

CONNECTING THE UNCONNECTED DOTS OF ANCIENT INDIAN PSYCHOLOGY TO MODERN TIMES

Abstract

The arrival of psychology as a discipline in India was a consequence of the process of colonization. Though later on, it went through the process of indigenization by test adaptation, translation, and interpretation of psychological perspectives such as cognitive, behaviorist, humanistic etc., in the Indian context, which is termed Indigenous Psychology. However, it cannot incorporate the Indian school of thought into the discipline. This chapter aims to briefly explain the Indian school of thought from a psychological perspective. It attempts to create an awareness regarding the relevance of Indian psychology, which will induce further research and provide a new direction to this field. It will help in unlocking the opportunities to extend the work on Indian psychology in order to enrich and strengthen it as a discipline relevant worldwide.

Keywords: Colonization, Ancient Indian Literature, Indigenous Psychology, Indian Psychology.

Authors

Palak Nema
M.A. Psychology Student
Institute for Excellence in Higher Education
palaknema2000@gmail.com

Dr. Vishal Yadav
Guest Faculty
Department of Psychology
Mahatma Gandhi Antarrastriya Hindi
Vishwavidyalya
Wardha, Maharashtra, 442001, India
vishalbhu1992@gmail.com

I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of evolution, we have tried to understand human behavior as well as the self, what we now termed as psychology. The ancient thinkers, sometimes called sages, were engaged in a continuous effort to know and understand concepts of the self, the mind, and its control, how to achieve salvation (self-actualization), and the way to achieve self-actualization. This is evident in our ancient Indian Vedic scriptures that deal with the mind, states of consciousness, personality types, and pathology. However, the irony is that in India, psychology was introduced as an alien branch of study, i.e., Euro-American, which caused a delayed acceptance of Psychology by the general masses as a subject native to us. Moreover, Universal psychology, which is nothing but Euro-American psychology, remains untouched by the Indian school of thought, which is today considered Indian psychology.

This chapter attempts to draw a timeline to understand our knowledge, the process of colonization of psychology, and the current emerging trend of reviving "Indian psychology" to provide an impetus to future research in this direction as well as give a novel perspective to the ancient Indian wisdom through the lens of the 21st century.

II. REVISITING THE ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY FROM A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The analysis of the ancient Indian historiography right from the Vedic Era (approx. 10000-5000 BC) to the Vedanta (2000-700 BC) and several kinds of literature from 500 BC to 100 BC (Epics, BhagwatGeeta, six orthodox and heterodox schools of philosophy) highlights the subject matter of psychology in every aspect. The examples given in the Upanishads are narrated in the form of stories that present a situation of which an individual is a part, how he or she behaves in that particular situation, and what the consequence of that action is; thereby, they try to convey what ought to be done in order to deal with that situation effectively. In this way, It revolves around Maya (world) and Atman (soul or self).

III. UNVEILING PSYCHOLOGICAL INSIGHTS IN VEDIC LITERATURE

In Vedic studies, i.e., the study of the four Vedas (Rigveda et al.), which are considered the core texts, we found that the "Mind" is conceptualized as a functional element of Atman (the soul or self). The Rig and the Yajurveda mention the chanting of mantras for the development of the inner self and the purification of the soul (Gautam, 1999). The Vedas also highlight the linkage of thoughts to facial appearance and expression and the influence of purified thoughts on instinct. It focuses on the preventive aspect of psychopathology, e.g., prevention from pain (depression).

On delving deep into the ocean of Vedic knowledge, we come across several psychology-related topics; for instance, the earliest Veda, i.e., the Rigveda, talks about the mind's speed and mentions the prayers for mental happiness, thereby recognizing the role of the mind in healing. It also mentions increasing medha (intelligence) (Gautam, 1999). Apart from this, Rigveda (later in Bhagwatgeeta) highlights the Trigunatmak personality types, i.e., Saatvik, Rajsik, and Tamsik, and their inter-relationship with Aahar(food), Vichar (thought), and Vyavhaar (behavior), which is currently the subject matter of health psychology. It also identified mental illness independent of physical illness (Prakash, Chaudhury, & Ali, 2023).

In addition, Yajurveda describes the structural and functional aspects of the mind. One of the Vedic shlokas says that Atman (the self) consists of three elements, and the mind is a part of the self, which represents knowledge along with vitality (action) and matter (worldly objects). Therefore, prayers have been made for mental well-being, further promoting general well-being. Besides the mind, Atharvaveda deals with subjects like preserving willpower, emotions, inspiration, consciousness, etc.

In Upanishads, written after the Vedas, terms like perception, memory, etc., have been mentioned. For instance, the Brihadranyaka Upanishad describes chitta, thought, smriti (memory), and theories of perception. Also, it describes six mental powers, namely Bhavna Shakti (imagination power), Smarana Shakti (remembrance power), Vedana Shakti (perceptual ability), Manisha Shakti (reasoning ability), Sankalpa Shakti (will power), and Dhahran Shakti (grasping ability) (Sivanand, 1983). All these are the subject matter of cognitive psychology, which received recognition after the 1960s.

The epics of Indian literature, namely the Ramayana and Mahabharata, written by Valmiki and Vedavyasa, respectively, also shed some light on symptoms of depression and anxiety as depicted in the Bhagwat Geeta that Arjuna experienced in the middle of the battlefield. It also shows how the psychotherapy (which is today considered cognitive restructuring) had been done by Krishna to give Arjuna insight into his deeds. The discourse between Arjuna and Krishna is still relevant today and is being used in cognitive restructuring.

IV. TRACING PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPRINTS IN AYURVEDIC TEXTS

Ayurveda has its roots in Atharvaveda. The principal classical documents of Ayurveda are the Charak Samhita and Sushrut Samhita of about 1400 BC and 1500 BC, respectively. These documents deal with mental disorders, their causative factors and treatment, and personality types according to trigunas.

One of the chapters on Manasrog describes 14 causative factors for mental disorders such as Pragyaparadh (socially unsanctioned behavior), Manasdosh (psychological factors), Manobhigat Kardravya (trauma due to Substance abuse), Malinahar Vihar (bad lifestyle), Chinta Man (inappropriate anxiety), and so on (Gautam, 1999).

Moreover, the texts present a systematic classification of mental disorders under Nijmanas rog (endogenous mental illness) and Agantujmanas rog (exogenous mental illness) (Prakash, Chaudhury, & Ali, 2023), wherein it further divides Nijmanas one into Manas dosh janya, those induced by psychic factors that can be associated with neurotic disorders, and Sharir doshanubandh janya, those induced by bodily illnesses that may be associated with organic brain dysfunction. (Gautam, 1999). The texts also clearly mention sleep disorders.

V. HARMONIZING BODY AND MIND: THE THERAPEUTIC INTEGRATION OF YOGA IN PSYCHOLOGY

The principal text in yogic science is the Yogasutra of Patanjali. The primary purpose of yoga is the union of mind and body. For this, Ashthangic yoga (eightfold path) should be practiced. Apart from this, Karma yoga, Jnana yoga, Hatha yoga, Raj yoga, Mantra yoga, and

Laya Yoga are the six yogic schools described in the Upanishad. All these aim to convert the self into a transcendental being. Yoga philosophy and meditation techniques are now being used in psychotherapy. Yoga has now become a subject in positive psychology.

The above discussion highlights the presence of Psychology in Indian discourse and thought way before the period when the branch developed in the West. Indian thought touched on almost every area of Psychology, such as cognitive psychology, positive psychology, psychopathology, and health psychology. However, this school of thought faded with time due to Turkish invasions, and further work had yet to be done in this direction.

VI. COLONIAL SHADOWS AND THE BIRTH OF PSYCHOLOGY: TRACING ITS INTRODUCTION AS A FIELD IN INDIA

The effects of colonization reflect not only in politico-economic conditions but also in our psyche, social relationships, minds and attitudes, coping mechanisms, frame of reference, context, environment, behavior, and the trans generational transfer of trauma. This effect is under-realized and under-recognized.

Psychology in India arrived while introducing Western science and methods and destroying indigenous culture for the benefit of the British. Unfortunately, Psychology taught and practiced today in India has minimal contribution to the Indian school of thought because it was adopted uncritically during the colonial period (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016). The first psychological laboratory in India was established in 1915 at Calcutta University through the efforts of B. N. Seal (Sanyal, 2021). Although psychology was adopted as an alien subject, some Indian psychologists tried to contribute their original ideas to the field even then; however, they have not been recognized so far.

The renowned name in this group was India's first psychoanalyst, Girindrasekhar Bose (Hiltebeitel, 2018), who informed Freud about his unique "opposite wishes" theory, which states that no wish exists without a counterpart in the psyche. The ideas of projective identification and inter subjectivity were contained in his theory long before they were explicitly developed in the West.

Apart from this, the leading psychologist in India was trained in the U.K. and the U.S. and brought Western thoughts, procedures, and even research topics. In this way, psychological research in India appears to be a clone of foreign studies devoid of native contribution. This made us mere recipients rather than exchange agents of knowledge that we had (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016)

VII. FROM INDIGENOUS PSYCHOLOGY TOWARDS INDIAN PSYCHOLOGY: A PARADIGM SHIFT

Since psychology in India was introduced as an alien discipline, it cannot connect with the national ethos (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016). Unlike natural sciences such as physics and chemistry, psychology, a social science, is bound by culture and context (Rao & Paranjpe, 2016). Therefore, psychologists began the process of indigenizing psychology. This includes the Indian adaptation of Western concepts and perspectives. For instance, Indian adaptations of various intelligence tests, projective techniques, etc. Although Indigenous Psychology is

being developed, it lacks the essence of the Indian school of thought. Therefore, a paradigm shift is now being observed in Indian psychology. Indian Psychology has its roots in India, but it is relevant worldwide. It has a Meta theoretical base, which may contribute positively to the field. For example, today, the world has been experiencing and getting benefits from the power of yoga and various forms of meditation, which highlights the significance of Indian Psychology. Therefore, it is high time to push for the revival of Indian Psychology to establish it as an independent discipline that will serve the national ethos and enrich psychology (Mishra, & Paranjpe, 2021).

VIII. CONCLUSION

The Indian school of thought contains immense wisdom that needs to be unfolded in order to move one step ahead in the direction of establishing Indian Psychology as a discipline recognized worldwide. However, its quest for recognition should not be seen from a narrow perspective. Also, developments in Indian Psychology should not be considered a revival of ancient knowledge. Instead, it should be treated as further development in the discipline to make it advanced knowledge that will be significant and relevant today and in the future. Furthermore, the concepts of Indian Psychology should not be confined to a particular branch of psychology because they can contribute to every branch in one way or another. Since the main ingredient of Indian Psychology is its positive outlook on human potential, it cannot be confined to a particular region or culture but may serve the entire community. From the above insights, it can be concluded that there is a need to look at this emerging research area of Indian Psychology from an optimistic and progressive lens to overshadow the misconceptions around it, with the hope of furthering the betterment of individuals and the community.

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