Meaning of Knowledge (Brahman) in the Indu Thought
by Potluri Rao In Seattle  ©2018 (CC BY 4.0)

No, it is not a typo, it is Indu not Hindu. Indu is the Indian subcontinent encompassing Jain, Buddhist, Hindu, Carvaka, and hundreds of other sects. They all belong to a single family tree distinguished by their separate Thoughts. This is an attempt to summarize collective Indu Thought on meaning of the word Knowledge (Brahman), the essence of the Scientific Method of Indus. Brahman is pure logic.

Thought process of Indus is ancient and matured by the time of the Rig Veda (2500 BCE). The Golden age of Thought started only after the Mahabharata war (1000 BCE). The death and destruction caused by the war made people rebel against the establishment and critical thinking took root. Students started writing treatises critical of their own teachers and academic freedom was law of the land. Rishi with intellect, critical thinking skills, composed the Upanishads to explain Brahman.

Jain, Carvaka, Buddha, Sankhya, Vaisesika, Nyaya, Yoga, Pramana, Advaita, and the Bhagavad Gita challenged the establishment and encouraged critical thinking. Scientific Method was established. Good ideas prevailed and bad ideas were weeded out by test of time. Hundreds of different good ideas coexisted, each addressing a problem of different kind. All Thought processes of Indus emerged from the same seed, Brahman. It is the same tree with hundreds of different branches.

The reason for knowledge is to learn from one experience and apply it in another situation to gain advantage. That leads us to the fundamental question: What is it that we observe? We use words to describe what we observe. How do words convey what we observe? Thought process is the science of constructing words to record what we observe so it can be transmitted without loss of information by corruption. Words alone are inadequate for this purpose. A higher level of abstract grammar called Thought is required. Different people suggested different solutions to this problem, that is why we have so many different grammars, Thoughts.

We see clay and a pot. Should we record them as two different things or the same in different shapes? We see seed and oil. Should we record them as two different things or the same in different forms? This family of questions is called Perception (Pratyaksha). Perception relates to things we observe directly with our senses sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch.
One Thought, grammar, was to break what we observe into its core components. Break it into smaller and smaller pieces until it can not be broken any further. The smallest piece that is indivisible is called Atom (Anu). This Atom is not to be confused with the atom in Physics which was named after this concept when people believed that atom was indivisible. Atom of Physics is divisible, it is no longer technically an atom.

All observable phenomena is called Nature (Prakriti) and belongs to Perception class. All Nature can be thought of as reducible to its core component Atom. Not all Atoms are exactly the same with identical properties. Atom only means it is indivisible. There are hundreds of different types of Atoms, all indivisible.

When several Atoms are assembled together like tinker toys we see Nature. Clay and pot are made from the same type of Atom; both seed and oil are made from a different type of Atom. We do not observe objects in Nature made of both clay and seed Atoms. Clay and pot belong to the same category. Clay and seed belong to two different categories. Atom helps us observe Nature in a scientific manner by category (family).

When we see fire we also see smoke. When we see lightning we also hear thunder. These are empirical observations. Can we depend on this observed relationship to safely infer one from the other? Fire is necessary for smoke. Is smoke sufficient to predict fire? If smoke can be produced in different ways, not just from fire, then we can not be sure whether fire produced it or some other thing produced it. If only fire produces smoke and nothing else then we say smoke is sufficient for fire. When a relationship between two objects in Nature is both necessary and sufficient then it is called Inference (Anumana).

Perception (Pratyaksha) is direct observation and Inference (Anumana) is indirect observation.

Does knowledge consist of only Nature (Prakriti)? The answer is No. There is a body of knowledge that can not be reduced to and analyzed as Atoms. It is Consciousness (Purusha), awareness of our own past experiences. Prakriti and Purusha are completely separate and unrelated entities. We have Mind (Buddhi) which is not constrained by laws of Nature (Physics). It can imagine and play with abstract concepts that have no real counter parts. We want to understand Consciousness for the same reason we want to observe Nature.

Can Prakriti and Purusha do what ever they want and get away with it? The answer is No. Apparently both seem to obey some Cosmic Laws. Without these laws there will be unpredictable disorder in the Universe and knowledge becomes worthless. The
Cosmic Power that sets these laws is called Ishvar. No, Ishvar is not God. It is “it”, just a concept, a place holder for something we do not understand. It is needed only for logical completeness.

The three basic building blocks of knowledge Prakriti (Nature), Purusha (Consciousness), and Ishvar (Order in Universe) are called the triple Tatvas (Fundamentals). They are also called Achit (not Mind), Chit (Mind), and Ishvar. The interaction between the three Tatvas produces Reality, our understanding of the world we live in.

To give a contemporary analogy, Prakriti is a database of facts and Purusha is analysis of data in the database. In order for a database to be useful data should be coded, categorized, cataloged, and stored in an accessible form. Analysis of data requires some theoretical models based on speculations conceived in human Mind (Chit). When there is a match between a theory (Chit) and data (Achit) we have knowledge. Both Prakriti (data) and Purusha (theory) are required ingredients to produce knowledge. They are often compared to Woman and Man required to produce a baby. Achit and Chit is a technical way of saying the same. Knowledge is a fusion of theory and data.

How do Chit and Achit work together to produce knowledge? Let us look at a well-known example.

There was something in the yard. In the dim light you thought it was a snake. When you returned with a lamp and a stick you found a rope. Chit (Mind) confused Achit rope for a snake. (Rajju sarpa bhranti.) Did Chit make a mistake? No, Chit behaved correctly. The mistake is in our lack of understanding of behavior of Chit. Chit obeys the Cosmic Law. If we understand why Chit behaved the way it did then we understand the Cosmic Law.

First, we need to develop some tools to understand fully the behavior of Chit.

The primary objective of Chit (Mind) is self preservation. It uses knowledge as a means to accomplish its end. Knowledge is not for its own sake, it is a means not an end.

Each Chit maintains two different databases stored in its brain: (1) A database of facts collected from Achit (A-base) and (2) A database of knowledge (K-base) obtained from own past experiences. These databases are assembled from personal experiences of the past and unique to a Chit. They are constantly updated. More experiences a Chit has larger will be its databases. The two databases are linked. For each item in A-base there exists at least one associated item in K-base.
When a Chit encounters an object in Nature it looks up in its A-base to see if there is a matching entry. If there is a match then it is a familiar object and looks in its K-base for linked items. From the knowledge acquired in the past the Chit knows how to react to the observed object. For example, in the past when it touched fire fingers were burned. There is an entry for fire in the A-base and a linked entry for fire as burned fingers in the K-base. When it sees fire Chit knows instantly what happens if it touches fire. Lookup in the A-base and the K-base is automatic, instantaneous, and happens at subconscious level. It is an involuntary chemical action in neurons of the Chit’s brain. The databases are neurons.

When a Chit (Mind) encounters a new experience and learns a lesson from it, a theory verified by data, then new linked entries (neurons) are automatically added to its A-base and K-base instantaneously. It is an involuntary chemical action in neurons of brain by the Cosmic Law of Ishvar.

The Chit observed an object in dim light, a blurry image of certain dimensions. It found two matching items in its A-base, a blurry snake and a blurry rope. They have associated links in K-base, one is a life threatening possibility and the other a harmless one. There is no way of knowing which one it is. The law Chit must obey is self preservation. If it were really a snake and the Chit selected rope instead then it is dead meat. If it were a rope and selected snake instead, and went to fetch a lamp and a stick, it was obeying the Law. The Chit naturally chooses the snake.

The Chit did not make a mistake in concluding that it was a snake when it was a rope. When the same object was seen with a lamp the Chit observed a different image, not the blurry image seen before. There was only one linked entry in its A-base for the new image and it was a rope. Perception of the same object with and without lamp produced two different images resulting in different reactions. Perception is influenced by ambient factors.

This illustrates how an experience between Chit (Theory) and Achit (Data) produces knowledge. Knowledge is the link between Theory and Data, linked neurons in brain.

Seeing a snake is a Perception of Nature. Realization that snake can kill is Reality, an interpretation of Perception. The Link between snake and death, obtained from the awareness of past experiences (Consciousness), is Knowledge. Perception is not knowledge. Knowledge interprets Perception. Without Knowledge Perception is unintelligible. Without Knowledge, linked neurons in brain, we do not know that snake can kill or fire can burn fingers. Knowledge is essential for self preservation of Chit.
Data and Theory by themselves are not Knowledge. Knowledge is the intersection of Data and Theory. Knowledge is an empirically validated theory. Knowledge can be gained only from experience. Reality is interpretation of Perception by Knowledge.

Interaction between Perception (Prakriti, Mother) and Consciousness (Purusha, Father) produces Knowledge (Brahman, Baby). Prakriti has no Purusha. Purusha has no Prakriti. Only Brahman has both Prakriti and Purusha as linked messages. Outside the linked messages Brahman has no Prakriti or Purusha.

The K-base in the brain of a Chit is called Brahman. It has only linked messages. Brahman resides in the brain neurons of all life forms. Only Brahman is Knowledge. Brahman interprets Perception. Brahman is essential for self preservation of Chit.

How is knowledge selected to become Brahman (Knowledge)? Brahman has its own logic. Ishvar does not allow anything in the neurons of a brain unless it meets the Cosmic Law. The Brahma Sutra is the science of understanding the logic of Brahman.

Reality, our understanding of the World, is an interpretation of Nature (Prakriti) by Brahman (Knowledge). Nature without an interpreter is unintelligible. Only Brahman can interpret Nature. What Brahman can interpret is limited to the existing linked messages in the K-base.

Nature is fixed but Brahman is variable, a result of accumulating experiences. The K-base of a Chit (Brahman) expands with each mistake made and lesson learned. Reality, our understanding of Nature, changes with changing Brahman. Nature is fixed, but its interpretation by ever changing Brahman is constantly changing. Nature is static. Nature is not Reality. Reality is an interpretation of Perception. Reality is dynamic.

Awareness of dynamic nature of Brahman is the ultimate reality called Moksha (liberation). Believing that Nature is Reality is called Maya (illusion).

Brahman is essential for self preservation and is put in all life forms by the Cosmic Law of Ishvar. In all life forms Brahman operates at three levels of alertness: (1) Awake, (2) Dream, and (3) Deep sleep. Even in deep sleep Brahman is alert and wakes you when a baby cries. Neurons in brain are optimized to conserve energy without sacrificing self preservation. Brahman is beyond awareness. There is Brahman in a new born baby.

Atman is a relevant subset of Brahman that is appropriate for a life form. Atman has no birth or death and wears a disposable body. Atman is a set of Linked Messages (K-base)
stored in brain neurons of a disposable body. Atman does not transmigrate, it copies itself to all disposable bodies like a virus. Atman stores itself in multiple backup copies, disposable bodies. Death of a disposable body (one copy) has no impact on Atman. Disposable body has death. Atman has no death. It is alive in other disposable bodies. Disposable body is a carrier, a physical storage device, for Atman virus.

The Linked Messages (Atman) that fire burns fingers and snake can kill is stored in all disposable bodies of all life forms that are impacted by fire and snake.

Brahman has no birth, death, or attributes (guna). It is a virus. It resides in brain neurons as Linked Messages. It is the imperishable Cosmic message of Ishvar. Brahman (virus) is universal and occupies (infects) all disposable bodies that have neurons in their brain, from Brahma (Creator) to Pipeelika (Ant). Humans have neurons in their brain, therefore they are infected with Brahman (Atman). It is the Law.

Brahman in a prey warns it of an approaching predator, interpretation of Perception. Brahman does not protect the prey, it is up to the disposable body to look after itself. Brahman in a predator warns it of an approaching food, interpretation of Perception. The same Brahman, Linked Message in brain neurons, warned both the prey and the predator. A predator eats the disposable body of its prey. Brahman in the prey does not transmigrate or die.

Self preservation of Chit (Mind), not happiness of a disposable body, is the Cosmic Law of Ishvar. War, genocide, and death do not touch Brahman. Brahman can not kill and can not be killed. Disposable bodies can kill themselves all they want. It has no impact on Brahman. Brahman does not transmigrate or die with a dead body.

God, Temple, Religion, and Worship are attributes (guna) of a disposable body, not shared by Brahman. Brahman has no attributes (nir-guna). No matter which God you worship you have the same Brahman in neurons of your brain. The same Brahman in an ant and a human, a prey and a predator, has the same properties.

Knowledge that is specific to a disposable body, not shared by other disposable bodies, is called Ahamkara (ego) and perishes with the disposable body. Only the knowledge that has universal relevance, and accepted by all disposable bodies, is Brahman (Knowledge).

Brahman is a link between Prakriti and Purusha, to interpret Perception, that is essential for self preservation of Chit (Mind). Brahman is a virus made of Knowledge that infects
all life forms. It is involuntary chemical action in neurons. It is beyond awareness. Brahman is the imperishable Message of Ishvar.

Seeing only the disposable body, not the Atman virus inside it, is called Samsara (bondage). Seeing only the Atman virus, not the disposable body it is wearing, is called Nirvana (enlightenment). Virus and its carrier have nothing in common.

When Adi Shankara asked a Chandala (untouchable) to get out of his way, Chandala asked him whether he was addressing the food eating body or the Caitanya inside it. That is how Adi Shankara attained enlightenment, according to his own account. It was the same Atman virus in both, only the disposable bodies it was wearing were different.

**The Brahma Sutra**

Brahman is Knowledge.
Brahman interprets Perception.
Brahman is essential for self preservation.
Brahman is in all Life.
Brahman is the link between Prakriti and Purusha.
Brahman has no birth or death.
Brahman has no attributes.
Brahman can not kill and can not be killed.
Brahman is beyond awareness.
Brahman is the Cosmic Message of Ishvar.