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ĀTMAN, SOUL, AND SPIRIT IN HINDU THOUGHT: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

By:
I Wayan Sukabawa[1], I Nengah Lestawi[2], Ni Ketut Riska Dewi Prawita[3]
[1,2,3]Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar
iwayansukabawa@uhnsugriwa.ac.id[1], lestawi@uhnsugriwa.ac.id[2], riskadewiprawita@gmail.com[3]

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Abstract

*Although the concepts of Ātman, soul, and spirit have been widely discussed in Hindu philosophy and theology, previous studies have primarily emphasized their metaphysical and doctrinal dimensions. Limited attention has been given to how these concepts are discursively constructed, represented, and communicated within the framework of communication studies. Addressing this gap, this study aims to examine the ontological relationship among Ātman, soul, and spirit in Hindu thought through the perspective of Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This study employed a qualitative library research design by analyzing classical Hindu scriptures, including the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gītā, relevant commentaries, and contemporary scholarly publications concerning Hindu spirituality. Within the scope of this study, Ātman refers to the eternal and transcendental self, the soul denotes the individual consciousness associated with embodied existence, and the spirit represents the manifestation of consciousness shaped by karmic experiences in religious discourse. The analysis reveals that Hindu discourse constructs these three concepts as interconnected dimensions of human spirituality that explain the relationship between divine consciousness, individual existence, and the process of self-realization. Rather than presenting theological doctrines as objective truths, the study demonstrates how Hindu religious discourse represents these concepts as philosophical frameworks for understanding human existence, moral responsibility, and liberation (*mokṣa*). From the perspective of communication studies, the findings highlight the role of religious discourse in constructing, transmitting, and legitimizing meanings of spirituality within Hindu communities. This study contributes to the development of Critical Discourse Analysis, Hindu studies, and religious communication by providing a clearer conceptual framework for interpreting the discourse surrounding Ātman, soul, and spirit in contemporary Hindu thought.*

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Ātman, soul, spirit, Hindu thought, religious communication.

I. INTRODUCTION

Human spirituality has long been recognized as one of the central concerns in religious and philosophical traditions because it addresses fundamental questions regarding the nature of existence, consciousness, identity, and the relationship between human beings and ultimate reality. Within Hindu philosophy, discussions concerning Ātman, soul, and spirit constitute the ontological foundation for understanding the origin, purpose, and destiny of human life. These concepts are not merely theological doctrines but also philosophical constructs that explain how human consciousness develops through the processes of karma, rebirth (*punarbhava*), and liberation (*mokṣa*). The *Upaniṣads* describe Ātman as the innermost essence of every individual that is eternal, immutable, and identical with Brahman, the supreme reality (Radhakrishnan, 1998). Likewise, the *Bhagavad Gītā* emphasizes that Ātman neither takes birth nor dies, but exists eternally beyond the limitations of the physical body (Prabhupada, 2013). Consequently, these concepts have become fundamental references for understanding Hindu spirituality and its philosophical worldview.

Although Ātman, soul, and spirit are closely related within Hindu teachings, each concept possesses a distinct ontological position. Ātman is generally understood as the eternal self that transcends material existence, whereas the soul is associated with individual consciousness that experiences worldly existence through its interaction with the subtle body (*sūkṣma śarīra*) and the law of karma. The spirit, meanwhile, is frequently represented in Hindu religious discourse as the manifestation of consciousness that continues its existential journey through rebirth until liberation is ultimately achieved (Eliade, 2009). These distinctions demonstrate that Hindu philosophy offers a sophisticated conceptual framework for explaining the relationship between divine consciousness, human existence, and moral responsibility. Nevertheless, the meanings attached to these concepts are continuously interpreted and reconstructed within different theological traditions, cultural contexts, and communicative practices.

Previous scholarly studies have extensively discussed Hindu spirituality from theological and philosophical perspectives. Radhakrishnan (1998) argues that the realization of Ātman constitutes the essence of Vedāntic philosophy because it enables human beings to recognize the unity between the individual self and Brahman. Similarly, Eliade (2009) explains that religious symbols and spiritual consciousness represent universal dimensions through which individuals experience the sacred. Within the context of Hindu philosophy, self-realization (*ātma-jñāna*) is regarded as the highest stage of human spiritual development because it liberates individuals from ignorance (*avidyā*), attachment to the material world, and the cycle of *saṃsāra*. The realization of the identity between Ātman and Brahman constitutes the ultimate goal of Hindu spiritual practice, culminating in *mokṣa*, the state of complete liberation from worldly bondage (Flood, 1996; Klostermaier, 2007). These classical works have made significant contributions to the understanding of Hindu metaphysics and spiritual philosophy by explaining the ontological nature of Ātman and its relationship to human existence.

More recent studies have expanded these discussions by examining karma, rebirth, and contemporary Hindu spirituality. Putra and Sudiarta (2022), for example, explain that the interaction between consciousness and karma determines the continuity of human existence through the cycle of *punarbhava*. Similarly, Numertayasa et al. (2024) investigate religious discourse within Balinese Hindu communities and demonstrate that contemporary religious communication increasingly encounters ideological contestation through digital media. Their findings indicate that religious meanings are not static but are continuously negotiated through communication processes influenced by social, cultural, and technological transformations. These studies enrich contemporary discussions on Hindu spirituality by demonstrating that religious teachings are continuously interpreted within changing social contexts.

Despite these important contributions, previous studies predominantly approach Ātman, soul, and spirit from theological, philosophical, or ethical perspectives. Comparatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to examining how these concepts are constructed, represented, and negotiated through religious discourse from the perspective of communication studies**.** Existing research generally focuses on explaining doctrinal meanings rather than investigating the communicative processes through which those meanings are produced, legitimized, and disseminated within society. Consequently, the role of discourse in shaping contemporary understandings of Hindu spirituality remains insufficiently explored. This limitation reveals an important research gap that requires an interdisciplinary approach integrating Hindu philosophy with communication studies.

From the perspective of communication studies, discourse functions not merely as a vehicle for transmitting religious information but also as a social practice through which meanings, identities, ideologies, and systems of knowledge are produced and reproduced. Fairclough (2018) argues that discourse simultaneously reflects and constructs social reality through the interaction between textual practices, discursive practices, and broader social structures. Similarly, van Dijk (2018) explains that discourse influences social cognition because language contributes to shaping collective knowledge, belief systems, and ideological orientations. Wodak and Meyer (2023) further emphasize that Critical Discourse Analysis enables researchers to examine how historical, political, and cultural contexts influence the production of meaning within public discourse. These theoretical perspectives indicate that religious discourse should not be understood merely as a theological expression but also as a communicative process through which spiritual meanings are socially constructed and maintained.

Within the context of Hindu communication, religious discourse plays a significant role in shaping how believers understand the concepts of Ātman, soul, and spirit. Sacred scriptures, religious education, ritual communication, and contemporary digital media all contribute to constructing particular interpretations of spirituality. Consequently, meanings associated with these concepts are not exclusively determined by theological doctrines but are also influenced by communicative practices operating within broader socio-cultural contexts. Understanding this dynamic requires a Critical Discourse Analysis approach capable of explaining how discourse constructs, legitimizes, and transforms spiritual knowledge in contemporary Hindu society.

II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive analytical approach. This qualitative descriptive analysis is utilized because the study seeks to explore and analyze data of a descriptive nature, which are subsequently presented narratively in a descriptive form.

Data were collected through a literature review technique, involving the reading and analysis of sources relevant to the research problem, such as books, academic journals, and other pertinent references.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach in communication studies that examines the relationship between language, power, and ideology. This approach is grounded in the view that language is not merely a neutral tool of communication, but also a means of constructing and maintaining social structures. According to Fairclough (2018), CDA focuses on how linguistic practices reflect and reproduce dominance and social inequalities within society. Therefore, critical discourse analysis does not only examine the content of texts but also the social, political, and cultural contexts in which they are embedded. In communication studies, this approach is used to uncover how meaning is constructed and disseminated through media, education, and other social institutions.

Furthermore, Wodak and Meyer (2023) emphasize that CDA has an emancipatory character, aiming to uncover hidden power structures within language and to foster critical awareness in society. This approach is rooted in

the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, as developed by Habermas, Horkheimer, and Adorno, which conceptualizes communication as a dialectical space between instrumental rationality and communicative rationality. In contemporary contexts, CDA is employed to analyze how media and social discourse shape public perceptions of religion, politics, and identity (Machin & Mayr, 2023). Thus, CDA functions as an analytical tool that bridges linguistic and social dimensions, positioning communication not merely as a process of message transmission but also as a practice of power.

Within the context of Hindu communication studies, the critical discourse analysis approach can be utilized to examine how spiritual teachings such as Ātman, Soul, and Spirit are represented, interpreted, and understood in modern life. Interpretations of these teachings are often influenced by discourses of globalization, modern rationality, and media representations that tend to reduce spiritual values into mere cultural symbols. By employing CDA, researchers can reveal how materialistic and individualistic discourses influence the ways in which individuals understand the essence of their spirituality. This approach is consistent with the perspective of Numertayasa, Suryawan, and Putra (2024), who emphasize the importance of critically analyzing religious discourse in Bali as an effort to preserve the authenticity of religious values amid the pressures of modern ideological currents.

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis According to Scholars

Norman Fairclough is a central figure in the development of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), seeking to bridge linguistic studies with critical social theory. According to Fairclough (2018), discourse is not merely a system of language, but also a social practice that both shapes and is shaped by structures of power and ideology. He developed a three-dimensional model of discourse analysis, consisting of text analysis (linguistic structures and lexical choices), discursive practice (the processes of text production and consumption), and social practice (the ideological and social contexts influencing the text). Through this model, Fairclough aims to reveal how language is used to represent social reality and to sustain particular forms of dominance or hegemony within society.

Fairclough's approach provides a strong theoretical foundation for analyzing religious communication, including within the context of Hindu teachings on Ātman, Soul, and Spirit. Through CDA, spiritual teachings can be examined not only as religious texts but also as social discourses produced within specific cultural and historical contexts. For instance, the representation of Ātman as a pure spark of Brahman may be understood as a discourse of spiritual liberation that challenges materialistic worldviews. Fairclough's framework opens new insights into the understanding that religious communication is not neutral, but is imbued with values, power, and ideology that shape how individuals interpret the nature of the self.

Teun A. van Dijk developed a socio-cognitive approach within CDA that connects language, cognition, and social structures. According to van Dijk (2018), ideology and power operate through the control of social cognition within society. Language serves as the primary medium through which values are instilled and collective perceptions of reality are constructed. This approach highlights how individuals interpret texts through cognitive frameworks shaped by their social experiences and ideological backgrounds. Therefore, discourse analysis does not merely examine linguistic structures but also the mental processes involved in interpreting communicative messages.

Van Dijk's approach is highly relevant for examining spiritual discourse in Hindu teachings, particularly regarding the relationship between karma, consciousness, and the liberation of the soul. Through a socio-cognitive lens, it becomes possible to understand how teachings about Ātman and Spirit interact with modern patterns of thought influenced by rationalism and materialism. This analysis helps reveal how human spiritual

understanding may be distorted by social constructions and media influences. Thus, van Dijk's theory contributes significantly to efforts aimed at restoring human awareness to its original spiritual meaning, rooted in the values of *dharma* and *mokṣa*.

Ruth Wodak is known for the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), which emphasizes the importance of historical and social contexts in the construction of discursive meaning. According to Wodak and Meyer (2023), discourse cannot be separated from the historical and social structures that give rise to it. Discourse analysis must consider how identity, ideology, and power evolve historically through communicative practices. This approach views language as a social archive that preserves traces of power relations and struggles over meaning. Therefore, DHA seeks to connect linguistic analysis with broader social and political histories.

In the context of religious communication, Wodak's approach provides a foundation for understanding how Hindu teachings—including those concerning Ātman, Soul, and Spirit—evolve over time. Teachings that were once philosophical and spiritual in nature are now often interpreted in ritualistic and symbolic ways due to the influence of modernization. Through historical analysis, it becomes possible to identify how social and political changes shape the ways in which people understand spirituality. Thus, Wodak's approach helps restore the philosophical context of Hindu teachings, which fundamentally emphasize the unity between human beings and Brahman.

David Machin and Andrea Mayr extend the scope of CDA through a multimodal approach, examining how meaning is constructed not only through language but also through visual, symbolic, and media elements. According to Machin and Mayr (2023), in modern society communication no longer relies solely on text, but on a combination of multiple modes of representation, such as images, sounds, and symbols. They argue that power and ideology often operate subtly through visual and narrative representations that shape public perceptions of reality. This approach renders CDA more relevant in the digital era, which is saturated with symbolic and visual media.

The multimodal approach is particularly useful for analyzing Hindu religious discourse, where spiritual symbols such as *Om*, *Swastika*, *Padma*, and *Trimurti* play a significant role in conveying philosophical values. These symbols are not merely aesthetic, but also ideological, representing worldviews centered on harmony, balance, and the sanctity of life. Machin and Mayr's framework enables a deeper understanding of how spiritual values are communicated through visual and ritual forms. Consequently, this approach opens space for a critical reading of Hindu spiritual communication within a modern context increasingly shaped by visual and digital culture.

3.2 Dimensions of Ideology, Power, and Culture

In the context of modern society, the relationship between discourse, ideology, and power has become increasingly complex due to the influence of media development and the globalization of values. Digital media, for instance, now functions as an agent in shaping new discourses that often reinterpret spiritual teachings through the logic of the market and sensationalism. This phenomenon has the potential to shift the philosophical meaning of Hindu teachings—including those concerning Ātman, Soul, and Spirit—into merely superficial narratives of popular culture.

According to Numertayasa, Suryawan, and Putra (2024), religious discourse in the era of social media frequently becomes an arena of ideological contestation between traditional authorities and more liberal modern discourses. Therefore, Critical Discourse Analysis becomes essential to reaffirm the position of Hindu spirituality as a source of emancipatory consciousness rather than merely a set of dogmatic beliefs. It also serves to restore the function of religious communication as a space for the liberation of human consciousness toward *mokṣa*—the union with ultimate truth.

3.3 Ritual Communication and Symbolic Meaning

Communication within religious rituals

functions as a medium for mediating the relationship between humans and transcendental forces, while simultaneously strengthening social bonds among individuals. According to Suyono (2019), religious rituals represent both vertical communication with the Divine and horizontal communication among human beings. Through established symbols and procedures, rituals create a sense of connectedness, order, and collective identity. In the context of Balinese Hinduism, *Ngaben* serves as a space of spiritual communication that integrates prayers, mantras, and symbols as both transcendental and social messages.

Symbols in Hindu rituals play a crucial role as media for conveying abstract meanings that are difficult to explain through rational means. According to Astuti (2020), symbols in Hinduism—such as fire, water, and earth—function to bridge the sacred and the profane dimensions. In every ritual, symbols serve not only an aesthetic function but also reinforce theological beliefs and social values. Therefore, in the *Ngaben* ceremony, fire and earth symbolize the Hindu belief in the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*) and the ultimate goal of the soul's liberation toward *mokṣa*.

3.4 The Concept of Ātman, Soul, and Spirit in the Hindu Perspective

In Hindu teachings, Ātman is understood as a spark of Brahman—the source of all life—which is pure, eternal, and unaffected by material elements (*prakṛti*). It represents the innermost essence of the human being, remaining pure despite experiences of suffering, error, or repeated rebirth (Radhakrishnan, 2018). Ātman is the eternal essence of consciousness that serves as the inner witness (*sākṣin*) of all human experiences while remaining unaffected by material existence. Hindu philosophy teaches that the realization of the essential unity between Ātman and Brahman represents the highest spiritual achievement, leading to *mokṣa*, the ultimate liberation from *saṃsāra* and the attainment of absolute reality (Prabhupada, 2013).

Ātman is immutable, eternal, and free from the influence of the material world. Within Hindu spirituality, it is the source of life and true consciousness. When an individual realizes the nature of their Ātman, they become liberated from the bonds of *māyā* (worldly illusion) and attain the highest wisdom. Thus, Ātman constitutes the spiritual core that transcends space, time, and karma.

In contrast, the Soul (*sūkṣma śarīra*), or subtle body, represents the dimension of individual consciousness that becomes associated with the material world through embodiment. It operates through the faculties of mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), and ego (*ahaṃkāra*), enabling perception, cognition, and action within empirical existence. As the subtle body interacts with *prakṛti*, which is constituted by the *pañca mahābhūta*—earth (*pṛthivī*), water (*āpaḥ*), fire (*tejas*), air (*vāyu*), and space (*ākāśa*)—it becomes conditioned by karma and worldly attachments. In this sense, the subtle body serves as the intermediary through which the eternal Ātman experiences embodied existence until the realization of *mokṣa* (Radhakrishnan, 1998).

As the Soul becomes influenced by worldly desires and actions, the law of *karma* emerges, determining the direction of one's spiritual journey. Karma, generated through thought, speech, and action, shapes the destiny of the Soul after death. In the spiritual process, Ātman united with the Soul is referred to as *Jīvātman*, representing self-consciousness that has been influenced by the world yet retains the potential to return to its original purity.

The Spirit is understood as the manifestation of individual consciousness that carries the accumulated effects of karma and undergoes the cycle of *punarbhava* (rebirth). It serves as the vehicle through which karmic impressions (*saṃskāras*) are transmitted across successive lifetimes. According to the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the condition of embodied consciousness is influenced by the three fundamental *guṇas—sattva* (purity and harmony), *rajas* (activity and desire), and *tamas* (ignorance and inertia)—which shape an individual's thoughts, actions, and spiritual destiny (Prabhupada, 2013).

A consciousness predominated by *sattva* is

characterized by purity, wisdom, and spiritual clarity, enabling individuals to progress toward self-realization and ultimately attain *mokṣa*. Conversely, the predominance of *rajas* and *tamas* gives rise to attachment, desire, ignorance, and delusion, thereby perpetuating the cycle of *saṃsāra*. According to Hindu philosophy, the continuity of rebirth (*punarbhava*) is governed by the law of *karma*, whereby the accumulated consequences of past actions determine the conditions of future existence. Rebirth is therefore understood not as an immediate or arbitrary event but as a manifestation of the moral and spiritual order that regulates the soul's journey toward liberation (Klostermaier, 2007).

In several Balinese Hindu traditions, the spirit is believed to remain associated with the deceased until the completion of funerary rites (*ngaben*), which facilitate its transition to the ancestral realm. However, this understanding represents a local religious interpretation and should be distinguished from the broader philosophical doctrine of karma and *punarbhava* found in classical Hindu scriptures (Eiseman, 1990).

From the perspective of philosophical theology, the relationship between Ātman, God, and the spiritual destiny of human beings can be examined through several major theological perspectives, including Deism, Theism, and Pantheism. These perspectives provide a comparative framework for understanding the nature of divine reality and its relationship with human existence.

a. Deism maintains that God created the universe and established its natural order but does not intervene directly in the ongoing affairs of the world. Human beings are therefore expected to rely primarily on reason and natural law in understanding reality (Peterson et al., 2014).

b. Theism asserts that God is both the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe, actively engaging with humanity through divine providence, revelation, and moral guidance. In Hindu traditions, this perspective is reflected in devotional (*bhakti*) schools that emphasize God's continual involvement in the spiritual lives of devotees (Flood, 1996)

c. Pantheism understands God and the universe as fundamentally identical, viewing the divine as immanent in all existence. Although classical Hindu philosophy—particularly Advaita Vedānta—is often associated with pantheistic interpretations, many scholars argue that it is more accurately described as panentheistic**,** since Brahman both pervades and transcends the universe (Flood, 1996; Radhakrishnan, 1998).

These three perspectives provide a philosophical foundation for understanding the relationship between humans and the Divine. When related to Hindu teachings, they help explain the dynamic interplay between human freedom (*karma*) and divine order (*dharma*). This analysis enriches the understanding of the journey of Ātman, Soul, and Spirit as a dialectical process between spiritual forces and worldly experience.

3.5 The Position of Ātman, Soul, and Spirit in the Human Body According to Hindu Teachings

In Hindu teachings, the positions of Ātman, Soul, and Spirit reflect a layered and hierarchical cosmic structure within the human body, in which spiritual and material elements interact dynamically. Ātman is regarded as a divine spark of Brahman—the ultimate reality that is absolute, infinite, and the source of all existence. It represents the essence of life and true consciousness (*cit*), characterized by *sat* (being), *cit* (consciousness), and *ānanda* (eternal bliss).

Ātman is the eternal witness, unaffected by birth and death, pleasure and pain, or good and evil. As stated in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (II.20), "Ātman is neither born nor does it die; it is eternal, everlasting, and is not slain when the body is slain" (Radhakrishnan, 2020). This affirms that Ātman is pure consciousness that observes all life processes without being bound by worldly change. Ontologically, Ātman is indivisible and immutable; it is identical with Brahman, as expressed in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* through the *mahāvākya* "Tat Tvam Asi" ("Thou art That"). This statement signifies that the true self (Ātman) is essentially non- different from the ultimate reality (Brahman). The highest spiritual

realization (*jñāna*) occurs when one becomes aware of this existential unity.

However, at the empirical level, human consciousness becomes fragmented due to worldly influences, making Ātman appear confined within the material body. Here, the Soul plays a crucial role as a bridge between divine consciousness (Ātman) and physical reality (the body).

The Soul (*sūkṣma śarīra* or *liṅga śarīra*) is understood in Hindu philosophy as the subtle body that comprises the mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), and ego (*ahaṃkāra*), functioning as the vehicle of individual consciousness. Through these faculties, human beings perceive, think, feel, and act within the empirical world. As the subtle body interacts with *prakṛti*, which is constituted by the *pañca mahābhūta*—earth (*pṛthivī*), water (*āpaḥ*), fire (*tejas*), air (*vāyu*), and space (*ākāśa*)—it becomes conditioned by desires, attachments, and the consequences of karma. These karmic impressions (*vāsanās*) remain associated with the subtle body beyond physical death and influence the continuity of existence through the cycle of *saṃsāra* until liberation (*mokṣa*) is attained (Prabhupada, 2013).

After death, the Soul carrying its karmic burden continues its journey into a new existence as Spirit (*preta* or *ātma-prāṇi*). The Spirit is not merely a supernatural entity but an existential form of consciousness undergoing spiritual transformation. In Hindu teachings, the Spirit is classified according to the dominant *guṇa*: **Sattvika** – characterized by wisdom, purity, and truth, leading toward liberation (*mokṣa*); **Rajasika** – driven by ambition, activity, and worldly desires; **Tamasika** – dominated by inner darkness, ignorance, and spiritual inertia. These qualities determine the trajectory of the Spirit—whether toward liberation or continued reincarnation (*punarbhava*) to resolve unfinished karma. In this context, reincarnation is not a punishment but a cosmic opportunity for the Spirit to refine its consciousness and perfect its moral being.

Furthermore, the relationship between Ātman, Soul, and Spirit can be understood as a process of spiritual communication between the divine and human dimensions. Ātman functions as the "source of divine messages" (pure consciousness), the Soul as the "receiver and transmitter" (instrument of individual consciousness), and the Spirit as the "result of interpretation" derived from lived experiences. When humans live in accordance with *dharma*, this channel of spiritual communication remains open, generating reflective awareness that leads to enlightenment. Conversely, when individuals live in ignorance (*avidyā*), the divine message of Ātman becomes distorted, and the Soul becomes trapped in the cycle of suffering (*saṃsāra*).

Thus, the human body is understood in Hindu philosophy not merely as a biological entity but as a sacred instrument through which spiritual realization can be attained. The ultimate purpose of human life is not simply to sustain physical existence but to realize the essential unity between Ātman and Brahman through self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna*). When this realization is achieved, the individual transcends the bondage of karma and *saṃsāra*, the subtle body is no longer conditioned by worldly attachments, and *mokṣa* is attained as the highest state of liberation and union with the ultimate reality, Brahman (Radhakrishnan, 1998).

3.6 The Attachment of the Soul to the Material World and the Emergence of Karma and Punarbhava

In the Hindu perspective, the attachment of the soul to the material world constitutes the core of human existential suffering. The soul (*jīvātman*) is essentially pure and represents an emanation of the sacred Ātman. However, when it enters the physical body and comes into contact with the material world (*prakṛti*), it becomes veiled by the three *guṇa*: *sattva* (truth and balance), *rajas* (activity and desire), and *tamas* (ignorance and inertia). The dominance of *rajas* and *tamas* leads human beings into attachment to sensory pleasures, power, and ego. In this condition, the soul loses awareness of its divine nature and becomes trapped in the cycle of *karma*—the moral law of cause and effect that binds every action to its consequences (Radhakrishnan, 2020).

In Hindu teachings, *karma* is not merely a

system of moral retribution, but a spiritual mechanism that maintains cosmic balance. Every human action generates energetic vibrations that adhere to the consciousness of the soul (*vāsanā*). When the physical body ceases to exist, the soul carries this karmic burden as a blueprint for its next life, giving rise to the concept of *punarbhava* (rebirth). According to Hindu philosophy, the quality of one's actions (*karma*) and the predominance of the three *guṇas* influence the soul's future existence. A soul governed by attachment, ignorance, and selfish desires remains bound to the cycle of *saṃsāra*, whereas a soul cultivated through wisdom, righteousness (*dharma*), and spiritual discipline progresses toward higher states of consciousness and ultimately attains *mokṣa*, the liberation from rebirth (Prabhupada, 2013).

Punarbhava is not a form of punishment, but rather a process of spiritual learning through which the soul gradually realizes its true nature as part of Brahman. Through the practice of *dharma* (righteous duty), *karma yoga* (selfless action), *bhakti yoga* (devotional surrender), and *jñāna yoga* (spiritual knowledge), the soul can dissolve the bonds of karma and restore its awareness to its original source—Ātman. When all worldly attachments vanish and the duality between "self" and "the Divine" dissolves, *mokṣa* is attained—the total liberation from the cycle of birth and death. At this stage, the soul no longer exists as a separate entity, but reunites with Brahman in the eternal stillness of pure consciousness (Putra & Sudiarta, 2022).

3.7 Critical Theory in Analyzing the Construction and Distortion of Spiritual Meaning

Critical theory provides an essential foundation for understanding how spirituality in Hindu teachings is constructed, represented, and at times distorted within modern social contexts. According to Habermas (1984), ideal communication should occur in a distortion-free space, where communicative rationality replaces instrumental rationality. However, in practice, spiritual communication is often entangled within systems of power, economy, and culture that exploit religious symbols for particular interests. In the Hindu context, the profound teachings concerning Ātman, Soul, and Spirit are frequently reduced to mere ritual activities without reflective meaning that leads individuals toward awareness of Brahman. As a result, spirituality loses its communicative function as a medium for the transformation of human consciousness and is reduced to a set of ritual practices detached from reflective understanding and self-realization. Such a condition obscures the emancipatory purpose of spiritual communication, which is intended to guide individuals toward the realization of Ātman and ultimately *mokṣa* (Habermas, 1984).

Foucault (1980) expands this perspective by asserting that discourse is never neutral, but always intertwined with power. In modern social spaces, religious institutions, mass media, and educational systems play active roles in shaping the meaning and representation of Hindu spirituality. Religious language becomes an instrument of moral legitimation as well as a mechanism of social control. When spirituality is produced and disseminated through symbolic systems controlled by authority, what emerges is ideological distortion—namely, the reconstruction of sacred meaning to align with dominant interests (Fairclough, 2018).

Through the approach of Critical Discourse Analysis, researchers are able to trace the linguistic structures, social practices, and ideological contexts underlying representations of Hindu spirituality. This approach opens a reflective space to understand how spiritual communication can be restored from an instrument of power into a means of emancipating consciousness. By returning spirituality to its essential nature—as a dialogical communication between human beings and Brahman—critical theory becomes not only an analytical tool but also a pathway toward the liberation of consciousness from the hegemony of materialistic rationality, leading to a more holistic transcendental awareness.

3.8 The Dialectic Between the Pure Ātman and the Worldly-Bound Spirit in the Process Toward Mokṣa

The dialectic between Ātman and Spirit

represents the journey of human consciousness from attachment toward spiritual liberation. Ātman, as a spark of Brahman, is pure consciousness unaffected by worldly dualities, whereas the Spirit is a subtle entity still bound by *karma* and the empirical experiences of life. In their spiritual journey, human beings are often trapped in the illusion that their existence is limited to the body and mind. Through a profound process of self-realization, individuals come to understand that they are part of divine consciousness. When the union between Ātman and the Soul occurs, it gives rise to *Jīvātman*—individual consciousness aligned with universal consciousness (Radhakrishnan, 2020). This awareness becomes the philosophical foundation for the highest goal of human life in Hinduism, namely *mokṣa*, the liberation from the cycle of rebirth and worldly attachment.

From the perspective of critical theory, the relationship between Ātman and Spirit can be interpreted as a dialectic between true consciousness and alienated consciousness. Habermas (1984) describes this process as the transformation of communicative consciousness, in which human beings strive to free themselves from ideological distortions toward a form of pure and reflective communication. In the context of Hindu spirituality, this transformation occurs when the human spirit transcends the limitations of *rajasic* (ambition) and *tamasic* (inner darkness) tendencies, ultimately attaining a *sattvic* state (truth and clarity). This process of purification is not merely moral but also epistemological, guiding individuals toward an understanding of the nature of reality through inner enlightenment and transcendental awareness.

Within the framework of Hindu communication, the dialectic between Ātman and Spirit illustrates a dialogical relationship between individual consciousness and divine consciousness. Spiritual communication is not merely the transmission of prayers or mantras, but an inner dialogue that connects human beings with the divine source through silence and self- understanding. When interpreted through critical theory, this process reveals spiritual communication as a space of liberation from the hegemony of materialism and the pseudo- rationality of modernity.

In this context, *mokṣa* signifies not only the end of the cycle of rebirth but also the highest realization of authentic communication—communication without distortion between the human spirit and divine consciousness—where truth (*satya*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and universal love (*prema*) form the foundation of an eternal cosmic dialogue.

IV. CONCLUSION

4.1 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Hindu teachings view human beings as spiritual entities composed of three primary aspects: Ātman, Soul, and Spirit. Ātman is a spark of Brahman that is eternal, pure, and unaffected by the material world; it constitutes the core of consciousness and the source of true life. The Soul functions as a bridge between divine consciousness and the material world, while the Spirit represents a manifestation of consciousness that remains bound by *karma* and worldly experiences. The relationship among these three elements reflects a dynamic spiritual structure of human existence, in which the body serves as a temporary vessel for the process of self-realization toward unity with Brahman.

The attachment of the Soul to the material world through desire and passion gives rise to *karma* and the cycle of *punarbhava* (rebirth). This cycle is not a form of punishment but rather a mechanism of moral and spiritual purification. Through the practice of *dharma*, *karma yoga*, and self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna*), individuals can मुक्त themselves from worldly attachments and attain *mokṣa*, true liberation. In this context, Hindu spiritual communication functions as a medium for the transformation of consciousness, wherein the dialogue between human beings and divine reality occurs through symbols, prayers, and meditation that carry reflective and emancipatory meaning.

From the perspective of critical theory—particularly through the ideas of Habermas, Foucault, and Fairclough—human spirituality can be understood as a discursive field that is not neutral but shaped by ideology, power, and social construction. Hindu spirituality, which

fundamentally guides individuals toward pure consciousness, is often reduced to formal and symbolic ritual practices. Critical Discourse Analysis helps reveal how language, texts, and religious symbols are used to construct or even distort the meaning of spirituality.

Therefore, this study affirms that spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*) also represents a form of emancipatory communicative consciousness—domination—leading toward an authentic dialogue between humans, nature, and the Divine. Overall, the dialectic between Ātman, Soul, and Spirit not only describes the metaphysical journey of human beings but also reflects a process of spiritual communication oriented toward the liberation of consciousness. By understanding this structure through the lens of critical theory, Hindu teachings function not only as a system of religious belief but also as a discourse of liberation for modern individuals from the hegemony of materialism and the crisis of existential meaning. Thus, Hindu communication should ideally be directed toward the integration of individual consciousness and universal consciousness—a process of inner dialogue that guides human beings toward *mokṣa* as the highest state of awareness and true freedom.

4.2 Recommendations

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of spiritual communication studies grounded in critical theory, particularly within the Hindu context. The integration of critical theory and Hindu teachings opens new avenues for understanding spirituality as a domain of social discourse that can be examined scientifically. This finding broadens the scope of communication studies, extending beyond media and message transmission to include the processes of consciousness formation and transcendental meaning-making. This study also enriches the literature on emancipatory communication, as proposed by Habermas (1984) and further developed by Fairclough (2018), by positioning spirituality as part of the human emancipatory process from power and ideology.

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Practically, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a foundation for strengthening Hindu education, community development, and religious communication in a more reflective, critical, and contextual manner. Religious leaders, educators, and communication practitioners should emphasize the philosophical and spiritual dimensions in conveying teachings about Ātman, Soul, and Spirit. Such an approach will enable Hindu communities to understand their religious teachings more profoundly as one that is free from social and ideological means of self-liberation, rather than merely as ritual practice. Consequently, religious communication can function as a tool enlightment and emancipation, rather than as an instrument of power or mere social formality.

In the modern context, characterized by moral crises, materialism, and value disorientation, Hindu teachings—when approached though critical discourse-offer a pathway toward balancing rationality and spirituality. This study is expected to serve as a foundation for future research in developing an emancipatory model of Hindu communication, one that liberates individuals from spiritual ignorance toward an awareness of the fundamental unity between humans, nature,

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