

# Moun Vrat: understanding the ancient Indian practice of conscious silence for mental discipline and inner awakening

Puneet Sharma

Assistant Professor

KCES Institute of Management & Research (Autonomous)

Jalgaon, India

***Abstract—In the present age, where a person is hardly ever away from sound, screen or speech, the old Indian discipline of moun, that is, conscious silence, asks to be looked at again. Moun vrat is generally taken to mean a vow of not speaking for some fixed period, yet this paper submits that its real depth lies in the mind, and not merely in the mouth. The present study, written from an Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) standpoint, explains moun vrat as a method by which a sadhaka, or practitioner, learns to stop the wastage of pranic energy that happens through unnecessary talking, and turns his attention from the outer world towards the inner one. The paper draws upon the Bhagavad Gita, the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, and the well-known spiritual memoir Autobiography of a Yogi, to bring out three working methods of moun sadhana, namely single-point focus, witnessing of thought, and the realisation that restless thinking serves no purpose. A short comparison is also made with related ideas found in Buddhist and modern psychological literature, to show that this old Indian insight is not out of step with present-day understanding of the mind. The paper closes by holding that moun vrat is not an escape from the world but a quiet doorway towards a calmer and more aware living.***

***Index Terms—Moun Vrat, Mauna, Indian Knowledge Systems, Pratyahara, Mind Control, Self-Awareness, Yogic Silence.***

## I. INTRODUCTION

Human beings of today are perhaps the most talking generation that has ever lived. Between phone calls, office meetings, family chatter and the endless scroll of social media, a person hardly gets a few minutes in a full day when nothing is being said, heard or typed. Against this background of continuous noise, the old Indian word moun, which simply means silence or pin-drop quietness, sounds almost out of place, even old-fashioned. Yet it is exactly this word which the rishis, the sages of Bharatvarsha, placed at the centre of their understanding of the human mind. The Sanskrit root of moun is mauna, which itself comes from muni, a word used for a sage or a seer who has mastered the art of restraint. A muni is, by simple definition, one who keeps moun. In the wider

field of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), where the body, mind and spirit are not studied as separate subjects but as one connected whole, *moun* was never seen as a small social habit of staying quiet out of shyness or politeness. It was treated as a serious sadhana, a discipline, through which a person could conserve his inner energy, sharpen his awareness, and slowly move his attention from the noisy outer world towards the quiet inner universe that the scriptures call the *antahkarana*. This paper attempts to look at *moun vrat*, the vow of practising such silence, in the light of this older and deeper understanding. Section II explains what the term actually means in the Sanskrit tradition. Section III places *moun vrat* within the larger philosophical and spiritual framework of Indian thought. Section IV looks closely at the psychology of thought that *moun vrat* is really meant to address. Section V gives three practical methods of *moun sadhana*, as practised by yogis and saints across the ages. Section VI places these classical ideas beside present-day discussion on mindfulness and the wandering mind, before the paper closes with its conclusion in Section VII.

## II. CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF MOUN IN THE SANSKRIT TRADITION

At the basic level, *moun* means silence. It refers to a state where a person does not speak or utter any words. Most people understand *moun* in this simple sense. This understanding forms the basis of *moun vrat*, a vow of silence that may be observed for a few hours, a day, or any period chosen by the practitioner.

Indian philosophical traditions, however, describe *moun* as something deeper than merely remaining silent. Classical texts often explain two forms of *moun*. The first is *vaachik moun* or verbal silence, which means refraining from speech. The second is *maanasik moun* or mental silence, which is considered more important. Mental silence involves controlling unnecessary thoughts, avoiding imagination and daydreaming, and not allowing fear, anxiety, or worry to dominate the mind (Radhakrishnan, 1953). A person may remain silent throughout the day, but if the mind continues to wander from one thought to another, true *moun* has not been achieved. Genuine *moun vrat* is attained only when external silence is supported by inner calmness and mental discipline (Easwaran, 2007).

This understanding of *moun* fits well within the wider framework of Indian Knowledge Systems. In this tradition, speech (*vak*) is not viewed as a simple act of communication but as a form of energy or *shakti* (Aurobindo, 1998). Ancient sages believed that careless and excessive talking weakens a person's inner strength because speech is closely connected with *prana*, the vital force that sustains both body and mind (Saraswati, 2008). For this reason, unnecessary speech was discouraged. The practice of *moun vrat* was recommended as a way to conserve this energy and direct attention inward. By reducing external communication for a fixed period, a person can develop greater self-awareness, mental clarity, and inner stability (Feuerstein, 2003; Saraswati, 2008).

### III. PHILOSOPHICAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MOUN VRAT

Why did ancient Indian scholars give so much importance to something as simple as remaining silent? The answer lies in the way Indian philosophy understands the connection between speech, the senses, and the mind. The *Bhagavad Gita* explains that a person must uplift himself through the mind because the mind can act both as a friend and as an enemy (Radhakrishnan, 1948). A few verses later, Arjuna admits to Krishna that the mind is restless, unstable, and difficult to control, comparing it to the wind (Radhakrishnan, 1948). According to Indian Knowledge Systems, *moun vrat* helps address this restlessness, not by suppressing the mind forcefully, but by reducing one of its major channels of expression, which is speech.

A similar idea is found in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* through the concept of *pratyahara*, the fifth limb of *Ashtanga Yoga*. Patanjali describes *pratyahara* as a state in which the senses gradually withdraw from external objects and come under the control of the mind (Bryant, 2009). In everyday life, the senses are constantly attracted towards sounds, sights, tastes, and conversations. *Pratyahara* is the process of turning this attention inward. In this context, *moun vrat* can be seen as one of the simplest and most practical methods for beginning this inward journey. Among all the sense organs, the tongue is one of the most active and yet one of the easiest to control. When speech is reduced, many people find that their other senses also become calmer, making it easier to focus the mind inward (Feuerstein, 2003).

The *Bhagavad Gita* also discusses *vanmaya tapas*, or discipline of speech. It describes ideal speech as truthful, pleasant, beneficial, and free from disturbance, while also encouraging regular study of sacred knowledge (Radhakrishnan, 1948). Although this teaching focuses on right speech rather than complete silence, it reflects the same principle behind *moun vrat*. Speech should be used carefully and responsibly rather than wasted through unnecessary talking. Many practitioners of silence report that after observing *moun vrat*, they become more aware of their words and communicate with greater clarity, thoughtfulness, and honesty (Saraswati, 2008). Taken together, these classical teachings present a common understanding of human nature. They suggest that every individual possesses a limited amount of attention and vital energy, which is often spent through constant thinking and excessive speaking. The purpose of *moun vrat* is to conserve this energy for a period of time and redirect it towards self-reflection, inner awareness, and personal growth (Feuerstein, 2003; Saraswati, 2008). In this way, silence becomes more than the absence of speech; it becomes a practical tool for self-discipline and self-understanding.

### IV. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THOUGHT: TWO CATEGORIES OF MENTAL ACTIVITY

If *moun vrat* is mainly a discipline of the mind, it is important to understand the kinds of thoughts that the practice aims to calm. Indian psychological traditions, like many modern studies in cognitive science, recognise that the mind is rarely quiet. It is usually occupied with a continuous

flow of thoughts (Rao, 2002; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). For the purpose of understanding *moun vrat*, these thoughts can be divided into two broad categories, as shown in Fig. 1 and summarised in Table I.

The first and larger category consists of reactive or conditioned thoughts. These thoughts arise automatically and are influenced by a person's emotions, habits, desires, fears, attachments, and level of awareness (Rao, 2002; Feuerstein, 2003). Feelings such as anger, greed, jealousy, ego, anxiety, and doubt often give rise to repetitive mental activity. Such thoughts are usually not created intentionally. They emerge on their own and continue to appear one after another, much like waves moving across the surface of the ocean.

The second category includes constructed or imaginative thoughts. These are thoughts that a person actively creates in the mind. For example, one may imagine a future conversation, repeatedly think about a past event, or spend time daydreaming. Unlike reactive thoughts, which arise automatically, these thoughts are consciously built and maintained by the individual (Beck, 2011). They often have little connection with the present moment and mainly serve to keep the mind occupied.

Because of this constant flow of reactive and imagined thoughts, the mind rarely gets an opportunity to rest. Continuous mental activity can lead to stress, fatigue, and reduced psychological well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). The practice of *moun vrat* offers a practical way to deal with this situation. Rather than trying to forcefully stop thoughts, which is often difficult and ineffective, the practitioner is encouraged to observe thoughts as they arise and pass away. This approach is similar to the mindfulness-based methods described in both classical contemplative traditions and modern psychology (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

The practitioner learns to watch thoughts without becoming involved in them. Instead of following every thought or emotional reaction, he simply notices it and lets it pass. Through regular practice, this process develops greater self-awareness and mental control. Classical yogic teachings describe this state as a gradual mastery over the movements of the mind, achieved through observation, discipline, and detachment rather than suppression (Feuerstein, 2003; Bryant, 2009).

TABLE I. TWO CATEGORIES OF THOUGHT ADDRESSED BY MOUN VRAT

| Category                                        | Origin                              | Typical Drivers                                                       | Example                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Reactive /<br>conditioned<br>thought (≈<br>95%) | Arises automatically,<br>on its own | Fear, greed, lust, ego,<br>jealousy, doubt,<br>comparison, attachment | Sudden anger on being<br>criticised        |
| Constructed /<br>imaginative<br>thought (≈ 5%)  | Actively built by the<br>mind       | Day-dreaming, replaying<br>the past, rehearsing the<br>future         | Imagining tomorrow's<br>meeting in advance |

## V. METHODOLOGY: HOW MOUN VRAT IS PRACTISED IN THE MIND

Indian tradition has never treated moun vrat as a single, fixed technique to be performed in only one way. Drawing upon yogic literature and lived practice, three methods recur most often, and are described below and shown together in Fig. 2.

### Single-Point Focus

One of the oldest and most commonly practised methods of *moun sadhana* is to focus the mind on a single object. The purpose of this practice is to prevent attention from constantly moving between different thoughts and distractions. Instead, the mind is encouraged to rest on one point for an extended period of time. Many yogic traditions consider this one-pointed concentration to be an important step towards inner silence and self-awareness (Feuerstein, 2003). In *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Paramahansa Yogananda describes how spiritual teachers often guided disciples to concentrate on a flame or another fixed object in order to steady the mind and develop deeper awareness (Yogananda, 1946). By continuously focusing on a single object, attention gradually shifts away from the changing events of the external world and becomes more stable and inward-looking.

This method is widely known in the yogic tradition as *trataka*. The object of concentration may be a candle flame, a sacred image, a small dot on a wall, or even the natural flow of one's breath (Saraswati, 2002). The effectiveness of the practice does not depend on the object itself but on the practitioner's ability to maintain steady attention. As concentration improves, mental distractions begin to reduce and the mind becomes calmer and more focused. With regular practice, the same ability to concentrate that was initially directed towards an external object gradually turns inward. The practitioner develops greater control over thoughts and learns to remain mentally steady for longer periods. Classical yoga texts describe this process as an important stage in preparing the mind for meditation and deeper states of awareness (Bryant, 2009; Feuerstein, 2003). Over time, the mind becomes less dependent on external stimulation and more capable of resting in a state of inner stillness.

### Witnessing the Thoughts

The second method of *moun sadhana* develops naturally from the understanding of thoughts discussed earlier. Once a person recognises that thoughts generally arise as either reactive thoughts or self-created imaginative thoughts, the next step is to observe them without becoming involved in them. Instead of trying to suppress thoughts or force them to stop, the practitioner simply watches them as they appear and disappear (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Bryant, 2009).

A simple way to understand this process is through the example of a car's windscreen wiper. The wiper does not stop the rain from falling, nor does it focus on individual drops. It simply clears the glass again and again, allowing the driver to see the road clearly. In the same way, the practitioner does not struggle with every fearful, anxious, jealous, or distracting thought that arises in the mind.

He also does not follow every daydream, memory, or imagined situation. Instead, he notices the thought, allows it to pass naturally, and gently brings his attention back to stillness and awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

This approach is closely related to the practice of mindful observation found in both classical yogic traditions and modern psychological research. Studies have shown that observing thoughts without judgment can reduce emotional reactivity, improve self-regulation, and increase psychological well-being (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Indian contemplative traditions similarly teach that suffering is often increased when a person becomes attached to thoughts or identifies completely with them (Feuerstein, 2003).

With regular practice, this habit of observing rather than reacting becomes stronger. The practitioner gradually develops the ability to remain calm even when difficult thoughts arise. Over time, witnessing becomes a natural mental skill, allowing the mind to settle without force or conflict. In the practice of *moun vrat*, this quiet awareness is one of the most important tools for developing inner silence and mental stability (Bryant, 2009; Feuerstein, 2003).

#### Realisation of “Enough is Enough”

The third approach to *moun sadhana* is not really a technique but a deeper understanding that often develops after practising the earlier methods for some time. It arises when a person begins to realise that constant thinking about life does not necessarily improve life. Since life can only be experienced in the present moment, excessive thinking about the past or future often creates more confusion than clarity (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). When left uncontrolled, the mind frequently produces thoughts related to worry, fear, doubt, anxiety, and stress. Such thoughts consume mental energy and prevent a person from fully appreciating the present experience (Beck, 2011). Instead of enjoying what is already available, the mind remains occupied with imagined problems, unfinished concerns, and endless mental conversations. As a result, many people miss the simple experiences of daily life, such as observing nature, appreciating their surroundings, or becoming aware of their own breathing and existence (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012).

With regular practice of silence and self-observation, a person gradually becomes aware of the burden created by unnecessary thinking. Thoughts that once appeared important are seen more clearly, and many of them are recognised as repetitive patterns that contribute little to personal growth or well-being (Rao, 2002). This awareness does not arise through force or suppression but through direct observation of the mind's habits. As this understanding deepens, the practitioner develops a natural desire to reduce mental noise and live with greater awareness. Silence is no longer viewed as a temporary exercise or ritual. Instead, it becomes a way of approaching life with greater presence, calmness, and clarity. In this sense, *moun vrat* evolves from an occasional practice into a daily discipline that supports inner balance and self-understanding (Feuerstein, 2003; Saraswati, 2008).

## VI. DISCUSSION: MOUN VRAT IN CONTEMPORARY LIFE

It would be a mistake to treat moun vrat as an isolated Indian curiosity, of interest only to those already inclined toward spirituality. Closely related ideas exist across other contemplative traditions, and more recently, within modern psychology itself. A brief comparison helps to place moun vrat within this wider conversation, as set out in Table II.

TABLE II. MOUN VRAT COMPARED WITH RELATED CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES

| Dimension        | Moun Vrat (IKS)                                         | Buddhist Noble Silence / Vipassana                     | Modern Mindfulness Psychology                          |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Primary aim      | Conservation of pranic energy; turning attention inward | Insight into the impermanence of sensation and thought | Reduction of stress; improved present-moment attention |
| Core technique   | Verbal silence combined with witnessing of thought      | Sustained silence; observation of bodily sensation     | Structured meditation on breath or body, often guided  |
| Typical duration | A few hours to one full day, by personal choice         | Several days during a structured retreat               | Minutes to about an hour, often daily                  |
| View of the mind | A friend or an enemy, depending on control (Gita 6.5)   | A stream of constantly arising and passing phenomena   | A network prone to task-unrelated wandering            |

Similar practices can also be found in other contemplative traditions. In Buddhism, periods of what is often called *noble silence* are commonly observed during *Vipassana* meditation retreats. During these retreats, participants avoid speaking, reading, and even unnecessary eye contact so that their attention can remain focused on observing bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts as they arise and pass away (Goenka, 1987; Gunaratana, 2011). This approach is very similar to the witnessing practice used in *moun vrat*, where thoughts are observed without reacting to them or becoming attached to them.

Support for the value of such practices is also found in modern psychological research. A well-known study published in *Science* examined the everyday thought patterns of thousands of individuals and found that people's minds wander away from the present activity nearly half of their waking hours. The study also reported that frequent mind wandering was associated with lower levels of happiness, regardless of what people were thinking about at the time (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). These findings closely match the observations of Indian psychological traditions, which suggest that much of ordinary mental activity consists of repetitive, reactive, or imagined thoughts rather than focused awareness of the present moment (Rao, 2002). For people living in today's fast-moving world, filled with constant notifications, deadlines, social interactions, and digital distractions, *moun vrat* offers a practical method for mental well-being. The practice does

not require a person to withdraw from society or remain silent permanently. Instead, it encourages setting aside a specific period of time during which unnecessary speaking and mental activity are reduced consciously. This creates an opportunity for the mind to rest and recover from continuous stimulation (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

From this perspective, *moun vrat* should not be viewed as an escape from life. Rather, it can be understood as a regular practice that helps maintain mental clarity, emotional balance, and self-awareness. Just as the body requires rest after physical activity, the mind also benefits from periods of silence and reflection. The wisdom behind *moun vrat* lies in recognising this need and creating space for it within everyday life (Feuerstein, 2003; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012).

## VII. CONCLUSION

This paper set out to look beyond the everyday understanding of *moun vrat* as nothing more than a vow of silence, and to recover something of its deeper meaning within Indian Knowledge Systems. What emerges from classical sources such as the Bhagavad Gita, the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, and lived accounts found in texts like *Autobiography of a Yogi*, is a coherent and remarkably practical philosophy: that speech and thought both draw upon a limited fund of vital energy and attention, that this fund is most often spent without any real need, and that a periodic, voluntary silence, practised both outwardly and inwardly, allows this energy to be conserved and redirected toward greater self-awareness. The three methods discussed in this paper, namely single-point focus, witnessing of thought, and the realisation that restless thinking serves no purpose, are not separate techniques so much as three stages of one inward journey. Placed beside Buddhist contemplative practice and recent psychological findings on mind-wandering, *moun vrat* appears not as an outdated ritual but as an old and well-tested answer to a problem that the present generation, perhaps more than any before it, urgently needs to solve. Future studies may usefully examine the physiological and psychological effects of *moun vrat* through controlled observation, so that this ancient practice may be understood with the same rigour that modern research now brings to other contemplative traditions.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Aurobindo, S. (1998). *The future evolution of man*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.
- [2] Beck, J. S. (2011). *Cognitive behavior therapy: Basics and beyond* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- [3] Bryant, E. F. (2009). *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali: A new edition, translation, and commentary*. North Point Press.
- [4] Easwaran, E. (2007). *The Bhagavad Gita* (2nd ed.). Nilgiri Press.
- [5] Feuerstein, G. (2003). *The deeper dimension of yoga: Theory and practice*. Shambhala Publications.
- [6] Goenka, S. N. (1987). *The discourse summaries: Talks from a ten-day Vipassana course*. Vipassana Research Institute.

- [7] Gunaratana, H. (2011). *Mindfulness in plain English* (Rev. ed.). Wisdom Publications.
- [8] Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 144–156. <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bpg016>
- [9] Killingsworth, M. A., & Gilbert, D. T. (2010). A wandering mind is an unhappy mind. *Science*, 330(6006), 932. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1192439>
- [10] Radhakrishnan, S. (1948). *The Bhagavadgita*. George Allen & Unwin.
- [11] Radhakrishnan, S. (1953). *The principal Upanishads*. Harper & Brothers.
- [12] Rao, K. R. (2002). *Consciousness studies: Cross-cultural perspectives*. McFarland & Company.
- [13] Saraswati, S. (2002). *Asana pranayama mudra bandha*. Yoga Publications Trust.
- [14] Saraswati, S. (2008). *Meditation from the Tantras*. Yoga Publications Trust.
- [15] Vago, D. R., & Silbersweig, D. A. (2012). Self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence (S ART): A framework for understanding the neurobiological mechanisms of mindfulness. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 6, Article 296. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2012.00296>
- [16] Yogananda, P. (1946). *Autobiography of a yogi*. Philosophical Library.