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Dreams: An Indian Perspective

Dr.T.Anantha Vijayah, Assistant Professor of English, Gandhigram Rural Institute – Deemed University, Gandhigram – 624 302, Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu, India, tavijay6@gmail.com

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Abstract

Dreams fascinate us. This paper attempts to present how seers in India perceive dreams. For a focused attention on dreams, this paper presents the Indian perspective detailed by Swami Sivananda in his book Mind – Its Mysteries and Control.

Keywords: Dream, Mind, State & Swami Sivananda.

Introduction:

According to traditional Indian thinking, a Dream is a product of the Mind. Hence, to understand dreams, it is essential to understand the functioning of the Mind. The states of the Mind are divided into three: the waking state, the dream state, and the deep sleep state. While the Mind operates in all three states, the individual can be conscious either during the functioning of the Mind or becomes conscious of its function later. This brings another dimension to be analyzed – the conscious being seen in the Indian tradition.

When an individual is not conscious, there are no impressions of the objects he encounters in his Mind. It is just like the Haiku poem:

Crane flying over a lake
Neither the lake nor the crane
retains the image.

Neither the lake nor the crane is conscious of themselves, the other, or about themselves. So, impressions have yet to be recorded and retrieved. However, as a conscious human being, when we see a mirror, we want to hold on to the beauty of our face. (Maybe the mirror may not relish it) Being an object without consciousness, the mirror does not have an opinion. However, we develop an opinion on the image we see in the mirror. Such fleeting impressions, though transitory, are inscribed on the Mind. These images, thus acquired, form the repertoire of the sum and substance of the Mind. This leads us to focus on identifying the Mind.

What is Mind?

To the fundamental question of what is Mind, the first reaction to it would be "My mind?" "Yes, it is my mind." This answer implies that the Mind is mine and that I own my Mind. This further means that the Mind is an object and an object of my observation. With the Mind as a tool, I start observing other objects. My Mind comes first, and then the object of my observation. Hence, between the Mind and an object, the Mind comes first. The order would be I, my Mind, and an object. We can thus comfortably conclude that I am not my Mind as

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sound as I am not my hand, I am not my house, I am not my car, I am not my head. Summing up the above statements, all stated above could be clubbed as objects of mine. Therefore, I exist, and the objects of my observation also exist. So, let me gain your permission to conclude that when I do not exist, the objects of my observation cease to exist.

While the Mind is an object, I also use it to see objects. Apart from my sense organs, objects do not exist for me without the Mind. So, the Mind is an object to see an object. In Indian tradition, the Mind is called the Anthakaranam, an internal organ like the sense organ. It receives its sustenance from the conscious being "I." It is permitted to conclude that the Mind is an object of consciousness and does not have an independent existence.

As the Mind is an object, it cannot exist independently. It needs a substratum to exist. The Mind always attaches itself to something objective. The Mind asserts itself as 'I' in the body. So when I say 'I,' the whole body, an object of my consciousness, becomes 'me' as the Mind expands to the entire body and determines it as 'I.' However, clinically speaking, we always say my limbs, my brain, my eyes, my stomach and my kidney, my heart is aching.

So, permit us to conclude that I am not my body; similarly, I am not my Mind. The Mind and the body are two independent variables at play. The Mind is an internal organ, and the body is an external organ.

Having decided that 'my mind' is an object, let us see the qualities of the Mind.

Qualities of the Mind

The Mind is mostly not constant, and it is wavering (Chanchala) and unsteady (Asthira). The Mind evolves through daily experience. Every man's Mind has

Its distinct qualities are determined by the "impressions, habits, collection of desires, feelings, botherations, and ideas gathered." These impressions are called 'Samskaras.' New desires also replace some of the old desires. Thus, the Mind is constantly adapting to emerging desires and impressions. However, this does not alter the mental operations; while the old desires, ideas, and feelings depart, the new ones concord and work in harmony with the residual impressions. Their working in harmony sustains the identity of their mental existence.

Our Mind also plays with the likes and dislikes (Raga and Dvesha). While the functions of the Mind are three-fold: sensation, thought, and will, the functional aspects of the Mind include memory, chitta (repository of impressions and habits), intellect (Buddhi – the capacity to know right from wrong), and being egoistic (Ahankara).

The Mind needs no rest; only the brain needs rest. At any point in time, the Mind can handle only one issue. One cannot think of two things at the same time. At any given time, the Mind can think only one thought.

However, an agitated mind creates its world according to its thoughts. It makes a world of imagination. The Mind always seeks variety and new sensations. It cannot stand in anyone's Mind for over a few seconds. It hates monotony. The Mind will always entertain Sankalpa-vikalpa (will think and doubt) endlessly; when it discriminates and decides, it is Buddhi; when it self-arrogates, it is Ahankara; when it is the storehouse of Samskaras and seat of memory, it is Chitta; also when it does Dharana and Anusandhana. Role-playing explains the actions of the Mind.

Volition brings all the mental faculties into play. Only through introspection will we know what happens at different times in the Mind. The Mind evolves through each of these experiences. The Mind has three states: active, passive, and neutral.

Waking State

When do we say, "We are awake?" We state that we are awake only when we connect

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ourselves to external objects through the Mind, assisted by the sense organs. That is, the internal organ – the Mind works through the external organs and connects us to the objects outside; only then do we say we are awake. The conscious being apprehends those external objects, and the Mind identifies itself with the body. It is during the waking state that the Mind. Occupies the brain, and we declare that we are alive, awake, and superimpose our body with the idea that I am.

In the waking state, an individual is aware/conscious of the image/impression recorded by the Mind. In the waking state, the Mind is mindful that the objects of the conscious, for instance, the table and the chair, are all objects away from the self. Conscious understanding happens when the subject-object relations exist, and the mental images observed and stored are recorded in the Mind.

In the waking state, space, time, and objects exist outside the Mind. The Mind understands that space, time, and objects are real—all these become objects of our consciousness.

These objects of our consciousness create impressions during the waking state. Let us explore how the Mind acts in the conscious state. The Mind identifies itself with the objects. While in sleep, the consciousness remains, and the consciousness of the body disappears; in the waking state, the Mind identifies itself with the body and other external objects to which it relates. When someone kicks our car, we get angry; the Mind identifies the vehicle with the individual and gets aggressive. The Mind occupies the whole of the brain and its functioning.

Similarly, in the waking state, if the Mind does not perceive, the external objects do not exist for the being. Only when and if the Mind perceives the objects do the objects come into existence. We are unaware of something that is not in our purview. The Mind gets impressions in the waking state. These impressions are churned repeatedly by the Mind; this becomes an obsession with the Mind. The consciousness being (Atman) witnesses all that is happening and illuminating.

In the waking state, we can be conscious of the Mind and its functioning; we may control it. We may mind our Minds.

Dreaming in the Waking State

The Mind creates its own space even when we are awake, leading us into a dream state where all imaginary things happen. The thoughts have also assumed a subtle state. The collapse of time, space, and objects occurs in the Mind. The Mind takes complete control over objects, space, and time. We are primarily unconscious of dreaming in the waking state and become aware of it only when we come out of the trance. The Mind starts building castles in the air, recollecting events, and playing with things that happened long past, imagining many things that can never happen. This is called Svapna-Jagrat (dreaming in the waking state). During the 'dreaming in waking state,' we are not conscious of the situation but realize it after we come out of the trance. In English, we call this 'lost in thoughts.'

Deep Sleep State

In sleep, the Mind is in a subtle state. In the deep sleep state, we are not conscious. The Mind does not play a role in the deep sleep state. All the activities of the Mind cease to play. There is no play of the internal and the external sense organs. It does not mean we do not exist during deep sleep. This is because when we wake up from a deep sleep, we say, "I had a deep sleep – an undisturbed sleep." Therefore, the consciousness of the being 'I' continues uninterrupted, but the action of the Mind is interrupted. We are conscious of deep sleep at a later time but not conscious of it during deep sleep.

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Dream State

While in the dream state, the Mind disassociates from the senses and ceases to interact with external objects. So, in a dream, the only player is the Mind, and no other external variables are at play during the dream state. Having no other objects to play with, the Mind depends on the impressions it has gathered during the waking state to play with.

The functions of the Mind, like thinking, imagining, etc, along with fear, likes and dislikes, and desires, play a role in the dream as they all have their sustenance in the Mind only. As all thought currents originate from the impressions gathered by the Mind, the impressions embedded in the Mind also play a vital role during the dream state. Along with the impressions, the embedded latent subtle desires accumulated over time find their way to the Mind in both waking and dream states.

As the Mind cannot play with objects, it does not know; the materials for the dream have to be weaved only with the repository of its knowledge. Dreams are thus a product of the impressions gathered. The impressions gathered during the waking state form the core repository for the dream. The Mind creates its impressions and enjoys them. They are played with fears, desires, likes, dislikes, and will-thoughts.

The sustenance for the dream time, dream space, and objects has to be the Mind, as no other variable is at play. Being an object, the Mind itself cannot create an existence away from it and, therefore, establishes the time, space, and objects within it. Hence, the dream, the objects in the dream, the time and space, and the Mind cannot be isolated. The Mind, apart from assuming various forms for play, becomes the subject and the object simultaneously. There is no space between the dream objects and the Mind. The external reality of the dream objects does not exist.

In the Jagrat (waking) state, the objects exist independently of the Mind. So, you see the same objects every day as soon as you wake up. However, in dreams, the objects of the dream exist only so long as there is a Mind, so long as the dream lasts, because the creatures are manufactured out of the Mind only. In dreams, the Mind creates the dream-creatures from the materials supplied by waking experiences with some modifications. All dream objects vanish when the Mind drops to a waking state.

The conscious being witnesses the dream. Every individual has their dream creatures. It depends on the impact external objects /people have on them. The individual's constant thinking strengthens the mental images of external objects / other people.

Just as in the waking state, when the Mind is intensely concentrated, a period of two hours passes like five minutes, and when the Mind is wandering, even half an hour drags on like two hours. The notion of time becomes very relative then. So is the dream time. A dream may cover fifty years but will occur within ten minutes. (33)

When we say we have a thought, the idea is an object of consciousness. When we say I had a dream, then the dream is an object of consciousness. When we say I have pain in my neck, the pain becomes an object of the subject-consciousness. It is pertinent to note that when we sleep, and the consciousness is not receptive, there are no objects, and the subjective consciousness has no impressions. When we wake up, we state, "Ha, I had a good sleep, an undisturbed sleep." However, when we dream and wake up, we say, "Ha, I had a good dream."

So, the 'I' that is all through the waking and dream states is constant. Who illuminates in dreams? There is no other light there. The Mind is not self-luminous. It is Jada. Brahman (the conscious being) illuminates the objects in the dream. (183) However, conscious control of the Mind is impossible in the dream state.

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That which is constant is the consciousness, and the images/impressions on the Mind are transitory. Thus, the consciousness of the self is the determining factor, and the images/impressions are objects of the consciousness. This includes the impressions of space and time. The consciousness of the 'I' is the subject, and everything else is an object, including the Mind. When everything else is an object of consciousness, even time and space, the whole conscious being is reduced to two specific categories: the subject 'I,' the conscious being, and the object of consciousness.

In Chhandogya Upanishad Sankara, it is observed that the phenomena of duality caused by the action of the Mind are present in the waking and dreaming states only but absent in the deep sleep state. In waking and dreaming states, there is the play of the thoughts (and the simultaneous occurrence of names and forms) and, hence, the world. In dreamless sleep, there are no thoughts; therefore, there is no world.

We taste the nature of absolute bliss in dreamless sleep, where a man is cut off from the distracting world. The Mind (lower Manas) creates differences, distinctions, duality, and separateness.

Conclusion

You dream that you are a king. You enjoy various kinds of royal pleasures. As soon as you wake up, everything vanishes. However, you do not feel for the loss because you know the dream-creatures are all false. Similarly, even in the waking consciousness, if you are well-established in the idea that the world is a false illusion, you will not get any pain. When you know the real Tattva (Brahman), the waking consciousness will become entirely false, like a dream.

Jagrat state is only a long dream (Dirgha Svapna). The state of waking consciousness does not exist either in dreams or sleep. Therefore, it is illusory. Reality always exists in all conditions or states.

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