛttis**. This understanding is echoed in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*:

“*yadā sarve pramucyante kāmā ye'sya hṛdi śritāḥ*
atha martyo'mṛto bhavaty atra brahma samaśnute”

Translation:

“When all the desires that dwell in the heart are relinquished, then the mortal becomes immortal - he attains Brahman here itself.”

Summary:

Thus, **citta-vṛttis** - the active tendencies of the mind - are the root cause of both **bondage** and **liberation**. Their cessation (*nirodha*) is the doorway to **Self-realization**, wherein the **seer** (**draṣṭā**) abides in his **pure, luminous nature**. All perception of duality is due to these *vṛttis*, and Yoga is the path that dissolves them, revealing the Self beyond all movement, multiplicity, and limitation.



In this verse, the state of **liberation (mokṣa)**, as taught in the *Yoga-sāstra*, is clearly explained through the concept of **cessation of mental modifications (citta-vṛtti-nirodha)**.

The word “**kāmāḥ**” (**desires**), as mentioned in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, refers to all **mental tendencies (vṛttis) in the form of attachment**. These are movements of consciousness generated by latent impressions (*vāsanās*), and they disturb the mind, making it restless and distracted.

When these **desire-based vṛttis** are completely relinquished from the mind, then the aim of Yoga - as stated in the *Yoga Sūtra*: “**yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ**” “Yoga is the cessation of the modifications of the mind.” - is accomplished. At that moment, as described in the next *sūtra*: “**tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe’vasthānam**” “Then the seer rests in his own true nature.” That is, the Self becomes steady in its pure witnessing nature (*sākṣitva*), completely transcending mental fluctuations. When the *Gītā* says: “**mṛtyo amṛto bhavati**” - “the mortal becomes immortal” - it refers to the transformation of the bound soul (*jīva*), who, after exhausting impressions (*vāsanās*), gains Self-realization and reaches the **immortal, non-returning state** called **mokṣa**, characterized by **kaivalya** (absolute aloneness).

The phrase “**atra brahma samaśnute**” (“here he attains Brahman”) confirms that **liberation is possible even while living (jīvanmukti)**, not just after death. Hence, the supreme goal of Yoga is clearly demonstrated as **Self-realization through vṛtti-nirodha**.

When the mind’s modifications (*vṛttis*) are restrained, the *puruṣa* attains his **true witnessing nature** - this state is **samādhi**, and hence it is said: “**yogaḥ citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ**” This view is supported by the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, which says: “**yadā pañcāvatiṣṭhante jñānāni manasā saha, buddhiś ca na viceṣṭate, tām āhuḥ paramām gatim**”

Meaning:

“When the five senses along with the mind become still, and the intellect ceases to move - that state is called the supreme state.” This is nothing but **nirvikalpa samādhi** or **kaivalya**.

The *Yogaśikhopaniṣad* also reinforces this by stating: “**yogaḥ samādhir iti kathyate**” “Yoga is defined as **samādhi**.” When the *puruṣa* identifies with the *citta-vṛttis* due to ignorance (*mithyā-jñāna*), he loses sight of his true nature - this is **bondage**. Therefore, Patañjali states: “**vṛtti sārūpyam itaratra**” “At other times, the seer identifies with the modifications.” When the mind is not restrained by Yoga, the *jīva* becomes indistinguishable from its *vṛttis*, forgetting the true Self and behaving in accordance with imagined identities.

This brings us to the fundamental question - If the *citta-vṛttis* are the cause of both bondage and liberation, what exactly are they? To answer this, Sage Patañjali classifies the *vṛttis* into five types: “**vṛttayah pañcatayyaḥ klišṭāklišṭāḥ**” “The *vṛttis* are of five kinds and are either afflictive or non-afflictive.” This means that the five kinds of mental modifications can either lead to bondage (if afflicted by *kleśas*) or assist in liberation (if unafflicted).

As *Vyāsa* explains in his commentary: “**kleśa-hetukāḥ karma-āśaya-pracaya-kṣetrībhūtāḥ klišṭāḥ. khyāti-viṣayā guṇādhikāra-virodhinyo’klišṭāḥ**” Afflictive (*klišṭa*) *vṛttis* are those rooted in *kleśas* (mental afflictions), leading to actions that bind. Unafflictive (*aklišṭa*) *vṛttis* oppose ignorance and aid in right knowledge and detachment. These five *vṛttis* are: “**pramāṇa-viparyaya-vikalpa-nidrā-smṛtayah**” “Right knowledge, error, imagination, sleep, and memory.”

The First Vṛtti - Pramāṇa (Right Knowledge):

Right knowledge (*pramāṇa*) is defined as knowledge that corresponds accurately to the object. Patañjali enumerates three sources of *pramāṇa*: “**pratyakṣa-anumāna-āgamāḥ pramāṇāni**”²⁵



- **Pratyakṣa**: Direct perception via the senses
- **Anumāna**: Inference based on logical reasoning and observed signs
- **Āgama**: Reliable testimony - such as that of scripture, guru, or sacred tradition

From a yogic standpoint, even *pramāṇa* is still a mental modification. It may be **afflictive**, if driven by attachment or ego, or **non-afflictive**, if guided by discrimination and aimed at liberation.

Hence, **even valid knowledge can become a tool for liberation** if rightly used, or a source of bondage if misused. Thus, the Yoga Sūtras provide a precise map of the mind's activities, showing how their control - especially through the practice of Yoga - leads not only to **clarity and peace** but ultimately to the **realization of the Self**, the **supreme goal of life** according to the Yoga philosophy.

Now, on the Afflictive (*Kliṣṭa*) Form of the *Pramāṇa-Vṛtti* :

When the mental modification of *pramāṇa* (valid cognition) operates in conjunction with afflictive factors such as *rāga* (attachment), *dveṣa* (aversion), or *moha* (delusion), it is termed *kliṣṭa* - that is, **afflictive** or **binding**.

Illustrations:

When a person perceives a beautiful garment (*pratyakṣa-pramāṇa* or direct perception), and this gives rise to **attachment (*rāga*)** in the mind - this is an instance of *kliṣṭa-pramāṇa-vṛtti*.

- When a person undergoes a painful experience and consequently develops **aversion (*dveṣa*)** - this, too, is a case of afflictive cognition.
- When one places faith in a **false or erroneous source** of knowledge - due to misunderstanding or ignorance - and thereby falls into **delusion (*moha*)**, this also constitutes a *kliṣṭa-pramāṇa*.

Thus, even valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*) can become **a cause of bondage** when it is influenced or colored by the *kleśas* - the mental afflictions. In such conditions, the cognition ceases to be liberating and instead contributes to **mental unrest, desire, and suffering**.

Hence, according to Yogic philosophy, **the value of knowledge is not absolute, but contextual** - determined by whether it aids in **freedom or bondage**.

Non-Afflictive *Pramāṇa-Vṛtti* (*Akliṣṭa Pramāṇa-Vṛtti*):

The *pramāṇa-vṛtti* becomes **non-afflictive (*akliṣṭa*)** when it is **guided by discriminative intelligence (*viveka-buddhi*)** and produces knowledge that supports the path of Yoga.

Examples:

- When one knows, through **scriptural testimony (*śāstra-pramāṇa*)** or the words of a reliable teacher (*guru-vacana*), that the Self is eternal (*nitya*) while the body is perishable - this is a case of *akliṣṭa pramāṇa*.
- When knowledge gained from **Yoga-śāstra**, or spiritual study, informs us that liberation (*mokṣa*) can be attained and suffering (*duḥkha*) transcended - the *pramāṇa-vṛtti* giving rise to such insight is considered **liberating**, and thus **non-afflictive**.

Further, consider this subtle distinction:

- When one observes the impermanence of worldly pleasures and develops **clinging or aversion**, that *vṛtti* becomes *kliṣṭa* - rooted in suffering.
- However, if the **same realization leads to detachment (*vairāgya*)** and inclines the mind toward **spiritual discipline (*Yoga*)**, the resulting *vṛtti* is *akliṣṭa* - conducive to liberation.



Vṛtti 2: Viparyaya-vṛtti (Erroneous Cognition):

The second *vṛtti* identified by Sage Patañjali is **viparyaya**, or **false knowledge**.

“mithyā-jñānam atad-rūpa-pratiṣṭham viparyayaḥ”

Meaning:

Viparyaya is false cognition which is not established in the true nature of the object.

In other words, **viparyaya-vṛtti** is **delusion or misapprehension** - when knowledge is based on an **incorrect perception of reality**. It arises when **truth is absent**, yet the **mind erroneously affirms it to be present**.

Examples:

- Mistaking a rope for a snake (*rajjuḥ sarpaḥ iti bhrāntiḥ*).
- Believing that **the Self is the body**, or that **happiness lies in external objects** - these are examples of **false cognition**.

The term ***“atad-rūpa-pratiṣṭham”*** literally means: "resting in that which is not its true form." That is, the mind **projects** an identity or appearance **on a thing that does not belong to it**.

This **viparyaya-vṛtti** is considered a **kliṣṭa (afflictive) vṛtti** and is especially dangerous, as it forms the basis of **avidyā (ignorance)** - which is the **root of all bondage**, preventing one from realizing the Self.

Thus, viparyaya leads the practitioner **away from truth**, obscuring **Self-realization**, and binding the puruṣa to **samsāra** (the cycle of suffering).

Twofold Nature of Viparyaya-Vṛtti - As Afflictive and Non-Afflictive

1. Afflictive Viparyaya (Kliṣṭa Viparyaya):

Viparyaya (false cognition) becomes **afflictive** when it arises **alongside ignorance (avidyā)**, produces **mental suffering**, and becomes a **cause of bondage**.

Such erroneous understanding **misguides the mind**, giving rise to delusion, attachment, aversion, and false identity. It entraps the jīva (individual self) in the cycle of birth and suffering.

Examples:

- **"I am the body"** - this is a false identification (*dehātma-buddhi*), rooted in the erroneous belief that the Self is identical with the body.
- **"Happiness lies only in sensory pleasures"** - a false notion that becomes the very root of attachment (*rāga*).
- **"This person is my enemy; this one is my friend"** - such distinctions arise from delusion (*moha*) and reinforce ego-based dualities.

Consequences:

- These false cognitions lead to emotional turbulence: *rāga* (attachment), *dveṣa* (aversion), *moha* (confusion).
- They bind the individual to **samsāra** - the endless cycle of rebirth and suffering (*duḥkha*).
- They veil the knowledge of the true Self, making liberation impossible unless corrected.

Hence, **kliṣṭa-viparyaya** is a major obstacle in the path of Yoga, and must be overcome through right knowledge (*pramāṇa*) and discriminative wisdom (*viveka*).



2. Non-Afflictive Viparyaya (Akliṣṭa Viparyaya):

False cognition (mithyā-jñāna), though inherently erroneous, becomes **non-afflictive (akliṣṭa)** when it is employed through the lens of discrimination (*viveka*), used purposefully for inquiry, or serves as a tool for instruction and realization.

When **viparyaya** is utilized to clarify truth, develop wisdom, or aid others in learning, it loses its binding nature and instead contributes to liberation.

Examples:

- When the classic analogy “the rope is mistaken for a snake” (*rajjuḥ sarpaḥ iti bhrāntiḥ*) is used in philosophical inquiry or scriptural teaching to explain the nature of illusion, it becomes a helpful illustration, not a binding delusion.
- In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, it is stated:

“*avidyāyām antare vartamānāḥ...*”

Here, the presence of **ignorance** is illustrated so that one might recognize and transcend it, not fall into it. The usage is educational, thus *akliṣṭa*.

- A spiritual seeker (*sādhaka*), upon reflecting on their past delusions and recalling the suffering caused by ignorance, gains **detachment (vairāgya)** and clarity of purpose. Even though the memory involves false understanding, its current role is purificatory - hence, it becomes **nonafflictive**.

A Practical, Worldly Example:

In common life, the **worship of idols or images (vighraha-pūjā)** may at first seem **misdirected** (i.e., mistaking the form for the formless). This appears to be *viparyaya*. However, if such worship leads the mind toward concentration (*ekāgratā*) and facilitates progress on the yogic path, then the same *viparyaya-vṛtti* becomes instrumental in liberation, hence *akliṣṭa*. Conversely, if worship is performed merely for social display, wealth, or fame, then it reinforces ego and desire. The *same vṛtti* becomes *kliṣṭa*, leading to bondage and sorrow.

This nuanced view is beautifully reflected in the *Īsopaniṣad*:

“*andhaṁ tamaḥ praviśanti ye’vidyām upāsate,
tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u vidyāyām ratāḥ*”

Meaning:

“Those who worship ignorance enter into darkness; but those who delight only in knowledge enter into a greater darkness.”

Here, exclusive attachment to either ignorance or knowledge can lead astray. But when rightly combined - *proper use of both vidyā and avidyā*, as tools - they together pave the way to liberation.

Conclusion:

Thus, *viparyaya-vṛtti* is not inherently binding. *Its effect depends on how it is used:*

- If it **misleads and deludes**, it is *kliṣṭa*.
- If it **educates, sharpens discrimination, and guides toward truth**, it is *akliṣṭa*.

The *Yoga Sūtras*, therefore, classify mental modifications not merely by content, but by their **function** - whether they lead to **bondage** or to **liberation**.

In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, it is said:



*"parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhūh,
tasmāt parāñ paśyati nāntarātman
kaścid dhīraḥ pratyag-ātmānam aikṣat,
āvṛtta-caḥsur amṛtatvam icchan"*

Meaning:

The Self-existent (*Svayambhū*) created the senses to face outward; therefore, beings perceive only external objects and not the inner Self. But a wise one, desiring immortality, turns his gaze inward and beholds the inner Self.

This verse vividly illustrates the nature of *viparyaya-vṛtti* and its twofold application:

- The **ordinary person** (*sāmānya-janaḥ*) dwells in the *viparyaya-vṛtti* - the **false cognition** that "I am the body" (*deho 'ham*), or "Happiness lies in external objects" (*sukham viśayeṣu*).
- Such a **misdirected vṛtti** gives rise to **ignorance** (*avidyā*), delusion, and suffering. It is therefore **kliṣṭa** (**afflictive**).
- However, the *Upaniṣad* praises the rare individual - "**kaścid dhīraḥ**" the wise and courageous seeker, who, through discriminative insight (*viveka-vṛtti*), rejects false perception (*viparyaya*) and turns within to realize the true Self (*pratyag-ātmānam*).

This reversal of attention from **external to internal** marks the transformation of *viparyaya* into a **means of liberation**. When **false cognition** is analyzed, illustrated, or used in scriptural discourse to guide one toward **Self-knowledge**, it becomes a *non-afflictive viparyaya* (*akliṣṭa-vṛtti*).

Thus, this śruti teaches:

- **Misplaced vision** creates **delusion**, which is the *afflictive viparyaya*.
- But when the seeker applies **inquiry and insight**, even that same *viparyaya* becomes **instrumental in Self-realization**.

Conclusion:

The Kaṭha Upaniṣad clearly supports the Yogic classification of mental modifications by showing how the same *viparyaya-vṛtti*, depending on the maturity and motive of the seeker, can be either:

- A source of ignorance and bondage (*kliṣṭa*), or
- A means to Self-realization and immortality (*akliṣṭa*).

3. Vikalpa Conceptual Construction or Imaginative Cognition

"śabda-jñāna-anupātī vastu-śūnyo vikalpaḥ"³⁰ *Vikalpa* is a mental modification that follows verbal knowledge but is empty of a corresponding object.

Meaning & Explanation:

The *vṛtti* known as *vikalpa* is a type of mental activity in which **knowledge arises solely from words**, even though there is **no real object corresponding to it** in the external world.

- "*śabda-jñāna-anupātī*" - it is **dependent upon verbal cognition alone**.
- "*vastu-śūnyaḥ*" - it is **devoid of a real referent (object)**.



In other words, *vikalpa-vṛtti* is verbal imagination - where words produce a sense of knowledge, but the object does not exist in reality.

Examples:

- "*śaśa-śṛṅga*" - "horn of a rabbit": A horn is imagined on a rabbit, though such an object is impossible.
- "*gagana-aravindam*" - "a lotus in the sky": A poetic construction, beautiful but fictitious.
- "*vrkṣa-kumārī*" - "a daughter of a tree": Mythical or metaphorical, but not literal.
- "*nadī-putraḥ*" - "son of a river": Symbolic or poetic, without physical substance.

In all such cases:

- The **mind forms a concept** based on **language**,
- But **there is no real object** that matches the concept.

Thus, *vikalpa* is a construct of imagination, a verbal fabrication, and often used in poetry, metaphor, or abstract reasoning, but not grounded in empirical reality.

Summary:

- *Vikalpa-vṛtti* is a mental modification based on language and conceptual imagination.
- It is not false knowledge (like *viparyaya*) because it doesn't claim reality.
- Nor is it true knowledge (like *pramāṇa*) because it lacks real correspondence.

It exists in the realm of the imaginary, and while it can be creatively or philosophically useful, it does not lead to liberation unless consciously transcended. In Yoga, such *vṛttis* are ultimately to be stilled, as they distract from direct experience of reality (*ṛtambhara prajñā*).

The Twofold Nature of Vikalpa-Vṛtti: Afflictive and Non-Afflictive

Just like other mental modifications (*vṛttis*), *vikalpa* (imaginative conceptualization) too can be either *kliṣṭa* (afflictive) or *akliṣṭa* (non-afflictive), depending on its orientation and effect on the mind.

1. Kliṣṭa Vikalpa (Afflictive Conceptualization):

Vikalpa becomes *kliṣṭa* when it is:

- Rooted in ignorance (*avidyā*)
- Accompanied by attachment, aversion, or delusion (*rāga, dveṣa, moha*)
- And leads to mental agitation and bondage.

Examples:

- "I am a sinner; I am destined to suffer." Leads to self-condemnation, mental depression, and delusion.
- "Eternal life can be easily attained in heaven." Fuels craving for sensory pleasures, strengthening worldly attachment.
- "This person is my enemy and will always harm me." Instigates hatred and negative emotional bias, which deepens psychological suffering.

Result:

- Heightened *duḥkha* (suffering),
- Distraction of the mind,
- Strengthening of bondage (*saṃsāra*).

2. Akliṣṭa Vikalpa (Non-Afflictive Conceptualization):

Vikalpa becomes *akliṣṭa* when:

- It is born of **pure intellect** (*śuddha-buddhi*),



- Aligned with **scriptural wisdom** (*śāstra-pramāṇa*),
- And supports **meditation, discrimination, or spiritual discipline**.

Examples:

- “Om Tat Sat”, “So ’ham”, “Ahaṃ Brahmāsmi” - Though **verbal constructs**, they **point toward truth**, and serve as **meditative aids**.
- “Śivo ’ham (I am Śiva)”, “Nāhaṃ kartā (I am not the doer)” - These are powerful **mantra-like vikalpas** used to purify the mind and dissolve ego.

Result:

- Calmness of mind,
- Support for meditation,
- Growth in Self-awareness and inner clarity.

Conclusion:

Thus, *vikalpa-vṛtti*, though essentially conceptual and objectless, is not always harmful.

- When misused, it deepens bondage - *kliṣṭa*.
- When wisely applied, it becomes a means for liberation - *akliṣṭa*.

In Yoga, the goal is ultimately to transcend all *vṛttis*, but until then, non-afflictive *vikalpas* can serve as valuable tools for purification, contemplation, and inner realization.

4. Nidra-vṛtti - The Mental Modification of Sleep

“abhāva-pratyaya-ālambanā vṛttir nidrā” Sleep is that *vṛtti* (mental modification) which rests on the cognition of absence (non-being).

Meaning and Explanation:

In Yogic psychology, sleep (*nidrā*) is not a state of '**no cognition**', but rather a distinct mental *vṛtti*. It is the modification of the mind based on the experience of absence (*abhāva-pratyaya*), wherein the mind is submerged in the notion of non-experience.

Though there is no waking knowledge, a cognitive impression of "**I slept**" is later recollected indicating that some *vṛtti* was indeed present. That *vṛtti* is *nidrā-vṛtti*.

Types of Nidrā-vṛtti:

A. Kliṣṭā Nidrā (Afflictive Sleep):

Sleep becomes *kliṣṭā* when it arises from **tamasic influences** such as:

- Ignorance (*avidyā*)
- Attachment (*rāga*) or Aversion (*dveṣa*)
- Egoism (*asmitā*) or Fear of death (*abhiniveśa*)

Examples:

- Sleep caused by fatigue after indulgence (e.g., after overeating or over-sensuality).
- Sleep induced by emotional disturbance like fear or desire.
- Sleep filled with confused or distorted dreams (produced by mental impurity).

Effects:

- Mental dullness, laziness, inertia, and distraction in *sādhana* (*spiritual practice*).
- Increased ignorance and lack of clarity.

B. Akliṣṭā Nidrā (Non-Afflictive Sleep):



Sleep becomes *akliṣṭā* when it is:

- Rooted in sattva (*purity, clarity*),
- Free from afflictions (*kleśas*),
- Born of natural rest or post-meditative absorption (*yoga-nidrā*),
- Or the innate peaceful rest of a purified mind (*śuddha-citta*).

Examples:

- Sleep experienced after meditation, when the body-mind naturally settles into calm clarity.
- A state of pure restfulness, not influenced by attachment, aversion, or ignorance.

Effects:

- Physical and mental rejuvenation,
- Purification of consciousness,
- Increased inner stillness, and
- Enhanced readiness for meditation.

Conclusion:

Even **sleep**, though seemingly passive, is classified as a *vr̥tti* in Yoga philosophy.

- It may be *kliṣṭā*, keeping the aspirant in bondage.
- Or it may be *akliṣṭā*, supporting purification and inner balance.

The *goal of the yogī* is to become **conscious even of sleep**, transforming it into a **tool of rest and renewal**, not a source of ignorance. Thus, *nidrā-vr̥tti* is not to be eliminated in the same way as other *vr̥ttis*, but rather **refined** - moving from **tamasic slumber** to **sattvic restfulness**, ultimately integrating even sleep into the path of liberation.

5. Smṛti-Vr̥tti - The Mental Modification of Memory

“*anubhūta-viśaya-āsampramoṣaḥ smṛtiḥ*”³² Memory (*smṛti*) is the non-loss of an experienced object.

Explanation:

In this aphorism, *Patañjali* defines memory as that **mental modification** in which the **impression of an experienced object is retained** without distortion or loss (*āsampramoṣaḥ*).

- “*Anubhūta-viśayaḥ*” - that which was previously experienced (perceived through senses, mind, or intellect).
- “*Āsampramoṣaḥ*” - uninterrupted retention; i.e., the cognition is **not erased** from the field of awareness.

Example:

- Recollection of childhood games, a painful incident, or a teacher’s instruction - all are forms of *smṛti* when the past experience resurfaces in consciousness.

Types of Smṛti-Vr̥tti :

A. Kliṣṭā Smṛti (Afflictive Memory):

Memory becomes *kliṣṭā* when it:

- Is associated with attachment, aversion, or delusion,
- Produces mental agitation or emotional bondage.

Examples:

- Remembering a hurtful insult, leading to resentment or anger.
- Remembering past sensual pleasures, triggering desire or craving.



- Recalling failure or trauma, reinforcing fear or helplessness.

Results:

- Mental restlessness,
- Strengthened ego-sense,
- Further entanglement in *saṃsāra*.

B. Akliṣṭā Smṛti (Non-Afflictive Memory):

Memory becomes *akliṣṭā* when it:

- Arises with discriminative awareness (*viveka*),
- Aids spiritual growth, meditation, or ethical conduct.

Examples:

- Recollection of scriptural statements such as “*Ahaṃ Brahmāsmi*” (I am Brahman), or “*Neti Neti*” (Not this, not this).
- Remembering virtuous deeds or teacher’s words, which inspire clarity and self-discipline.
- Memory that promotes concentration and detachment during meditation.

Results:

- Inner purity,
- Strengthened meditative focus,
- Awakening of Self-awareness and detachment.

Control of All Five Vṛttis:

Patañjali summarizes the method to control all these five mental modifications with the following aphorism: “*abhyāsa-vairāgyābhyāñ tan-nirodhaḥ*” Their cessation is achieved through **practice** (*abhyāsa*) and **detachment** (*vairāgya*).

- *Abhyāsa* (consistent effort) helps in weakening and eventually removing the momentum of mental modifications.
- *Vairāgya* (dispassion) prevents their recurrence by eliminating the underlying tendencies (*vāsanās*).

Conclusion:

Smṛti - though a **reflection of the past** - can either **bind or liberate** the mind:

- If tied to **afflictive residues**, it perpetuates **suffering**.
- If refined through **wisdom**, it supports **liberation**.

Thus, **like all vṛttis**, memory must be **disciplined, purified, and transcended** through Yoga.

Final Conclusion :

The exploration of the five vṛttis as classified by *Patañjali* reveals a profound psychological and metaphysical structure within the *Yoga Sūtras*. Each vṛtti-pramāṇa, viparyaya, vikalpa, nidrā, and smṛti- represents not merely mental fluctuation, but existential movements of consciousness that either obscure or unveil the Self. Their classification into *kliṣṭa* and *akliṣṭa* forms reveals a moral and soteriological dimension central to the yogic journey.

This study affirms that the cessation (*nirodha*) of these vṛttis is not achieved through suppression, but through the sustained discipline of *abhyāsa* (practice) and *vairāgya* (dispassion), as taught by *Patañjali*. Such discipline refines the mind, turning each vṛtti from a cause of bondage into a means of liberation. Even apparently inert modifications like sleep and memory can be transformed through wisdom.



The authority of the Upaniṣads undergirds this classification, wherein the inner restraint of the mind is equated with Self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna*), the highest form of liberation (*mokṣa*). Patanjali's synthesis offers a bridge between scriptural revelation and experiential realization.

Thus, this philosophical analysis not only offers a doctrinal exposition but also a practical roadmap for seekers. For future scholars, it opens avenues for deeper integration between Yogic psychology and Indian metaphysics. For yogīs on the path, it serves as a luminous guide, showing that vṛttis are not enemies to be vanquished, but energies to be disciplined, refined, and ultimately transcended. In this lies the heart of Yoga not in negating life, but in illuminating it through conscious mastery.

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