

Global Contributions of Ancient Indian Knowledge System in The Field of Psychology

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Abstract- Exploring knowledge systems beyond one's perspective reveals two approaches: a spiritual one, viewing foreign insights as potential enrichments or replacements for personal perceptions of reality, and an objective lens recognising cultural distinctions. Despite being an alien discipline for nearly a century, academic psychology in India initially adopted Western models, struggling to integrate with indigenous heritage and adapt to local contexts. The need to rediscover knowledge rooted in scriptures and folk practices is evident, yet comprehensive data on the discipline's growth and impact remain elusive. Nevertheless, Indian psychology, drawing from ancient scriptures and traditions, offers profound insights for modern understanding, particularly in bridging the gap between individual experiences and societal harmony.

Keywords- Philosophical Foundation, Subjective Areas of Knowledge, Theories of Self and Personality, Developmental Stages and Life Processes, Spiritual and Holistic Approaches to Mental Well-being

INTRODUCTION

The assimilation of knowledge systems beyond one's cultural framework unveils contrasting perspectives: a spiritual approach embracing foreign insights as potential enrichments to personal understanding and an objective stance acknowledging cultural diversity. Despite its century-long existence, academic psychology in India initially adopted Western paradigms, struggling to reconcile with indigenous heritage and societal contexts. The imperative to rediscover ancient wisdom rooted in scriptures and folk practices underscores the discipline's evolutionary trajectory. While data on its proliferation are sparse, Indian psychology's unique synthesis of ancient scriptures and contemporary insights holds promise for

addressing modern challenges and fostering societal well-being.

IMPACT OF HINDU SOCIALISM ON WESTERN PSYCHOLOGY

The emerging trend among Indian psychologists to explore ancient Indian thought reveals a paradigm shift towards indigenous psychology. Practices such as Yoga and meditation, integral to Hindu traditions, have garnered attention from Western psychology, signifying a convergence of perspectives. Unlike Western psychology's focus on bodily processes, Hindu psychology centres on the human individual as the locus of understanding, emphasising the intrinsic reality of mental phenomena. Carl Jung's views on psychic reality resonate with Hindu psychology, highlighting a shared

emphasis on the totality of the mind rather than isolated functions. In contrast to Western psychology's reductionist approach, Hindu psychology regards mental acts and the mind as fundamental realities. This holistic perspective, rooted in ancient texts like the Upanishads and the Gita, aims to understand, develop and integrate the mind with character and personality. Patanjali's teachings underscore the transformative potential of systematically controlled minds, transcending bodily limitations to experience superconsciousness. Ancient Indian psychology, imbued with social and moral considerations, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding human behaviour and fostering individual and societal harmony.

THOUGHT ON COGNITION /PERCEPTION

In Indian philosophy, the human mind transcends mere sensations; it functions as an internal agency facilitating observation, analysis, and integration of sense impressions from both external and internal sources. Simultaneously, it serves as both experiencer and observer, akin to an inner instrument or antahkarana. This internal agency encompasses four distinct functions:

- a) Oscillatory functions characterise Manas.
- b) Buddhi represents a decisive state that identifies external objects like trees or cows.
- c) Ahankara is where the mind acknowledges its knowledge.
- d) Chitta is where present experiences are linked to past ones, establishing meaning.

The mind serves as the instrument enabling individuals to identify objects in their environment. Indian psychology distinguishes between the Indriya, an internal implement for sensation, and the nervous system and sense

organs, which receive environmental stimuli. The Indriya, as an instrument of the mind, exhibits dynamic activity, reaching out to external objects. This concept contrasts with Western psychology. The Indriya's responsiveness to external stimuli is essential for perception; otherwise, new sense impressions cannot lead to perception. Indeed, the concept of Indriya can elucidate phenomena of extrasensory perception where sensor contact is absent. While perception is a prevalent means of acquiring knowledge, other avenues, such as the authority of experts or elders, inference from experience, and logical deduction, also contribute. This underscores why ancient Indian thinkers emphasised the role of the Guru or preceptor. The Guru provides opportunities to learn and accept truths of life that young individuals may not directly perceive or comprehend.

INSIGHT ON CONSCIOUSNESS

Ancient Hindu texts offer an intricate exploration of consciousness, contrasting with the early focus of Western psychology on conscious experiences like sensations, feelings, and images. The emergence of psychoanalysis, spearheaded by Freud, redirected psychological inquiry towards the unconscious, revealing its profound influence on human behaviour. Freud characterised the unconscious as a reservoir of biological and instinctual impulses alongside repressed contents barred from conscious awareness. Western psychology gradually acknowledged the significance of unconscious mental processes, with scholars like William James delving into religious and mystical experiences. In contrast, Hindu Indian psychology delineates four stages or levels of consciousness: the sleep stage (Susupthi), the dream stage (Swapna), the waking stage (Jagruthi), and an expanded superconscious

stage (Turiya). Unlike the pessimistic view of psychoanalysis, Indian psychology regards the subconscious realm as harbouring inherent tendencies or past impressions (sanskaras), which intermittently influence conscious experiences. Swami Vivekananda noted that positive and negative thoughts and actions can clandestinely shape conscious behaviour. Indian psychology acknowledges the interconnectedness of individuals' thoughts and actions, akin to Jung's collective unconscious, but with the added belief that impressions from past lives can permeate the subconscious, reflecting the Hindu doctrine of rebirth. Susupthi and Swapna stages are deemed part of the subconscious realm, with Indian psychology advocating for integrating subconscious, conscious, and superconscious levels as a pathway to holistic development and profound harmony. Yoga offers various practices to achieve this integration, emphasising active individual engagement. Unlike Western techniques such as hypnosis and psychoanalysis, which often involve passive reception, Indian methods promote active participation in self-analysis. In essence, Indian psychology advocates for psycho-synthesis, where the analysis of subconscious contents culminates in their synthesis across different stages, fostering holistic development and profound inner harmony.

OUTLINING SUPER-CONSCIOUS

The concept of the super-conscious state is a distinctive facet of Indian thought, particularly in Hindu psychology. According to Indian philosophy, ethical living is a fundamental prerequisite for attaining this state. As articulated in the Katha Upanishad, one who lacks understanding, is thoughtless, and remains impure fails to attain this goal and remains entangled in the cycle of birth and death.

Conversely, an individual endowed with intelligence, purity, and a controlled mind achieves the goal of super-consciousness, transcending the cycle of rebirth. Contrary to common misconceptions, genuine mystics with the spiritual realisation of the super-conscious experience exhibit deep concern for the welfare of others. It's crucial to differentiate between super-conscious experiences and what is commonly labelled as extrasensory or occult phenomena. Attaining the super-conscious state necessitates rigorous training and spiritual practices under the guidance of a realised teacher. This realisation unfolds in stages: spiritual experiences precede the stage of Samadhi, where distinctions between happiness and misery, light and darkness dissolve. As Swamy Akhilananda describes, an individual emerging from the super-conscious stage undergoes a profound transformation, gaining mastery over emotions, will, intellect and radiating bliss. The transformed individual acquires unique, universal knowledge and utilises it for the welfare of others. Indian thinkers distinguish between two stages of super-conscious experience: Savikalpa Samadhi, where one perceives the immediate presence of God while retaining personal identity, and Nirvikalpa Samadhi, where individual limitations dissolve, leading to a profound sense of oneness with the absolute. Patanjali delineates eight steps for reaching the super-conscious stage: Yama (Mental Control), Niyama (Physical Regulation), Asana (Posture), Pranayama (Breathing Control), Pratyahara (Withdrawal of the Mind from Sense Objects), Dharana (Concentration), Dhyana (Meditation), and Samadhi (Super-consciousness). These steps serve as a structured pathway to transcendence, guiding individuals towards profound states of consciousness and integration with the absolute.

UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS

Emotions accompany almost every cognitive act, as subjective reactions intertwined with cognitive processes. Disentangling the cognitive and emotional components proves challenging, as emotions arise from external experiences and innate urges. The Indian perspective on emotions resonates with the views of Prof. McDougall, who regards emotions as intrinsic to human nature, with each instinct bearing a characteristic emotion. However, modern Western psychology has often overlooked feelings and emotions. According to ancient Indian psychology, emotions stem from desires and exhibit a bipolar nature. Attainment of desires leads to happiness or joy, while unfulfilled desires result in sadness or unhappiness. Emotions entail more than mere physiological reflexes; they encompass the holistic activity of the individual. As expressed by Swami Abhedananda, emotions are experienced by the individual personality, not by the brain alone. While bodily responses accompany emotions, the reductionist view of Western psychology, equating emotions solely with bodily changes, fails to acknowledge the totality of the individual's experience. In Indian psychology, emotions originate as mind activities, manifesting in bodily changes. Thus, desires, as activities of the individual's personality, give rise to emotions and feelings. The Bhagavad Gita offers profound insights into managing emotions effectively. Desire, known as "Vasana" in Sanskrit, is the creative force underlying all actions. The gratification of desires induces happiness, yet complete satisfaction renders desires inert. Sustaining desires relies on mental and physical energy; an excess of desires depletes energy, hindering their fulfilment. Indian thought emphasises relinquishing lower desires to pursue higher-order fulfilment effectively.

EMPHASIS ON PERSONALITY AND INDIVIDUALITY

The Indian system of psychology places a significant emphasis on personality, considering it a central aspect of human existence. In contrast, Western psychology often equates personality with individuality, using the terms interchangeably to highlight the uniqueness of behaviour and individual differences. Ancient Indian psychology delineates two essential aspects of personality: the "me" and the "I." Together, these components constitute our personality. As articulated by Swami Abhedananda, the "me" denotes the known objective aspects of oneself, while the "I" represents the unknown essence. The "me" component encompasses various constituents, including material, social, and spiritual elements. Material constituents comprise the body and possessions, while social components encompass familial and communal relationships. Spiritual elements, such as beliefs in moral principles and connections with the divine, also contribute to one's personality. Despite changes in surroundings and relationships, individuals maintain a core identity or consistency, often attributed to memory. However, this continuity extends beyond memory, as consciousness acts as a unifying thread, maintaining identity amidst change. The "I" or individuality serves as the unchanging core of personality, distinct from thoughts, functions of the mind, or sensations. It unifies sensations, feelings, perceptions, and ideas, providing a stable background to our experiences. This individuality often referred to as the pure and non-empirical self or ego, remains constant amidst life's fluctuations. It lends reality to our dreams and represents a higher cosmic self, transcending transient empirical contents. At its essence, the "I" is the

knower, perceiver, and thinker, embodying the fundamental essence of human existence.

PROMINENCE TO THE SELF

While terms like soul and self once held significant positions in Western psychology, they were later disregarded by European experimental psychology and American behaviourism. However, pioneering efforts by figures such as Carl Rogers, Gordon Allport, and Henry Murray aimed to reintroduce the importance of the self. The growth of the phenomenological approach in psychology, clinical and counselling psychologies, and psychotherapy prompted a rediscovery of the self-concept within Western psychology. Conversely, ancient Indian psychology was deeply rooted in the notion of self or soul. According to this perspective, the self is the foundation of psychology, driving all human activity, with self-development or realisation as the ultimate goal. Indian psychology posits that the self transcends the body and encompasses all aspects of human existence. Unlike Western views that may find such notions challenging, Indian psychology regards the self as a fundamental and independent reality. Referred to as “Atman,” the self represents the individual manifestation of the universal or cosmic self known as Brahman. To achieve ultimate happiness, the individual must liberate himself from bodily constraints, desires, and limited knowledge acquired through the senses. Practices such as yoga, meditation, and tapasya are prescribed to help individuals transcend these limitations and realise their connection with Brahman. In Indian concepts of personality, a distinction is made between personality and individuality, with the latter closely related to the self-concept.

According to Indian psychology, the mind and other mental faculties are subordinate to the self, a viewpoint that may challenge Western perspectives. The Upanishads describe the nature of the self as immortal and incorporeal, freed from the confines of the body. The self progresses through four stages of consciousness, culminating in a super-conscious state known as Turiya, characterised by bliss, peace, and non-duality. Various philosophical schools in India offer different perspectives on the nature of the self. While Advaita emphasises the unity of all realities, other schools such as Nyaya, Sankhya, and Visistadvaita present alternative views on spiritual plurality and the relationship between matter, soul, and God. Ancient Indian psychology prioritised individual self-awareness, offering practical guidance for personal development and happiness. It recognised the uniqueness of each individual, shaped by experiences not only in the present life but also across multiple lifetimes, as depicted in Buddhist Jataka tales.

PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDIVIDUAL

Various psychologists have proposed different models to describe individuals’ developmental stages from birth to old age. Freud’s stages are based on psychosexual development, Erikson’s stages focus on identity formation, and Piaget’s stages relate to cognitive and intellectual development. Ancient Indian thinkers also conceptualised the development process in stages, but their approach was more comprehensive and socio-psychological, considering societal demands alongside internal states. This concept, known as the “Asrama” theory, divides life into four stages. While ancient Indian thinkers discussed the Asrama theory, they recognised individual

differences and the Hindu doctrine of rebirth and soul continuity. Therefore, an individual may not necessarily experience all four stages in one lifetime, especially the last stage of Sanyasa, which depends on past and present deeds. Comparisons have been drawn between the Hindu Asrama scheme and Erikson's developmental stages, noting similarities in considering social factors and expectations. Sudhir Kakkar suggests that Erikson's school age and adolescence stages align with the Brahmacharya stage, adulthood stages correspond to Grahasta and Vanaprastha, and the last stage aligns with Sanyasa. However, there are differences between the two schemes. While both emphasise life stages contributing to self-realisation, Erikson's approach is clinical and developmental. In contrast, the Hindu theory integrates traits from previous lives and focuses on ideals rather than clinical observations. Additionally, the Hindu theory disregards Erikson's early stages and infantile sexuality, reflecting distinct perspectives on human development.

FIVE AREAS OF INDIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SCIENCE OF PSYCHOLOGY

1. Philosophical Foundation: The Indian tradition offers a profound philosophical framework that supports its psychological knowledge and complements modern psychology. Its understanding of consciousness provides a richer foundation compared to Western materialist-reductionist theories.
2. Subjective Areas of Knowledge: Rooted in consciousness-based theory, the Indian tradition offers coherent methods for exploring subjective knowledge. These

techniques enable the attainment of valid and reliable insights in subjective domains.

3. Theories of Self and Personality: Indian tradition provides a comprehensive understanding of personality and self, surpassing contemporary personality theories. Its insights into these aspects are more holistic and rewarding.
4. Special Areas of Psychology: Indian contributions extend to specialised fields such as emotions, aesthetics (e.g., Bharata's theory of bhava and rasa), language, motivation, human development, dance forms, forms of meditation, child psychology, parenting, etc. These areas benefit from unique Indian perspectives.
5. Healing Psychology: Pathways for Change: Various approaches to Yoga within the Indian tradition offer insights and techniques for psychological transformation. These insights can significantly enhance applied fields like psychotherapy and counselling, revolutionising healing and personal growth approaches.

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION

1. The All-Pervading Brahman: The heart of Indian philosophy is the concept of the all-pervading Brahman. It is remarkable that in the ancient scriptures, the simple mention of Brahman's name is enough to settle all doubt.
2. Epistemology (Theory of Knowledge): Indian epistemological contributions are derived directly from Vedic ontology. Truth is considered a quality of being, more than an attribute of sentences. Indian spirituality acknowledges the limitations of human understanding and emphasises experience over information.

3. Models of the Self and Personality: The Indian tradition offers profound insights into the Self as the Atman and its relation to the ego, Prakriti, and Brahman. Various

CONCLUSION

The Indian contribution to psychology encompasses various facets deeply rooted in its ancient spiritual and philosophical traditions. The quest for true being, light, and immortality epitomises the eternal yearning captured in ancient scriptures. As the new millennium unfolds, Indian psychology witnesses a shift towards embracing native wisdom, recognising the gap between academic pursuits and real-life issues, and seeking practical applications for societal challenges. Several factors have propelled this change. Firstly, the inadequacies of Western psychology in addressing societal problems have led to a reevaluation of traditional approaches. Secondly, the popularity of Yoga and spiritual practices from India in the West has drawn attention to Indian psychological perspectives. Thirdly, Indian psychology's secular nature and emphasis on consciousness offer valuable insights for self-growth. Lastly, India's emergence as a global economic power has renewed interest in its cultural heritage, including psychological traditions. Indian psychology's universal appeal lies in its relevance to perennial human issues transcending geographical and temporal boundaries. Its focus on spirituality complements scientific inquiry, offering broader theories of human existence and practical methods for personal transformation. The discipline emphasises experiential knowledge generation and advocates for a paradigm shift in psychological research, prioritising the study of oneself and others. Efforts to establish Indian psychology as a vibrant discipline have

intensified, with conferences, publications, and research initiatives driving this movement forward. The goal is not to prove the superiority of ancient Indian theories but to contemporise them and explore their relevance for enhancing human well-being. Indian psychology, thus, holds promise for ushering in an era of exciting possibilities, blending ancient wisdom with modern scientific inquiry to address the complexities of human nature and society.

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