

Exploring Indigenous concepts in Western Psychology

Dr. Bani Narula* & Shefali Midha**

* Assistant Professor, ** Academic Tutor & Research Fellow

* Department of Psychology, Post Graduate Govt. College for Girls, Sector -11, Chandigarh, India

** Jindal School of Liberal Arts & Humanities, O.P Jindal Global University, Sonapat, Haryana, India

ABSTRACT

The basic aim of the present study is to scientifically validate the eastern concepts in relation to established western parameters. This study is in a growing line of research that attempts to draw relationships between core beliefs of Indian philosophy and western psychology. Even though the western world has had a very heavy influence on the eastern world over so many years, concepts like counseling, psychotherapy, wisdom, mindfulness and asakti and anasakti clearly represents the deliberations relevant in Hindu philosophy and exists a convincing overlap to the Eastern world.

Keywords: *Indigenous Psychology, East and West Psychology*

Introduction

The researchers at the outset bemoan an imperative fact to the lack of attention given to Indian Psychology and its concepts. Drawing a parallel in eastern and western concepts, quite a few western concepts are an offshoot of eastern impression. Therefore, it can be said that western psychology is the flip side of eastern psychology. Indian psychology can be understood as an umbrella term, as the inclusive ideas or doctrines are not limited to those originated in India but various parts of Asia and there are a wide variety of examples with regard to psychological concepts having roots in the east. The importance of studying and applying the concepts of Indian Psychology comes from the developing trend of adapting the western psychological concepts even with no indigenous significance. This paper aims to understand thriving literature on psychological concepts that originated in East and it became prominent in Western psychology.

As Indian psychology is vast and include teachings from various ancient writings, the

term “Indian Psychology” was thought to be more relevant than the term “Psychology of Indian origin” (Rao, 2008).

Menon (2005) deduced that Indian psychology has embellished the typical definition of psychology from “science of human behavior” to “human possibility and progress”.

Historical Approach to Indian Psychology (IP)

The researchers would like to begin from the beginning i.e. considering the genesis of the concept; the roots of Indian Psychology can be traced back to the ancient times when the savants and thinkers were excogitating issues and problems that are relevant even in the contemporary times. The term Indian Psychology was first used by Sinha (1933) in his book entitled “Indian Psychology: Cognition”. Others initiators of the field were, Raghunath Safaya who published “Indian Psychology” (1975). David’s book entitled “The Birth of Indian Psychology and its Development

in Buddhism (1936/1978), and Kuppuswami's book "Elements of Ancient Indian Psychology" (1985). Aurobindo has prominently contributed to the field through his work known as "The synthesis of yoga" (1949/1999). Majorly his work collaborates three classifications of yoga namely- jnana yoga (paths of knowledge), bhakti yoga (paths of devotion) and karma yoga (paths of action). Apart from his contribution through yoga, Aurobindo gave elucidations of several hymns of Vedas and Upanishads and explained the parables in context to their psychological significance.

Indian Psychology is not limited to any culture or ideology and it subsumes thoughts and knowledge from various schools such as Sufism, Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism. The most prominent example being yoga and meditation which cannot be compressed to any culture or religion but something which is practiced throughout the world by people of different castes, religion and races (Dalal & Mishra, 2010).

Advent of Indian Psychology in Teaching

Indian Psychology began in the mid-1960s in many Indian universities (examples- Banaras Hindu University, Mysore, and Jodhpur). The course of psychology could not survive for two reasons- firstly, it was initially imported from philosophy and secondly, the course content was mostly inclined towards laboratory research and lacked contextual requirements of the Indian population in general. The belief that IP is an extension of philosophy or is nothing but philosophy is still somehow prevalent in the country; this might be another reason why IP is still not a part of

psychology curriculum at most Indian universities (Mishra & Dalal, 2010).

Many Indian psychologists who were believed to be the pioneers of psychology in India have been trained in U.S. and U.K., which propelled them to introduce western concepts in Indian universities. N.N. Sengupta headed the first psychology department in the University of Calcutta was a trained experimental psychologist and more inclined towards concepts, methods and research topics of western psychology. In general, if psychology faces "physics envy", Indian psychology is wrecked under "Western envy" (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016).

Further, an effort was made to systematically introduce Indian psychology in course curriculum in Indian universities began with the declaration of Puducherry Manifesto forwarded by a collaboration of 160 psychologists in a meeting on October 1, 2003. The thrust began to spread awareness regarding the importance of IP among psychology professionals and also to educate them about the significance of establishment of the native concepts and models (Rao, 2012). After the Puducherry Manifesto, activities regarding research and publication of scholarly books in Indian context spurted (Joshi and Cornelissen 2004; Rao and Marwaha 2005; Rao et al. 2008; Cornelissen et al. 2011; Misra 2011 and Rao 2011a).

Status of Indian Psychology today in Academia

It is imperative to look upon the rationale as to why it became necessary for Indian psychology to flourish? Since Indian Psychology encircles a wider worldview, its

scope ranges from Kama sutra to yoga sutra (from sexology to transcendental pursuits). In short, there is no human aspect that Indian psychology overlooks (Salagame, 2011). The conundrum faced by IP to flourish is Pan-human because IP is not limited to psychology of Indian people but holds a pervasive approach applicable to people around the world.

In doing so, Indian Psychology faced quite many challenges related to the methodological concerns as a lot of ideas and insights in IP have stemmed from transcendental phenomenon; Indian psychologists have speculated that these phenomena cannot be understood by using third person methodologies, instead first person methodologies are favored. Indian psychologists hold an affirmative view towards a variety of methodologies beyond observation, experimentation and inference. Means of obtaining valid knowledge is known as *pramaana*. Indian Psychology accepts verbal testimony and intuitive level of knowledge apart from the methodologies mentioned above (Salagame, 2011).

An insight into Indian Psychology

Consciousness is considered as a core of Indian Psychology (IP), an individual is believed to be a conglomeration of body, mind and consciousness. Consciousness is considered as imperishable and core of awareness and acquiring knowledge. According to Rao (2012), it is conceived as a facilitator of a person's knowledge which also allows him to explore his potential and experience a higher level of elation.

Jiva or the self is the central concept. Jiva is thought to be a biological and

psychological living being, which attains a conscious entity. A human body is composed of jiva and pudgal meaning soul and body respectively. The two entities are entirely different as the former entity is composed of consciousness or soul and possesses characteristics such as feelings, emotions and cognitions and on the other hand, pudgal is comprised of a materialistic body possessing characteristic qualities such as touch, smell and taste (Jain, 2008). The doctrine of Jainism (especially jiva) corresponds well to the assumptions dealt by Indian Psychology, due to their similar nature of studying individual self or consciousness.

The researchers in the ensuing section throw light on constructs of Indian Psychology that today has much in common with Western concepts.

○ Mindfulness

The roots of mindfulness can be taken back to the ancient Indian times when 'yogis' sat in cross-legged position in meditation looking inward with partially closed eyes. Training one's mind has been associated with gaining emotional collectedness, a way of acquiring physical and mental health and thus excelling the human condition (Siegel, Germer & Olendzki, 2009). Formally, mindfulness as a practice emerged from the religion of Buddhism which considered meditation as a core of mindfulness.

According to Baer (2003), mindfulness is defined as "the nonjudgmental observation of the ongoing stream of internal and external stimuli as they arise". Bishop et al. (2004) postulated two components of mindfulness namely, regulating one's attention and specifying one's orientation towards different

experiences. The former focuses on unrefined observation of feelings, thoughts and sensations; it involves concentrating on the present moment and ability to switch attention from one set of experience to other. The latter stresses upon the type of attitude held towards different experiences. For instance, attitude of eagerness, receptiveness and cooperativeness.

Mindfulness meditation is also known as "insight meditation" or "Vipassana practice". It has a key role in the contribution of how meditation based practices can lead to growth and development of individuals (Lehrer, Woolfolk & Sime, 2007). The evidence of western adaptation of mindfulness comes from the development of various therapeutic approaches with mindfulness as its core. For example, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) group program initiated by Jon Kabat-Zinn (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 2005). Kabat-Zinn defined mindfulness as "the awareness that

○ **Wisdom**

Grossmann (2017) defined wisdom as associated with facets accompanied with affection, self-knowledge, self-transcendence and non-attachment and also it includes virtues namely humanity and conscience (Staudinger & Gluck, 2011; Walsh, 2015).

The Bhagvad Gita, a Hindu scripture which is a part of the epic Mahabharata (Johnsan, 2001). The verses in the Gita dictate a conversation between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, a combatant prince, on the field of Kurukshetra just before the beginning of the culminating war. During the conversation, Krishna guides Arjuna on various aspects in which he is facing difficulties in the battlefield and also sheds light

emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and no judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment" (Kabat-Zinn 2003). The MBSR is an eight week program with weekly sessions and it generally involves instruction in three different techniques namely, mindfulness meditation, body scanning and different yoga postures (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Hayes's work on acceptance and commitment therapy also take mindfulness as a core aspect. ACT is a behavioral therapy approach aimed at helping clients to accept their anxieties, and fears in a mindful and compassionate manner (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999). Another such mindfulness based practice includes Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBP). DBT focuses on sustaining one's attention alive to the present moment (Hanh, 1976). Being present in the current reality involves awareness in a specific way, with a sense of purpose and open-mindedness (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

on various tenets of philosophy for everyday living through various instances and anecdotes (Sharma, 1999). Jeste and Vahia (2008) conducted an analysis and conceptualized wisdom in the Gita. They classified 10 domains of wisdom in Gita namely, life's knowledge (28 verses), regulation of one's emotions (20 verses), controlling one's desires (20 verses), ability of take decisions (20 verses), affection for God (19 verses), responsibility and work (14 verses), contentedness with respect to self (13 verses), collectiveness of personality (12 verses), humaneness (8 verses), and humbleness (7 verses).

Bhagvad Gita as a text has provided innumerable ways for resolving human miseries

of the contemporary times. Furthermore, a lot of western writers have focused upon the significance of the Gita's verses with respect to western cultures (Steiner, 2007). The teachings of the Gita are not limited to any particular culture, religion or country; it exceeds all physical, temporal and cultural boundaries. A lot of similarities exist between conceptualization of wisdom in the Gita and modern scientific literature. For example, regulating one's emotions and humanity services i.e. sacrificing for common welfare (Jeste & Vahia, 2008).

○ **Psychotherapy**

Numerous renowned Indian psychiatrists have advocated the significance of doctrines of Bhagvad Gita for psychotherapy and restoring mental health (Rao, 1974; Bateman, Brown & Peddar, 2010). The Bhagvad Gita teaches the right path of action that is relevant even in the ambiguous contemporary times. It has been speculated that there exists a lot of similarities with regard to conflict resolution between teachings of Gita and mental health professionals, both of them aids in resolving conflicts and apprehensions of the patients' and also helps them in discovering the paths to long-term recovery (Bhatia, Madabushi, Kolli, Bhatia & Madaan, 2013).

Psychotherapy as a distinctive division of psychiatry accrued larger acknowledgment after surfacing of psychodynamic framework. Psychodynamic theories focus upon the conflicts related to unacceptable aspects of self (Bateman, Brown, & Peddar, 2010). Freud's structural theory stresses how conflicts between id, ego and superego are resolved through

adaptive ego defense mechanisms. The fundamental aspect of Gita also revolves around the resolution of conflict encountered by Arjuna between three gunas namely *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*, resembling id, ego and superego. Gita forwards an idea that mind occupies a superior position than senses, drawing a parallel to Freud's theory which describes the interplay between ego and superego (Bhatia, Madaan, Kolli, Bhatia & Madaan, 2013)

First chapter of Gita, "Arjuna Vishad Yoga" forwards agony and perplexity of Arjuna, while the 18th chapter, "Moksha Sanyas Yoga" portrays relinquishment from angst, fear and suffering following a CBT session with Lord Krishna. Arjuna was full of integrity, clarity of mind and compassions but was down to a state of despondency as he was unwilling to share a battle ground with his 'Gurus' and siblings. The Krishna navigated Arjuna towards the righteous course of action and aided him to triumph the war and exhibit goodness over evil. The conversation between the Krishna and Arjuna in the Bhagvad Gita portray principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. The Gita delineates the concepts of insight and gaining intellect by Arjuna and skills of a therapist entailing trust, genuinity and compassion by the Krishna (Sharma, 2014).

○ **Asakti-Anasakti**

Asakti-Anasakti are indigenous psychological constructs of the East. Roughly, English equivalents of Asakti-Anasakti are attachment and non-attachment. There are about 50 shlokas or verses in Bhagwat-Gita that deal with the nature, causes, effects and practical ways of dealing with attachment and how to develop an attitude of non-attachment. At

various places in Gita, words like “Sangha”, “Moha”, “Raga”, “Vasna”, “Spriha Bhavna” have been interchangeably used with attachment or Asakti and “Prsakti”, “Vairagya”, “Veetraaga”, “Nirudha Bhava” have been used interchangably for non-attachment or Anasakti.

“As a person contemplates on the objects of the senses, then arises in him attachment to them; from attachment arises desire; from desire anger is produced. From anger comes delusion: from delusion, the confusion of memory and loss of mindfulness; from the disappearance of memory and mindfulness, the loss of faculty of discrimination, by the loss of faculty of discrimination, one’s sense of well-being perishes”. Literature suggests that dominance of Asakti very often results in egoism, possessiveness, anxiety, obsession, hatred, negativity and different forms of insecurities (Bhushan & Jha, 2005).

Anasakti is negation of Asakti. It is a tendency of maintaining neutrality by accepting everything as it is without any attraction or repulsion (Bhushan & Jha, 2005). Anasakti is a source of happiness. Shloka 21 of chapter 5 of Bhagwad Gita says that “when an individual is unattached to external contacts, he/she finds happiness within his/her real self. In other words, Anasakti is the key to authentic happiness. Such happiness is not dependent on the animate and inanimate in the world outside”. Therefore, it can be said that Asakti is positively related to Subjective well-being and Anasakti is positively related to Psychological well-being.

○ Counseling

References

None of the civilization survived without advice and guidance; therefore it would be right to say that counselling has existed in one form or the other since time immemorial. It can be traced back to our ancient epic Bhagavad Gita which embodies the finest principles of counselling for people of all times and ages to the 21st century counselling which is seen catering to the imminent societal trends such as issues of ageing population, raising quality of life, incorporating neuroscience into counselling, emphasis on wellness assessment, strengths and life span development (Narula, 2016).

The Atharva Veda described good mental health as the restoration of equilibrium of the components of human personality called gunnas, Vatta, Pitta, and Kaph. The Traditional Healers are called Mantrawadis and Patris. These healers believed that people suffered because of misdeeds committed in their present or previous lives. Also, visiting religious centers is commonly found for healing purposes in India (Raguram, Venkateswaran, Ramakrishna & Weiss, 2002) such as visiting “healing temple” in South India.

Final Remarks!

The study dwells upon both eastern and western concepts and draw attention to revive eastern concepts through western literature. Indigenous psychology which somehow vanished over the years has been brought to light in this theoretical research paper. The researchers tried to recollect Indigenous roots, heritage and philosophy’s richness and worth.

1. Aurobindo, S. (1999). The synthesis of yoga (5th ed.). Pondicherry: Sri

- Aurobindo Ashram (First published 1949).
2. Baer, R.A. (2003). Mindfulness training as a clinical intervention: A conceptual and empirical review. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*. 10, 125–143.
 3. Bateman, A., Brown, D. & Peddar, J. (2010). In: *The concept of conflict. Introduction to Psychotherapy: An Outline of Psychodynamic Principles and Practice*. 4th ed. Bateman A, Brown D, Peddar J, editors. Hove: Routledge, 11–13.
 4. Bhatia, S. C., Madabushi, J., Kolli, V., Bhatia, S. K., & Madaan, V. (2013). The Bhagavad Gita and contemporary psychotherapies. *Indian journal of psychiatry*, 55(Suppl 2), S315–S321.
 5. Bhushan, L.I. & Jha, M.K. (2005). Developing test of Asakti and Anasakti. *Indian Journal of Psychometrics and Education*, 36 (1), 3-9.
 6. Bishop, S.R., Lau, M., Shapiro, S., Carlson, L., Anderson, N.D., Carmody, J., & Devins, G. (2004). Mindfulness: A proposed operational definition. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*. 11, 230–241.
 7. Cornelissen, R. M. M., Misra, G., & Varma, S. (Eds.). (2011). *Foundations of Indian psychology*, vol. 2. Delhi: Pearson
 8. Dalal, A. K., & Misra, G. (2010). *The Core and Context of Indian Psychology. Psychology and Developing Societies*, 22(1), 121–155.
 9. Davids, C.A.F.R. (1936/1978). The birth of Indian psychology and its development in Buddhism. Munshiram Manoharlal Publications, reprint Oriental Books.
 10. Grossmann, I. (2017). "Wisdom in context". *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 21 (12): 1254–1266.
 11. Hanh, T. N. (1976). *Miracle of mindfulness*. Boston: Beacon.
 12. Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (1999). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: An experiential approach to behavior change*. New York: Guilford Press.
 13. Jain, J. (2008). *Jaina Psychology*. In K, Rao, A. Paranjpe, & A. Dalal (Eds.), *Handbook of Indian Psychology*, Foundation Books, 55-72.
 14. Jeste, D. V., & Vahia, I. V. (2008). *Comparison of the Conceptualization of Wisdom in Ancient Indian Literature with Modern Views: Focus on the Bhagavad Gita. Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes*, 71(3), 197–209.
 15. Johnsen, L. (2001). *The complete idiot's guide to Hinduism*. New York: Alpha Books.
 16. Joshi, K., & Cornelissen, M. (Eds.). (2004). *Consciousness, Indian psychology and yoga*. New Delhi: Center for Studies in Civilizations
 17. Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. New York: Bantam Dell.
 18. Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain and illness*. New York: Delacorte.

19. Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 144–156.
20. Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*. New York: Hyperion.
21. Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living*. New York: Delacorte Press.
22. Kuppaswami, B. (1985). *Elements of ancient Indian psychology*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.
23. Lehrer, P., Woolfolk, R.L. & Sime, W.E. (2007). *Principles and Practice of Stress Management*. 3rd Edition. New York: Guilford Press.
24. Menon, S. (2005). What is Indian psychology: Transcendence in and while thinking. *Journal of Transpersonal psychology*, 37(2), 83–89.
25. Menon, S. (2016). Consciousness and Cognition. *obo* in *Hinduism*. doi: 10.1093/obo/9780195399318-0171
26. Misra, G. (2011). *Handbook of psychology in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
27. Narula, B. (2016). Trends in Counselling: A Comprehensive Overview. *Indian Journal of Applied Research*, 6(5), 14-15
28. Premasiri, P.D. (2008). Verities of cognition in early Buddhism. In K.R. Rao, A.C. Paranjpe & A.K. Dalal (Eds), *Handbook of Indian Psychology*, 85–104. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
29. Raguram, R., Venkateswaran, J. R., Ramakrishna, J. and Weiss, M. G. (2002). Traditional community resources for mental health: A report of temple healing from India. *British Medical Journal*, 325, 38-40.
30. Rao, A.V., & Parvathidevi, S. (1974). The Bhagavad Gita treats body and mind. *Indian Journal Hist Med*. 19, 34–44.
31. Rao, K. R. (2011a). *Cognitive anomalies, consciousness and yoga*. New Delhi: Matrix Publishers.
32. Rao, K. R. (2012). Psychology in Indian Tradition. *Psychological Studies*, 57(4), 323–330.
33. Rao, K. R., & Marwaha, S. B. (Eds.). (2005). *Towards a spiritual psychology*. New Delhi: Samvad.
34. Rao, K., Ramakrishna, P., & Anand, C. (2016). *Psychology in the Indian tradition*. New Delhi, Heidelberg: Springer. ISBN 9788132224396
35. Rao, K.R. (2008). Prologue: Introducing Indian psychology. In K.R. Rao, A.C. Paranjpe & A.K. Dalal (Eds), *Handbook of Indian Psychology*, 1–18, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
36. Safaya, R. (1975). *Indian psychology: A critical and historical analysis of psychological speculation in India philosophical literature*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
37. Salagame, K. K. K. (2013). *Indian Psychology. The Encyclopedia of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 695–698.
38. Salagame, K. K. K. (2011). *Indian indigenous concepts and perspectives: Developments and future possibilities*. In G. Misra (Ed.). *Psychology in India*:

- Fifth ICSSR survey of research in psychology*, (4), 93–172, New Delhi, India: Pearson.
39. Sharma, N. (2014). Cognitive Behaviour Therapy in Perspective of the Bhagwat Gita. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 3(1), 19-21.
40. Sharma, S. (1999). Corporate Gita: Lessons for management, administration and leadership. *Journal of Human Values*, 5, 103–123.
41. Siegel, R. D., Germer, C. K., & Olendzki, A. (2009). *Mindfulness: What Is It? Where Did It Come From?* Clinical Handbook of Mindfulness, 17–35.
42. Sinha, J. (1933/1958). *Indian psychology, Vol.1: Cognition*. New Delhi, India: Motilal Banarasidass.
43. Staudinger, U.M., & Glück, J. (2011). "Psychological wisdom research: Commonalities and differences in a growing field". *Annual Review of Psychology*. 62, 215–241.
44. Steiner, R. (2007). *Bhagavad Gita and the West*. London: Rudolf Steiner.
45. The Bhagwat Gita, Gorakhpur Press
46. Walsh, R. (2015). "What is wisdom? Cross-cultural and cross-Disciplinary Syntheses". *Review of General Psychology*. 19 (3): 178–293.