

**Original Article**

**Exploring *Chakra* Model of Knowing, Becoming, and Valuing**

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**Abstract**

This introspective inquiry navigates onto-epistemological underpinnings and possibilities by embracing interconnected ways of knowing, becoming and valuing based on the *chakra* paradigm informed by Eastern wisdom contemplative traditions through the lens of critical spirituality. I unfold the phenomenology of learning and my embodied educational experiences nurtured and enriched by writing, reflecting and questioning my thoughts, beliefs, values, and assumptions, thereby exploring possibilities of epistemic humility. I theorize and philosophize the process of constructing knowledge by incorporating experiences and stories of my struggles and emotional resilience, thereby developing a living educational theory grounded in my contexts (but not limited to). The blend of epistemologies from Western-induced paradigms and Eastern Wisdom Traditions via the lens of critical spirituality informs a deeper and critical engagement to envision a living educational theory for creating a better school that ensures meaningful learning ambience by cultivating curiosity and nurturing critical and creative thinking of learners.

**Keywords:** *contemplative, Chakra, resilience, critical spirituality*

**Scene Setting**

Few months before, I was invited to take a session to Basic Level teachers of Public Schools from Bagmati Province by Education Training Centre Dhuikhel on the title “Yoga and Meditation for Holistic Learning” as the topic resonates my passion and longing to make a positive difference in life. I accepted the request. It was a virtual session to be started from 5 AM. It was a great time to start the session. On the very day, I woke up a bit early in the morning and got ready for the session. As I joined the session, I was briefly introduced by the organizer and asked to commence the session.

I greeted everyone there and started the sharing by chanting a Sanskrit Mantra.

असतोमा सद्गमय ।  
तमसोमा ज्योतिर्गमय ।



मृत्योर्माँडृतं गमय ॥

*asato mā sadgamaya,  
tamaso mā jyotirgamaya,  
mrtyormā'mṛtaṁ gamaya.*

*From the unreal lead me to the real!  
From the darkness lead me to the light!  
From death lead me to immortality!*

I mentioned that as teachers we are trying to spread some light of knowledge and positive thinking. It is a great opportunity for us to spread the rays of hope. As there is light, darkness gets dispelled instantly. I asked the participants to be interactive during the session and feel free to share their experiences. Then I showed a picture of river and asked them to relate it to their professional journey. The participants shared their thoughts connecting to ups and downs, as well as flow of river to their professional journey to be always seeking fresh perspectives and get updated. The river gives a message of turning stress into strength embracing challenges along the way and always to see life from a fresh perspective.

I briefly shared on mindfulness and asked the participants to be a mindful teacher and conduct some mindfulness activities in the classroom to enhance the concentration of learners and nurture meaningful learning experiences for them. Then I briefly talked about The Ashtang Yog (*Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyan, Samadhi*) by Maharshi Patanjali, seven chakras (*Muladhara, Svadhisthana, Manipur, Anahath, Vishudhi, Anja, Sahastara*) and *panchas koshas* (*Annamaya, Panmaya, Manamaya, Vigyanmaya, Anandamaya*) to sensitize the teachers about basic understanding to integrate Yoga and meditation into everyday pedagogy embracing Yoga and meditation as tools for embodied learning. Then, our discussion centred around integrating Yoga and meditation into pedagogy to ensure holistic development of learners with deeper awareness by engaging head, heart and hands of learners in the learning process informed by ecological thinking (Wagle, 2022) and critical spirituality (Panta, 2022). In the meantime, the sharing of a teacher made me quite thoughtful:

Some students are distracted, maybe due to family conflicts, gadgets, and many other issues. The attention span is low. Some students are even disruptive in the classroom. As a teacher, a question always strikes me: How can I support such students in their learning? Sir, I anticipate some strategies to engage students in the learning process.

The remarks of the teachers touched me. There are always some psychological issues in the classroom. Every child is unique. They have some diverse needs and aspirations. Making an effort to understand a child appears quite crucial. In this context, yoga pedagogy might contribute to effective learning. Awareness of teachers is expected to contribute to this end.

### **Exploring Critical Spirituality**

The insights of criticality and spirituality cultivate effective and meaningful connection, maintaining the harmony of heart and mind, and finding paths to mutual trust, collegiality, and collaborative space by nurturing transformative sensibility and critical consciousness (Panta, 2022). Bussey (2006b) argues that critical spirituality "integrates the concerns of

critical theory for social justice, gender equity, and process of legitimation" (p. 42). Gardner (2011) asserts critical spirituality as "seeing people and communities holistically; seeking to understand where they are coming from and what matters to them at a fundamental level" (p.77). Similarly, Boyd (2012) mentions that critical spirituality includes insights into critical theories and critical pedagogy. More so, the reconciliation of spirituality and criticality supports nurturing inner awareness and challenges the deep-seated beliefs, and paradoxes (Panta & Luitel, 2022; Palmer, 1998), thereby contributes to create transformative learning ambience taking into consideration social and emotional learning contexts. Hence, the lens of critical spirituality (*spirituality* includes grace, humility, care, empathy, and compassion, whereas *criticality* embraces critical self-reflection, challenging the status quo, embracing materiality). Critical spirituality intends to create a harmonious space by embracing spirituality and criticality and connecting the internal and external world.

### **Living Educational Theory as a Theoretical Lens**

Is this the limit of what I do as a teacher and a leader? Can't I create meaningful learning spaces in school? Are my efforts sufficient to create a positive learning culture? Am I being a good communicator to the team? Am I able to display my caring attitude to team members? These questions always trigger me to embrace my contradictory views and put efforts for creating a school culture. I align my emerging thoughts and perspectives of Whitehead (2008) who mentions living educational theory as "an explanation by an individual for their educational influence in their learning, in the learning of others, and in the learning of social formation in which they live and work" (p. 104). Having presented "How do I improve what I am doing?" as the key question of the living theory, Whitehead (2008) further explains that living theories incorporate embodied values, understanding and contextual influences to nurture their educational experiences. So, being inspired by the notion of living educational theory, I generate a living educational transformative leadership theory to my context (but not limited to) grounded to eco-spiritual thinking and transformative sensibility to improve my school leadership practices. As an educational leader, I need to focus on my professional praxis, and values to transform my leadership roles. I see and experience myself as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 2018) as I observe what I am doing in my school as a leader amid chaos and uncertainty, which might embrace transformative intent and awareness of relational dynamics (Panta, 2022).

### **Seven Interconnected Ways of Knowing, Becoming, and Valuing**

My intent to embrace multiparadigmatic research design inspired me "to look at the bigger picture of the nature of knowing in my inquiry" (Luitel, 2009, p. 24), thereby exploring the possibilities of thinking, expressing, and knowing via integral ways (Taylor & Synder, 2012). I love to interact and negotiate the interest, hopes and challenges of my professional journey to embrace living values and beliefs as well as promote living collaboration (Dhungana, 2022). My autoethnographic navigation seeks an emergent, multi-perspectival, holistic and integral nature of inquiry (Luitel, 2009).

The word *chakra* is derived from Sanskrit meaning a disc, wheel or any arrangement in a circular shape. Paulson (2002) mentions that "*chakras* are vortices through which energy flows both in and out of the body" (p. 59). Johari (2010) mentions that "*chakras* are psychic

centres of transformation that enable one to move toward an enlightened state of being” (p. 1). “When a *chakra* and its petals flow correctly, a certain frequency is set up, opening a person to psychic abilities or higher spiritual values” (Paulson, 2002, p. 67). So, when psychic abilities are nurtured, people will have an expanded level of awareness and understanding of cosmic energy. There is a different level of intensity at different *chakras*, which guides “our levels of vitality, responsibility and empowerment” (Wauters, 1997, p. 21). These multiple wheels of life-force energy unfold multiple ways of knowing, becoming and valuing. Through reflection and contemplation, the inner navigation of holistic knowing and unfolding possibilities through life might nurture transformative sensibilities by embracing care, compassion, and humility.

### **Cultural Knowing**

‘*Be like a headteacher*’ as sometimes remarked by some of my teachers and the SMC chairperson, maybe pointing to my shortcoming for not being able to lead the way they anticipated might resonate my cultural or contextual knowing as the headteacher to act aligning with the expectations of the people and the contexts I live by. Cultural knowing relates to our social and ecological worldview (Taylor, 2015). Cultural knowing embodies contextual understanding and culturally situated realities. It appears essential to understand people's values, beliefs, assumptions and attitudes to make sense of why they do what they do. I came to realize that the metaphor of knowing as interpreting and constructing (Taylor et al., 2012) provided me space to construct contextual meaning of my leadership to have a glocal perspective (e.g., think globally and act locally) to connect worldviews at local and global levels. In a similar vein, Clark and O’ Donoghue (2016) contend that understanding context is pertinent to understanding the realities of school leadership as leadership may not be enhanced when a leader cannot adapt the strategies relevant to the context.

As of Eastern Wisdom Traditions, the *Muladhar chakra* relates to cultural knowing and beyond. The symbol of the *Muladhar chakra* is a lotus with four petals. It is located at the base of the spine associated with the earth element, so it links us with the earth element. Wauters (1997) mentions that the *Muladhar chakra* “filters energy up from the earth and connects our higher energies to the basic reality of life” (p.22). It is the *chakra* for survival, stability, and building trust, among others. It might promote self-centric knowing and bodily being. Considering the root chakra as the *chakra* to manifest our relationship to the material world, Hoopen and Trompenaars (2009) mention that “root chakra is the spiritual hub of everything material” (p.67).

### **Critical Knowing**

As a leader, my intent is to create a transformative space at school that demands critical sensibility. In this connection, Taylor (2016) views that “critical knowing involves coming to understand how and why (political, institutional, economic) power has structured our social realities” (p. 1080). Uncritical reproduction of normative social values and practices does not contribute to deconstructing disempowering and deep-seated beliefs and ideologies (Taylor et al., 2012). Cranton and Taylor (2012) mention that “the goal of critical social theory is to critique and change society as a whole and rather than explain or describe it” (p.7). Critical

knowing embodies ideology critique, which "describes the process by which people learn to recognize how uncritically accepted and unjust ideologies are embedded in everyday situations and practices" (Brookfield, 2009, p. 293), akin to Friere's (1972) notion of critical consciousness to envision a democratic and just society.

Critically self-reflective approach helps me to navigate life experiences and narratives in a critical manner. Critical knowing allows me to be critical of others and myself in different circumstances of socio-cultural settings through the metaphor of *finger-pointing* (Luitel & Taylor, 2019). Making use of the metaphor of finger-pointing, I reflect critically on my school leadership roles to give momentum to school leadership journey.

I embrace the intent of emancipatory interest of Habermas (1972) through the process of informing, reforming, and transforming as a continuous process of being and becoming. Robinson and Aronica (2015) argue that education needs to promote active citizenry. To this end, a school leader needs to be critically mindful of students' hopes, aspirations, and passion and engage them meaningfully in classroom/school activities. Being critically aware of my belief system and practices and that of others in a given cultural context enabled me to challenge my own "false consciousness" (Qutoshi, 2016) and empowered me as a leader to look at my endeavors of being and becoming.

The Eastern perspective gives due focus on self-knowing and self-transformation. The Eastern aphorisms such as *appo deepo bhava* (be light unto yourself), I am Satchidanand (I am eternal, enlightened, and pure self), '*Aham brahmashami* (I am the universe), I am 'Shiva (*shivoham*) and so on highlight the significance of the Self. The Eastern perspective appears to embrace a higher self-that is the universal Self.

Regarding Eastern Wisdom Traditions, the *Svadhistan chakra* (the sacral chakra) might promote critical knowing and beyond. It is the *chakra* for movement, fluidity, pleasure and so on. The emotional issues relating to this *chakra* include "self-worth, self-esteem, self-confidence, and personal power" (Wauters, 1997, p. 22). It is the chakra of emotionality, connectedness, identity and creation (Hoopen & Trompenaars, 2009). Considering the critical aspect of *the Svadhistan chakra*, Jung (1996) mentions that "*Svadhistan chakra* must be unconscious, symbolized by the sea, and in the sea is a huge leviathan which threatens one with annihilation" (p. 15). If this chakra is in a state of balance, it helps in decision-making and the process of empowerment.

Critical perspective has been a basis for transformation to critique my views, assumptions, and beliefs with critical reflections on self and others' practices (Brookfield, 2009). It allows me to be critical of others and myself in different circumstances of socio-cultural settings through the metaphor of *finger-pointing*, as viewed by Luitel (2009). In line with the views of Taylor (2013), critical epistemology enables me to sustain a transformative intent and develop transformative leadership philosophy for my leadership praxis. Turning a critical eye inward and taking an activist turn, I critique and challenge my belief systems via critical-self-reflection (Brookfield, 2009).

### **Existential Knowing**

The local metaphor "*chattan chheder umranchha Peepal*" meaning that Peepal tree grows penetrating rocks, reveals the fact that we need to cope with adverse circumstances and stay calm and strong, aligning with our vision and mission with unwavering determination and commitment. Arguing against the notion of Descartes "*I think, therefore I am*", which appears to be an overly self-referential or solipsistic idea (Panta & Luitel, 2022), Kumar (2010) mentions that "only in relationships with others will you blossom. You are because others are, and others are because you are. We all exist, flourish, blossom and mature in this mutuality, this reciprocity, and the web of relationships" (p. 58). His arguments capture the essence of inter-being and co-existence to sustain in this arena of mutuality and collaboration.

As of the *Manipur Chakra* (the Navel Chakra), it is associated with the fire element. It is the chakra for spontaneity, self-esteem, vitality, willpower, resilience and autonomy (Hoopen & Trompenaars, 2009). This chakra might promote self-knowing and support to critique and challenge deep-seated beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions and ponder on our existence as a culturally embedded being with transformative sensibility.

### **Relational Knowing**

Few moths back, a Teacher shares her thoughts regarding my reactive nature as:

*Sir, your remarks and presentation styles today indicate that there are changes happening at school only because of you. It seems as if other team members are reluctant to bring positive changes at school and are creating hurdles to achieve the mission of school. As a teacher representative, I feel a bit disheartened by your remarks. I do not know how others have felt. But I think most of the teachers are unhappy with your reactive remarks. Can you transform school alone?*

The remarks of teachers left me dumbfounded. There is a need to unlearn my thoughts and actions. As a headteacher, I consider relation (*sambandha*) to be a crucial component of leadership. Oliver (2015) mentions that building an environment of trust is crucial for a school leader to experience long-term achievement. Taylor (2016) mentions that "relational knowing involves learning to connect empathetically and compassionately with our true (nonegoic) selves, our local community, the culturally different other, and the natural world" (p.1080). Vaai (2017) mentions that relational understanding is a crucial component of being a human, so it seems pertinent to deconstruct non-relational understanding of self. In a similar vein, Gergen (2009) mentions that as a relational being, an individual needs to be mindful of relational responsibility to foster the spirit of co-existence and collaboration. With critical awareness, I am mindful of my relational and embodied. Aligning with the views of Kumar (2010), I need to "take time to do and to be" (p. 59).

As of the Eastern Wisdom Traditions, the *Anaahat chakra* might embrace the relational aspect. It is considered to be the centre of creativity and connection. Balancing this chakra might ensure all-embracing love, connection, empathy, compassion, and a good relationship.

### **Communicative/Practical Knowing**

Ups and downs of my school leadership experiences have nurtured me to take communication as a core of leadership performance. When I tend to impose my ideas and

plans without having broader consultation with my team members, I come across dissenting voices, grievances, and sometimes even apathy and rejections from them. As I communicate any issue with team members, I can have their thoughts, solidarity, and meaningful engagements while implementing those plans. So, frequent communication and dialogue with stakeholders help to build trust and maintain cordial relationships (Fiarman, 2015).

*I have started communicating more with people, even if I do not feel like communicating with them. I do realize that if I did/do not communicate, it would/will be costly for me. Though it sometimes hurts my ego and leaves me on the verge of despair, I do it as I lead a team. A leader has to tolerate the intolerable. (Journal, August 2020)*

Communicative knowing relates to exploring possibilities of consensus and mutuality through hermeneutic understanding (Habermas, 1972). Regarding the role of communication in leadership, Baldoni (2010) argues that communication skill is a powerful strategy for effective leadership. So, there is a crucial role of creative and motivating communication in maintaining amicable relationships. Fullan (2010) argues that “communication in the abstract, in the absence of action, means almost nothing” (p. 26). Hersted and Gergen (2013) highlight the need for dialogic collaboration to enhance the vitality of an organization.

*The Vishuddha chakra* located at the throat is associated with communicative knowing and beyond. “The throat chakra is the connection between our inner being and the outside world” (Hoopen & Trompenaars, 2009, p. 158). This chakra is associated with communicating truth and exploring the path of integrity and creativity. Hence, the throat chakra might help catalyze the dialogue and discussion, opening the avenues of sharing, interacting, and thriving together.

### **Visionary Knowing**

I believe in collaborative vision and remain engaged with the team members to envision possibilities for a better school. Taylor (2016) mentions that “visionary and ethical knowing involves us in creative, inspirational and discursive processes of idealising, imagining, poeticising, romanticising, meditating on and negotiating a collective vision” (p. 1080). Cornish (2004) argues that visionary knowing enables us to cope with challenges and create more opportunities. Sadhguru (2012) mentions that “imagination is firmly rooted in your mind. You must understand this. It does not matter how fanciful or how wild your imagination is” (p.155). So, the power to visualize appears to reveal the signature strength of being a human. “Our vision of the universe is driven by the unity of feeling and reason, imagination and reflection” (Wright, 2000, p. 110). In a similar vein, Luitel (2009) considers imagination as an epistemic technique to explore the possibilities of a phenomenon to enrich an inquiry.

*The Ajna chakra*, as the point of intellectual realization and intuition, is the centre of seeing, dreaming and creating a vision. Wauters (1997, p. 23) mentions that the brow chakra “governs our ability to think and discern, use our intuition and imagination, and gather wisdom from our life experiences”. People start seeing things as they are when this *chakra* is in a state of balance. It helps to explore the purpose of our life and visualize our destiny. Considering the crucial role of the third eye chakra (*Ajna chakra*), Judith and Goodman



(2012) mention that the process of envisioning shapes and vitalizes our conception. So, this *chakra* might relate to visionary knowing and beyond as it might help to see a bigger picture of life.

### **Integral Knowing**

Ecological awareness is essential for mapping connections and cultivating compassion (Brown, 2021). I embrace the "empowering epistemic metaphor of knowing as holistic meaning-making" (Luitel, 2009, p. 32), looking for possibilities of a better school adhering to the possibility of integral knowing. Dhiman (2017) argues that "we need holistic leaders and holistic systems that are able to integrate the spiritual and the material perspectives in a dialectical manner" (p. 1). "The yogic view of consciousness is the exact opposite of the common sense view. The world you perceive directly in your consciousness is the outermost part of the inside of your consciousness" (DeGracia, 2015, p. 24). So, it appears that the yogic view of consciousness does not reject the external material world, looks for how we are embedded in it connecting to ecological thinking and perspectives. The *yogic* perspective as a meditative dimension is an all-embracing perspective that links to eco-spiritual cosmology.

The process of holistic meaning-making, theorizing, and envisioning in my research incorporates "inclusive logics and expression, various forms of imagination and perspectival language" (Luitel, 2009, p. 33). I incorporate integral knowing in my inquiry which offers new ways and alternatives of seeing the world. I embrace post-modernist and post-humanistic views of multiple horizons of possibilities using multiple logics and genres (Dyson, 2007).

*Sahasrara* is a Sanskrit word that means infinite. This *chakra* is associated with the space element. It is connected to empathy, pure consciousness, and aesthetics. "This is the chakra of universalism and cosmic consciousness. Its realm is our sense of connectedness with something greater than ourselves" (Hoopen & Trompenaars, 2009, p.196). "It is the state when energy (*Sakti*) and intelligence (*Siva*) get merged, which is portrayed by the iconography of *ardhanarishvara* signifying "the half-male and half-female aspect of Siva and Sakti" (Yadav, 2001, p. 1). As the gateway to universal consciousness, the *crown chakra* keeps us connected to our quest to create a new belief system, even amid chaos and complexity that unfold around us with an expanded level of awareness (Judith & Goodman, 2012), transformative sensibility and contemplation in action with ecological thinking (Wagle, 2021). So, this *chakra* might be related to integral knowing and beyond, portraying an individual as a universal being seeking alignment to higher values nurturing ecological thinking.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Awareness of the *chakra* system has made me mindful of my activities and behaviors. I have challenged my deep-seated beliefs with evolving consciousness. I acknowledge the efforts of all the team members, for I cannot make a difference at school alone. It might be possible through participatory and democratic leadership. As a practitioner, I perform my activities with mindful awareness, thereby contributing to my deeper personal as well as professional transformation. It has also contributed to the deeper engagement with my inner self with



shifting perspectives. Being mindful of my practices, I embrace my contradictions and embark on my professional journey with a growth mindset (Dweck, 2007) and humility. I nurture my educational experiences and values and make meaning from them. Mindful awareness helps me nurture relationships with others, be fully present in interactions, and maintain meaningful connections and collaboration. I realize that I am in a constant process of being and becoming relocating myself at the crossroads of identity-making as a school leader, possibly nurturing critical and creative sensibilities.

This introspective inquiry offers insights to counsellors and wellbeing activists to stay thoughtful and mindful of every thought and action. Mindful awareness helps an individual remain calm and patient during adverse situations. It fosters compassionate thinking and a non-judgemental mindset (Neff & Germer, 2013), thereby creating space for empathy (Krznaric, 2015). Being aware of the different chakras, some meditative practices might be adopted to activate energy centres of our body and strive for harmonious living with meaning and purpose with transformative and ecological sensibilities.

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**Dr. Chet Nath Panta** completed his PhD in Educational Leadership. The PhD research focused on compassionate leadership embracing the lens of contemplative inquiry. He serves as a visiting faculty at School Counselling and Psychological Wellbeing Unit, School of Education, KU. He is avidly engaged in teacher professional development and leadership capacity-building workshops, wellbeing seminars, and publications. His areas of research interest include critical pedagogy, contemplative inquiry/education, dimensions of educational/ school leadership, wellbeing, Nonviolent Communication (NV), and Appreciative Inquiry (AI).

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