

Defining Spiritual Intelligence from the Perspective of Indian Thought: A Conceptual And Hermeneutic Study

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Abstract

This research examines the conceptual roots of spiritual intelligence in Indian texts. This paper examines these dimensions and analyses how they can be linked with the life of the protagonist. Yet, these dimensions possess strong philosophical parallels in the Indian knowledge traditions. The study examines, through a qualitative textual and hermeneutic approach, how selected ideas from the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Patanjali Yoga Sutras, and related ethical traditions articulate the inner capacities now associated with spiritual intelligence. The paper argues that Indian texts propagate not simply faith but also a disciplined model of human consciousness, self-regulation, ethical judgement, compassion and purposeful action. The paper identifies essential themes like Atman-realisation, viveka, karma yoga, equanimity, yoga as mental discipline, ahimsa and detachment as conceptual foundations for spiritual intelligence. The research helps to create a culturally rooted framework that links the classical Indian and the modern theories of spiritual intelligence. It also highlights implications for counselling, leadership engagement, holistic human development and education. The paper concludes that the study of spiritual intelligence can be deepened by engaging with Indian textual traditions in a critical, comparative and non-reductionist manner.

Keywords

Suggested keywords: spiritual intelligence; Indian texts; Upanishads; Bhagavad Gita; Yoga Sutras; Indian knowledge systems; self-transcendence; consciousness; hermeneutics; value-based education.

Introduction

Spiritual intelligence is receiving a lot of attention today, in discussions about human development, wellbeing, leadership, education, etc. Spiritual intelligence is the capacity to seek meaning, regulate the self, recognise core values, and act with wisdom in complex life circumstances (Emmons, 2000; Zohar & Marshall, 2000). These abilities are not new; Indian philosophers and Spiritualists have recognised thought, behaviour, self-realisation and the individual-whole connection for long (Chakraborty, 2019; Pradhan, 2017).

Although most of the current literature focuses on studying spiritual intelligence from a Western psychological or managerial perspective, its cross-cultural foundations are yet to be developed. The Indian texts contain a wealth of material that contributes to the conceptual work on moral consciousness, self-knowledge, transcendence and self-discipline. This paper does not argue that the spiritual intelligence of our times has Indian texts as its source. Instead, it reveals the conceptual roots, similarities, and interpretive frameworks that will allow understanding of how cognition, ethics, consciousness, and intentionality combine through spiritual intelligence.

The primary objective of the study is to investigate the meaning of spiritual intelligence in the selected Indian philosophical and spiritual texts. To be specific, the study tries to answer the following questions. What do Indian texts say about dimensions of spiritual intelligence?

How are these textual ideas related to today's idea of spiritual intelligence? In a multicultural setting, how to accept spiritual intelligence as authentic? The paper is structured in the following way: Initially, the literature offered by contemporary literature on spiritual intelligence is reviewed; then the relevant Indian texts are analysed, and lastly, the findings are discussed in terms of theoretical implications and practical applications.

Review of Literature

Contemporary Concept of Spiritual Intelligence

According to Emmons (2000), spiritual intelligence is not an intelligence type, but rather the use of spiritual information to solve problems and attain meaningful goals. It contributes to meaning-making, ethical discernment, and personal transformation. Zohar and Marshall (2000) suggested that spiritual intelligence is the intelligence that deals with ultimate questions and the quest for higher value. It includes qualities such as wisdom, compassion and resilience. According to Vaughan (2002), Spiritual Intelligence is the growth of consciousness, transcendental awareness and an ability to face existential challenges. King (2008) proposed an integrative four-dimensional model that includes critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness and expansion of consciousness, emphasising reflective processes and value-oriented decision-making processes. Jones, Miraglia and McQueen (2011) argue that spiritual intelligence helps us cope and enhances resilience as it allows us to reinterpret life challenges in light of purposefulness and ethics. The studies in this section highlight key dimensions of spiritual intelligence, such as ethical awareness, wisdom, compassion, resilience, values-based decision-making, and transcendental cognition. We shall examine these in Indian literature.

Indian Textual Traditions and the Study of Consciousness

Radhakrishnan (1994) identified the Upanishads as the foremost source of Indian philosophy of consciousness and self-realisation and disciplined thought. According to Olivelle (1996), the Upanishads associate the knowledge of self (the atman) with liberation or moksha by linking ethical conduct, meditation, and philosophical inquiry as interrelated activities. The Bhagavad Gita sets out a solution for ethical decision making, moral discipline and self-regulation according to Prabhavananda and Isherwood (2000), in which one acts with awareness of higher values and detachment from egoistic outcomes. "Patanjali's Yoga Sutras consist of a systematic process for mental discipline, cognitive control, and expansion of consciousness through ethical observances, meditation and restraint" (Feuerstein, 1996). The passages that describe practices, actions, or an individual's character are well-suited for the study of consciousness, ethical restraint, self-control, and transcendence, for they not only theorise but also prescribe tasks that facilitate cognitive, energetic, and ethical development. Scholars have also pointed to the Buddhist and Jain textual repertoires as offering complementary insights into mindful attention, non-injury, and moral reasoning, too. The present study may not be able to bring in these perspectives for clarity's sake. Hence, it will focus on the Upanishads, the Gita and the Yoga Sutras.

Spirituality, Intelligence, and Indian Knowledge Systems

Spiritual intelligence may be cross-cultural and not superculture, Vaughan (2002), Sisk (2005). Western models of spiritual intelligence tend to lack the philosophical and psychological depth that one finds in Indian models. In 2014, Rao and Maharaj examined the spiritual teachings of India that can be applied in a classroom setting. Further, they proved that meditation, self-reflection and moral reasoning can enhance the cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes of students. Sharma and Chopra (2016), through Indian wisdom literature, found that the principles of the Bhagavad Gita help in making

ethically sound decisions, increased resilience, and lead with purpose. Nevertheless, the often conceptual or pseudo-empirical nature of these studies, in addition to their limited textual analysis, undermines their capacity to trace the dimensions of spiritual intelligence to the primary text properly. Moreover, Nair (2012) has stated that there is very little empirical research on Indian knowledge systems and in-depth comparative studies between the Western model of spiritual intelligence and the model derived from Indian texts. Through the sum of this article, it is evident how Indian knowledge systems are relevant in psychology, education and leadership. Further, it shows how the textual depth, structural comparison and conceptual integration are some gaps in the paper.

Critical Synthesis

Experts Emmons, Zohar, Marshall, and King assert that contemporary spiritual intelligence theory identifies ethical awareness, existential thinking, transcendence, compassion, and value-based decision-making as the main dimensions (2000, 2000, 2008). As RadhaKrishnan (1994), Prabhavananda and Isherwood (2000), and Feuerstein (1996) demonstrate in Indian texts, achieving transcendence takes disciplined thinking, along with ethical conduct, and an appreciation of consciousness. Nonetheless, Rao and Maharaj (2014) and Sharma and Chopra (2016) suggest that contemporary scholarship is more focused on the application of Indian wisdom than the systematic textual mapping of it. The convergence carries with it a research gap. Thus, there is in it an opportunity for a focused conceptual study which directly traces the dimensions of modern spiritual intelligence onto Indian textual ideas. The present study provides theoretical and applied insights that would be useful in psychology, education, and leadership contexts. It addresses the under-researched intersection of spiritual intelligence and Indian knowledge systems by mapping cognition, ethics, and transcendental insight from primary Indian texts onto contemporary models.

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Research Gap, Problem Statement and Research Questions

Need for the study

Although spiritual intelligence has been heavily used in recent literature, much attention has not been paid to its concepts delineated in some of the Indian philosophical texts. The large bulk of the literature views spiritual intelligence as a measurable psychological construct or managerial tool. Most studies contain little more than brief general references to philosophy. There is an important need to study the specific maps of a particular dimension of spiritual intelligence with respect to the selected Indian texts for bolstering the theory.

Problem Statement

The current research seeks to address the limited connection between contemporary spiritual intelligence theory and Indian texts. If this phenomenon is not taken on board, it may be misconstrued as merely a psychological scale or a leadership tool, not something that includes consciousness, ethics, self-discipline and meaning-making." This paper, therefore, studies how selected Indian texts can offer conceptual foundations for spiritual intelligence and how they can help in developing a more theoretically sound and culturally relevant understanding of the construct.

Research questions

- What aspects of spiritual intelligence are most relevant for textual analysis?

- What do selected Indian texts say about self-awareness, self-transcendence, ethical judgment, and meaning-making?
- What similarities can we draw between modern spiritual intelligence theory and Indian philosophical categories?
- How can these textual insights be organised into a coherent conceptual framework for future research?

Objective of the study.

- The purpose of the study was to recognise the key dimensions of spiritual intelligence as mentioned in recent literature.
- To study various Indian texts on consciousness, self-knowledge, ethical action, meaning, and transcendence.
- Mapping Indian textual ideas onto the present-day aspects of spiritual intelligence.
- To create a conceptual guide that shows the Indian background of spiritual intelligence.
- We can talk about what this framework means for education, leadership, counselling and human development.

Theoretical And Conceptual Framework

The paper used a conceptual framework that connects modern dimensions of spiritual intelligence with selected Indian textual constructs. This framework should guide the analysis and prevent the paper from becoming only a descriptive summary of ancient texts.

Suggested framework:

Modern spiritual intelligence dimension	Possible Indian textual root	Indicative meaning for the article
Self-awareness	Atman inquiry, self-knowledge, introspection	The capacity to understand the deeper self beyond superficial identity.
Critical existential thinking	Questions of life, death, liberation and reality in the Upanishads	The ability to reflect on ultimate questions and the purpose of life.
Meaning-making	Dharma, karma yoga and purposeful action	The ability to connect action with duty, responsibility and higher values.
Self-regulation	Yoga, mental discipline, equanimity and detachment	The ability to manage desire, emotion and mental fluctuation.
Transcendental awareness	Brahman, unity of existence and non-dual insight	The recognition of interconnectedness and deeper consciousness.
Ethical intelligence	Ahimsa, compassion, truthfulness and non-attachment	The ability to act with moral clarity and concern for others.

Research Methodology

This paper is based on the qualitative, conceptual and textual research design with a hermeneutic approach. The purpose of this paper is to interpret the meanings from the selected Indian Philosophical and Spiritual texts instead of collecting any numerical data. Using this analytical method, the comparative analysis relates textual themes with contemporary models of spiritual intelligence. Manuscripts of the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and when space permits, sections from Buddhist, Jain, or Vedantic texts will be primary sources, while peer-reviewed articles, books and theoretical studies on spiritual intelligence, Indian philosophy, psychology, and value education will be secondary sources. The chosen texts clearly depict one or more of the following themes: consciousness, self-knowledge, ethics, discipline, meaning, and transcendence. They are mostly not purely devotional or sectarian, and if they are, then their critical-academic significance ensures their inclusion. Through the analysis of contemporary literature on spiritual intelligence, a number of major dimensions were identified. Relevant texts were drawn from pamphlets and coded under conceptual categories such as self-awareness, transcendence, meaning, ethical action, and self-regulation. After that, a comparative analysis of each of the Indian textual categories with modern-day spiritual intelligence constructs is done, and a conceptual model depicting the relationship between the Indian textual concepts and spiritual intelligence is presented. To ensure rigour or trustworthiness, the study explains the logic of text selection, uses recognised translations or scholarly editions, distinguishes interpretation from evidence, and triangulates where possible across multiple texts. The analysis is careful not to overclaim or pretend that spiritual intelligence is anything other than a contemporary idea being interpreted through past philosophical materials.

Findings And Analysis

According to Emmons (2000) and Zohar and Marshall (2000), spiritual intelligence refers to profound self-awareness which is ethical and the capacity to make meaning and transcend. The Indian philosophical texts present substantial foundations for the conceptualisation and incorporation of consciousness, ethics, and disciplined action into practices. In the Upanishads, one is urged to acquire self-awareness and self-knowledge in the pursuit of the true self or atman, which the Upanishads assert is that which lies beyond the personality, social identity, and ego. In Radhakrishnan's view (1994), the Upanishadic inquiry entails a shift from bodily and mental identification to an awareness of inner consciousness that grows reflective, continuous and ethical in nature. According to Basham (2010), this kind of self-knowledge, which is the S.I. dimension of deep self-awareness, is more than just self-confidence or personality awareness. Deep Self-awareness leads to an experiential understanding of the self as one with the universal principle. The self-awareness and self-knowledge of Upanishads are not merely thoughts but the dialogue and aphorisms reflecting them. Similarly, they help us to become resilient and make wise decisions (Olivelle, 1996).

The Bhagavad Gita adds further perspective to the importance of meaning, duty, and goal-oriented action as components of spiritual intelligence. According to Prabhavananda and Isherwood (2000), engaging in dharma and karma yoga motivates people who perform morally responsible deeds, irrespective of the fruits of action, and are committed to what goes beyond the self. Spiritual intelligence and decision making refers to the ability of people to find their bearings in situations that are faced with moral dilemmas, uncertainty and conflict and think clearly and act ethically. This shows decision making is not merely cognitive but also values and purpose informed. As noted by Feuerstein (1996), the Gita offers evidence of one's capacity for value-based behaviour through prescriptions for action in crises. To contemplate the meaning of one's actions requires mental work, self-discipline and transcendence. It seems that spiritual intelligence goes beyond internal understanding. It has practical, ethical and social value to enable compassionate and responsible leadership.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras enhance this debate by illustrating the key role of mental discipline and self-regulation. Sutras are for controlling the vrittis of the citta (the mind) in a systematic way, which is dharana, and developing vairagya (detachment) as per Feuerstein (1996). Being able to self-regulate,

whether it be your thoughts, feelings, or behaviours, allows you to think, feel, and act clearly. According to King (2008), the ability to control internal states enables the person to deal with difficult tasks and moral problems effectively with wisdom and resilience. Through the engagement with the practices of ethical observance, meditation and trained thinking set out in the Yoga Sutras, spiritual intelligence is enacted as a set of internal capacities which are integrated in a way that allows for self-reflection and purposeful action. The disciplined mind fused with spiritual intelligence fits into Indian texts for cognitive, ethical, and emotional intelligence related to this construct.

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According to Radhakrishnan (1994), Indian texts reiterate the relationship between all beings and the oneness of existence. According to the Upanishads, atman is Brahman. This recognition provides a philosophical grounding for transpersonal consciousness. Or, consider the Bhagavad Gita's description of selfless action. It places the action of an individual within a larger, cosmic context (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 2000). According to the Yoga Sutras, the practitioner who meditates on a God who is universal becomes aware of self in relation to the universal and not in isolation (Feuerstein, 1996). According to the literature, spiritual intelligence has more to it than ethical or cognitive. There is also a willingness towards the larger whole and a sense of interconnectedness. This results in a holistic understanding along with ethical, etc.

Building on these findings, it is possible to construct a conceptual model which suggests that Indian texts contain the five roots of spiritual intelligence: consciousness, discernment, disciplined mind, ethical action and transcendence. The Dharmic tradition views mindfulness as a combination of self-awareness and awareness of others, along with the cultivation of compassion. The six qualities of consciousness, discernment, disciplined mind, ethical action, and transcendence, can be found in the Indian Buddhist tradition. The roots of spiritual intelligence map onto modern-day outcomes such as meaning-making, resilience, compassionate leadership, value-based decision-making and holistic education (King, 2008; Rao & Maharaj, 2014). The model traced the conceptual roots of the spiritual intelligence construct to Indian philosophical texts to illustrate how these philosophical texts inform enhanced understanding of the construct.

Each dimension reinforces the development of the other. Self-awareness gives us the ability to reflect on the rightness and wrongness of a situation. Whereas, disciplined thinking stabilises the mind to behave in line with values. When we act ethically, it generates compassion, relational attunement and moral integrity, which engenders a transcendent awareness of interrelatedness. The integrated model shows that one's Spiritual intelligence does not function as a linear skill; rather, it is a dynamic, holistic construct where cognition, ethics, emotion and consciousness are interconnected.

This view attempts to counteract the Western views that tend to see spiritual intelligence only as one type of measurable and psychologized human quality or managerial ability (Vaughan, 2002; Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

The importance of interpretive depth, critical engagement and scholarly rigour is underscored by the textual analysis. The study is careful not to overclaim, being a modern concept. The study interprets Indian texts with care since Indian texts have philosophy, ethics and practice. The results of the

hermeneutic interpretation and comparative conceptual analysis demonstrate the continuity and conceptual concordance between ancient Indian thought and contemporary spiritual intelligence theory and provide a basis for external, educational and leadership applications.

Proposed definition based on the above discussion and analysis of Indian texts

Based on the synthesis of philosophical concepts in the Indian texts, Spiritual Intelligence can be defined as follows:

“Spiritual Intelligence is the capacity of human consciousness, which can be used to develop Self Awareness, mastery over the mind and senses, transcendence and experiential realisation of unity between the Self (Atman) and Universal consciousness (Brahman). It represents a transformative evolution of individual human consciousness achieved through Karma Yoga, contemplation, meditation and living with intensity, leading to ethical purification and experience of wholeness and oneness, not merely psychological adaptation and meaning-making.”

Unlike many contemporary definitions, which interpret Spiritual Intelligence primarily in terms of meaning making and adaptive functioning, Indian philosophy understands Spiritual Intelligence as a transformative evolution of consciousness into disciplined awareness, transcendence, ethical discernment and realisation of the ultimate reality.

Discussion

The study's findings suggest that spiritual intelligence should be seen as an integrated ability of cognition, ethics, consciousness and action and not as a specific psychological skill or managerial competence (Emmons, 2000; King, 2008; Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Indian texts – such as the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali – reinforce this conception further by linking these capacities with self-transformation and moral and ethical responsibility (Radhakrishnan, 1994; Prabhavananda and Isherwood, 2000; Feuerstein, 1996). In contrast to current frameworks that focus on measurable outcomes, the Indian texts locate spiritual intelligence in an ontological and ethical framework, making the case that intelligence is and should be linked to self-realisation, ethical discernment, and engagement with the larger whole. The change indicates the importance of an infusion of philosophical depth in the impetus, avoiding restricted, performative or cognitive skill conceptualisations (Vaughan, 2002).

The analysis indicates that spirituality in Indic traditions is understood primarily as disciplined awareness rather than mere belief. Exposure to reflective practices such as meditation, self-inquiry, ethical observance and detached action alters such consciousness, produces resilience or tolerance, and establishes values. (Feuerstein, 1996; Olivelle, 1996) This view expands spiritual intelligence to the relational, social, containing a moral dimension, and not merely individual functioning; compassion and ethical commitment to others are emphasised (Harvey, 2000; Rao & Maharaj, 2014). By positioning spiritual intelligence as a bundle of inward self-awareness and outward ethical performance, Indian textual traditions further contextualise and enrich our understanding and the capacity for culturally-grounded psychological and educational models. This view has resonance with calls from literature

about leadership and human development for intelligence frameworks that include values, ethics and self-control along with cognitive performance (Sharma and Chopra 2016).

Through the study, it is shown that a critical treatment of Indian textual insights enables a sophisticated, culturally and historically conscious expansion of the construct and avoids uncritical anachronism. Modern forms of psychological intelligence cannot be directly transposed onto texts without much mediation. The texts are not evidence of our intelligence in the present-day form. They instead provide us conceptual analogies and philosophical scaffolds that can illuminate dimensions of spiritual intelligence. The interpretive approach also stresses that the study's theoretical contribution is to offer a reframing of spiritual intelligence as an integrated capacity that is ethical and cognitive and has been articulated through many centuries of philosophical reflection.

The findings also highlight applicable outcomes for education, leadership, and human development. We can inculcate lessons from Indian texts into curricula, leadership training and counselling for moral decision-making, disciplined thinking, compassion and meaningful action. The model of spiritual intelligence is culturally grounded through consciousness, ethical responsibility and self-transforming. The model significantly extends the theoretical reach and practical scope of the construct. The textual meaning and illustration go on to transform the understanding of the terms self/other –from-(as)- a principally Westernised, individualistic and reified conception to an integrated, relational and transformative one, i.e. Experience. So these paintings will try to show the relationship between self-awareness (subjectivity), moral positioning (agency), and transcendence.

Conclusion, Contribution, and Implications

The recent study shows that selected texts of Indian philosophy have strong conceptual foundations for comprehension of spiritual intelligence as they refer to self-knowledge, disciplined consciousness, meaning, ethical action, compassion and transcendence. By mapping the dimensions of contemporary spiritual intelligence to the insights in the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, the paper brings out the richness and cultural specificity these texts offer to contemporary theory. The conceptual framework that is developed through ancient wisdom and modern-day constructs for a culturally authentic future study is the original contribution of this research. The Indian texts can serve as a starting point for interdisciplinary dialogues in psychology, leadership, education and human development without being reduced to religious discourse. Said otherwise, philosophical and ethical reflections can be made useful and relevant. The findings can be applied to educational institutions and organisations. The framework can be integrated by educational institutions in reflective learning modules aimed at enhancing students' self-awareness, ethical judgement and purposeful action that lead to the development of cognitive, emotional and ethical capacities. Likewise, leadership programmes could integrate these principles to foster leaders' inner clarity, resilience, responsibility, and compassion. Counselling, mindfulness-based training and other personal development interventions are also possible using this framework that combines ethical reasoning, disciplined thinking and transpersonal awareness. The research adds to the academic understanding of the concept of spiritual intelligence. To establish a theory of spiritual intelligence, ancient Indian texts could be utilised. This could show how it is possible for ancient philosophical thinking to become contemporary psychological and educational practices. In addition, providing a multi-traditional advancement to human development with ethical grounding.

Limitations And Future Research

This research has some limitations which must be acknowledged. To begin with, it is largely conceptual and textual. Hence, it depends on the interpretational analysis of selected Indian philosophical texts, not the empirical measurement of spiritual intelligence. Consequently, it cannot establish a quantitative validation. Furthermore, the particular texts chosen and the selected translations have ramifications for interpretation and lessen the generalisability beyond the empirical literature on Indian philosophy. Moreover, unlike Western schools, Indian traditions are heterogeneous, with so many philosophical schools and regional variations, the study does not claim a single Indian perspective on spiritual intelligence. An inherent risk exists that later psychological categories are foisted on earlier texts. Although the analysis has been cautious, we must be open to this potential to avoid anachronism. Despite these restrictions, the research offers a basic outline of spiritual intelligence from a culturally essentialist perspective for further examination. Researchers will be able to resolve these limitations in future.

Research can find out if the conceptual model can help students, educators, leaders or counsellors develop spiritual intelligence, thus providing empirical verification. An exploration of spiritual intelligence or similar reputable terms across cultures and religions (Indian, Buddhist, Islamic, Christian, indigenous systems, etc.) would facilitate cross-cultural theorising and bring theories into line through comparative discourse. Studies focusing on developing scales may yield instruments that are culturally appropriate for the measurement of spiritual intelligence based on Indian concepts, which are useful in educational psychology and leadership. Obviously, applied research can be able to ask applied questions, the answers of which may help in developing effective transformational training modules. When examined together, these avenues for future research show that spiritual intelligence could be researched in a more robust theoretical, empirical and applied manner without alienating itself from cultural and philosophical specificity.

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