

Indian Psychology- Exploring the Historical Roots, Emerging Trends and Future Implications

Mansi Sharma^{1*}

ABSTRACT

The field of Indian psychology is potentially recent and dates back to the times of N.N. Sengupta and the establishment of the first psychology lab in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in the year 1915. Since then, the field of Indian psychology, at its own pace has seen its own potentialities of upward growth and acceptance. Adopting various spiritual concepts and ideological beliefs of the abstract ideas in the history of abstract consciousness, this relatively new field of Indian psychology stands strong on the giants of eminent Indian psychologists like Durganand Sinha, Girishwar Misra and Syed Mohammad Mohsin to name a few. The contributions of Indian psychologists have been noteworthy. Keeping in mind their enormous contribution and research evidences in this relatively vast and abstract sub-field, this qualitative review is an attempt to explore the historical and indigenous roots of the Indian perspective on Psychology, emerging trends and future scope and implications of research in a field which deals majorly with human consciousness, spirituality and balance, by maintaining the balance with the western psychological perspective.

Keywords: *Indian Psychology, Consciousness, Self and Personality, Spirituality*

The development of Indian Psychology is a relatively a recent development which roots from the Indian Philosophical subject matter. To establish a homogeneous equation between indigenous and Indian Psychology might seem a dream because psychology in India is still largely culturally bound and influenced. To define psychology with an Indian perspective might seem an abstract idea because of the existence of a theoretical conflict between the western and the Indian perspective on psychology.

Misra (2011) suggests that there is a functional difference between indigenous and Indian psychology, while indigenous psychology deals majorly with the indigenization of psychology as a discipline, Indian psychology usually deals with the functional thought of the evolvement of psychology with spiritual and transcendental aspects. Supported and strengthened by the spiritual thought process of Swami Vivekananda through a nationalistic perspective, researchers and contributors get a comprehensive view of the evolving field of Indian Psychology.

¹Counselling Psychologist, Uttar Pradesh, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: May 25, 2021; Revision Received: June 15, 2021; Accepted: June 30, 2021

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In his classical book “Development of Psychological Thought in India” (1962), S Ramachandran wrote though the study of mind was not an independent thought in the ancient times, various concepts- spiritual, transcendental and religious have been thought upon in various altered perspectives.

Development of Indian Psychology

The advent of psychology in the Indian perspective has been into the research-based focus only to follow the western perspective of psychology which started developing its own empirical metaphysical subsystems and religious constructs. Based on these, numerous theories about self and personality, religious, their interplay with the practical applications and implications was constructed through a power bank of psychological knowledge base. Modern methodology lacked empirical evidence in the true sense which is why a strict divide or amend was required and expected, as far as modern Indian Psychology is considered.

Considering the potential growth psychology here in India was capable of achieving, the first coursework of experimental psychology was established in the university of Calcutta. Often, Indian psychology is confused with the study of a specific culture or tribe in India, sometimes so it is in the western terminology of definable constructs, thought upon as a study about people or population of India residing specifically within the geographical boundaries of the country. What is noteworthy is the fact that it does addresses the study of the behavioral and cultural reactions to the situational constructs, it does not, by large the psychology of the Indians.

Defined and highlighted in our ancient texts and scriptures, Indian psychology follows a rightward inclination towards higher consciousness as a method to understand the intricacies of self and personality and the theory of mind. Indian psychology or the Indian perspective on psychology is dynamic in its nature because of its universal applicability. When we talk about the indigenization of psychology, many psychologists who rely on the cultural roots and cues, have successfully attempted to translate by adapting the tests and scales as per the Indian setting, some of the examples can be Binet-Kamath intelligence scale or Uma Chaudhary’s Indian adaptation of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT).

The ancient thinkers have by far attempted to dig deep into every aspect in great detail, be it the *Arthashastra*- the study of political and economic domain, the study of six philosophical subsystems- *Shat darsanas*, *Neetishastra* or *Dharmashastra* – the study of the social aspect of the society and human species or *Kamasutra* – about the sexual tendencies and human sexuality. To sync the modern and philosophical roots of psychology, our ancient intellectuals have covered it all from politics to sexuality.

Sufficient research and empirical evidences are available in the regard of the development of Indian psychology, based on this we can roughly trace back the development of the Indian roots to the development of psychology across the 20th century when the possible terminology, to define psychology as a different branch away from its own contemporary roots of philosophy might be *manashastra* as its complimentary to the western perspective.

The western ideological belief to contemporary psychology differs in the sense that there are varied perspectives to life and death, consciousness, human nature, life- orientation, goals and virtues when compared with an Indian ideological belief. So much so that on the surface the western form of thought-belief psychological perspective seems a bit too

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materialistic, probably which is why some of the theories and literature lacks practical applicability when assessed in the Indian psychological environment and population.

The Indian perspective is strengthened by two spiritually inclined world-views *dharmā* and *darsana*. These are suggested to have been studied as the ancient experiences of saints and sages along-with our intellectual thinkers. These begin with understanding the concept as the grounded spirituality base in its own sense of reality. However, when looked upon in the three forms of religious practices followed by the India population, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism evolve from similar cultural roots- from an Indian psychological thought, they share similar features in terms of spirituality and religious oneness and integrity. These aspects are discussed below briefly.

While indigenous psychology focuses on eliciting concepts and modalities based on taking culture as a root, the concept of focusing and addressing those basic needs or biological needs were thought upon by our Indian traditions long back. This is clearly similar to the concept of Maslow's need of hierarchy as we study today in the modern western psychology. Our traditions suggest that when these basic needs are balanced out and achieved, our mind and body struggle hard enough to achieve and actualize the other higher order needs- in terms of spiritual and transcendental needs. When human beings are able to attain the higher order spiritual inclination, they are better able to connect with innate experiences, naturalistic thinking and thought process develops, one where there is no time-space restrictions, detachment yet attachment to worldly pleasures and duties is evident as well. Humans actualize and learn from experiences of self and others which enables them to be connected with the spiritual path of growth and human potentialities, a concept similar to the humanistic and existential perspective in the modern- contemporary psychology.

Life and death follow a different ideological thought pattern in both western and Indian psychology. The western psychology is backed by the theory of human evolution by Darwin where there is a passage of dominant and recessive traits across various species- living, which is why, the human species is considered to be the most superior or the most developed one, which limits its research scope in further directions. This is altogether different In the Indian perspective as a fact that life and death is an ongoing process- the *soul* or *aatma* is ever- evolving and when it leaves a human body, it will follow its due course and will undergo rebirth again only in other life forms if not necessarily as a human species. The force of life and death is ever evolving and an ongoing process. The practices, tendencies and life path we follow in this life is a result of accumulated karma of a past life and acts as a stepping stone in the next lifetime, our birth, transformation and death are complementary to each other in accordance with the Indian perspective.

While the Indian perspective is known for its inclination towards *purushartha* or the ideology where the human life is much deeper than the fulfillment of the biological needs, it follows a life leading path which suggests that the human goals and aspirations must also be influenced on the basis of how a living being wishes to spend his life, in the process of leading a life full of virtues. By developing virtues in his/ her human life, individuals can attain self- fulfillment and this attainment creates a building foundation towards the attainment of spiritual goals, often practiced at the later stage of a human life-span. Often misunderstood as the fulfillment of one's sexual desires only *Kama* also indicates the fulfillment of other higher order psychological needs as well. Ancient texts suggests that in this process of birth, death and rebirth the whole process of *purushartha* is dynamic in its own existential being.

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There is an existence of a functional and ideological difference between western and Indian psychology in the sense that the former is less accepting on the spiritual aspect of psychology, however, it would be contextually incorrect to coin such an inference due to the fact of increased research-based evidences about parapsychology a subfield of psychology that deals with out of the body experiences (not to be confused as hallucination or somatoform experiences).

When researchers based on consciousness surface, western psychology in the beginning was only considerate enough to focus on exploring the three states of waking, deep sleep and dream states. The fourth state which has recently been identified is the state of consciousness or conscious awareness. Indian intellectual thinkers believe that consciousness or higher- order/ transcendental consciousness is attaining *pure state of awareness*. As far as the *yoga sutra* is concerned, the *drstu or awareness* is considered to be independent of mental thoughts and activities. There is a clear demarcation between consciousness and the mind due to which it is possible to consciously carry out mental activities and tasks of consciousness. The manas is *Jada Vastu* sans life but with the presence of physical matter. Consciousness is considered to be an energy that enlightens in the presence of physical matter. Both of these together results in the formation of *Sukshama* and the *Karna Sharira* which continue the rebirth in a transformatory manner. Some of these similar concepts are also evident in the Buddhism and the Jainism literature, although the *Jiva* according to the Jains keeps on transforming and escalating with the help of *karma* and the notions of Brahman and Atman is an alien concept. Although the Buddhists consider Gautam Buddha as an enlightened person, he rejected the idea of transcendental awareness or what we call Atman.

Psychological Aspects of Bhagwad Gita

Recent empirical developments shows that the psychological aspects of *Shrimad Bhagwad Gita* portray great in-depth information about the whole time-lapse of the epic war- *The Mahabharata*. Many researchers understand the comprehensive contextual and psychological aspects it covers. Many of them are of the view that the great text in itself is the greatest epitome of religiosity intertwined with spirituality. It is an important sacred text in the Hinduism so much so that it has been translated into almost every language and carries varied spiritual meaning dynamically.

The sacred text of the Gita depicts how consciousness, emotionality, behavioral aspects, fulfilling one's duties, fighting for righteousness, the ability of self-control, impulses and reacting and acceptance of cowardice play a major role in one's life and the circle of life. Some aspects where Yudhishtira, the eldest son of Pandu, was influenced by Sanjay to think that war is a sin in the name of Dharma, and that he himself was Dharmaraj, he was influenced to some extent considering that waging a war against his own brothers was no less than a sin. Another instance is the one where Arjuna, is reluctant to fulfill his duties as an armed warrior in the battlefield. This shows the psychological reluctance despite pure consciousness however, what was undiscovered as the form of conscious awareness was resolved by Lord Krishna when he imparted the lesson of performing one's social obligations but keeping the religious and the spiritual notions of knowledge intact.

With the help of politics, Sanjay was able to manipulate the Pandavas in an attempt to weaken their side against the Kaurawas. Attachment is majorly thought to be of enemy to the human personality and it is suggested to follow the path of detachment towards situations, people and relationships if the obligations or karma as they say has to be fulfilled.

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If we try and analyze the character or personality of Arjuna, we realize that despite being a learned warrior, he was reluctant to implement the skills, to help him realize his strength, Lord Krishna has been seen being his supervisor and bringing him back on track to lead the war in the battle-field. Truth and strength is evident when Lord himself imparts the knowledge of the soul that it is eternal and it seeks to be killed in order to regain itself. He also preaches that gradually, and steadily, the mind cannot be controlled but trained in such a way where the thought process can reach a stage of transcendence and spirituality. Thus, we can infer from such an analytic perspective that being derailed in making a conscious decision is not indicative of cowardice, but it in itself is recovery, a journey towards making an informed decision.

Buddhi yoga or intellect in accordance in terms of abstract judgement, learning and adjustment. As per the **Gita**, Lord Krishna is the live example of **Sthirbuddhi** or a stable intellect. It is crucial to also understand that with a view of **Sthirbuddhi**, reason and enlightenment happens when there is no judgement of fear, as Lord himself says while preaching that only he is the ultimate truth, and that in him, everything else merges. Arjun then regains his senses and understands that illusion has to go in view of attaining enlightenment and illumination. The Gita also highlights the importance of managing impulses, the failure of which creates imbalance a result of which is evident in the under, over and suppressed portrayal of emotions. Anger, greed, lust if practiced results in the lack of judgement, ultimately leading to the failure and downfall of a human being.

Self and Personality in the Indian Context

The concept of self and personality in the Hindu tradition has been an ever-evolving concept. Since the ancient times, self and personality have been studied as complimentary aspects. The self is an independent concept. In accordance with the Yogic perspective, is dualistic in nature. The **purusa** is the pure awareness or consciousness, whereas the **prakriti** or the psycho-physical aspect which refers to the unconscious. The prakriti comprises of two components namely **buddhi** or the intellect or the **ahamkara** or the ego-based mechanism. The **manas** or the mind and the **indri** or the senses elicit its being from the self or the **purusa**. In the path of enlightenment or in the process of attaining samadhi or transcendental consciousness, the individual must accept and practice by undergoing the karmic cycles of birth, rebirth, liberation and death- the ultimate form of liberation, from atman, physical body and an eternal soul.

Transcendental transformation follows the path of spirituality, especially in the process of reaching an individual's highest potential. Through the melodious interplay of purusa and prakriti, an individual can get through the process of reaching the higher consciousness and attaining self-liberation. The same can be reached through the process of **Abhyasa** through which, a path of righteousness can be carved. Through devotion or bhakti yoga, the utmost self- awareness can be attained. **Samskara** has its importance in the sense that it binds the life of an individual, makes it fulfilling and easy to function on this path and fulfill its essence of the very existence.

The self and personality in the ancient perspective can also be thought upon in terms of the **gunas** the person is made up of. These gunas were the motivating factors and the building blocks of an individual's personality. Ancient researches and intellectual thinkers classify them into three major categories namely- **the tamas or the tamasic guna, the sattva guna and the rajas or the rajasic guna**. Indian saints and sages believed that a fully functioning individual is a balanced composition of the three gunas, presence of any one

guna in excess could create an imbalance in the basic *pravritti* or the personality of an individual.

The individuals with a dominant tamasic personality are more likely to be argumentative, have anger issues or may have tamasic qualities like lust, greed and immediate gratificatory needs. Tamas may be a result of escapism from the duties of this worldly life and being away from the spiritual awakening or transformation in the life. The rajas guna is dominant of action and movement in life. It has to do with the fruit or results of our hard work and achievement. Thus, an imbalance or underactivity of this particular guna might be indicative of fearfulness or anxiousness in later stages of life. The sattva guna indicates the sattvik or purity of action. It is the sattvik guna which reduces the effects of dominance of the tamas and the rajas and makes it possible to achieve the ultimate liberation from all the worldly pleasures of life. An individual high or dominant on this particular guna is highly likely to be a person full of self-harmony, purity, balance and selflessness.

Ancient Ayurveda also highlights the importance of bodily composition of the *tridoshas* or faults as body typology in an individual. These can be categorized as *vatta, pitta and kapha*. The vatta is a major composition of air and earth, usually with a slender and an athletic body type, these individuals are steady and effective communicators. They are active, result oriented marked by movement and creativity. The pitta dominants are a combination of water and fire. A stable balanced body, they are most likely to be of a medium built and their qualities are their intellect and courage. They might face issues with anger and irritability though, they are more dominant with transformation and transcendence. The kapha is a composition of earth and water elements making the native on a plump side. Often full with compassion and fluidity, flexibility and structure in their usual nature, these individuals are usually likely to be forgiving and full of love and compliance in their usual nature, however, these individuals are also most likely to be filled with mental inertia, melancholy and sadness, attachment and greed.

Challenges in Indian Psychology

The recent emerging trends towards the development of the Indian Psychology has shown an upward trend towards testing and experimentation. While looking back in the 1930s and beyond, India was on the verge of experiencing and accepting that psychological science was or could be a different discipline altogether, apart from the biological roots of its philosophical foundations. This section of qualitative review analyses the challenges in the field of Indian Psychology that are evident, in accordance with the researcher's own observation.

- Backed by a materialistic perspective, Indian psychology is by large limited to the characteristics of natural and physical sciences. Hence there exists a limited scope of research advancement based on external scientific methodologies.
- There is paucity of research-based evidences and findings to fit the Indian population in terms of subjective and objective interpretation of models and theories.
- There are certain research areas such as the Buddhism and Jainism spiritual worldview because of lack of initiation towards the same.
- Researchers interested in studying transpersonal psychology are much more inclined towards studying it superficially due to which, there is lack of in-depth analysis in this field despite of its growth and potentialities.

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- Clinical interventionists likewise are limited towards the expansion and research in the clinical population across the country. This leaves them with limited or no scope to study the Indian literature well.
- The whole conceptualization of the Indian psychological school of thought is abstract in its structure. Researchers find it difficult to understand the abstract concepts as these are usually subjective in nature. For example, transcendence and spirituality might hold different meanings for different people. In this way, what scientific methodology should be adopted to reach satisfactory and conclusions of statistical or qualitative significance might be an ethical issue or challenge to deal with.
- Social psychologists and researchers are often of the view that because of the complementary integration of the psyche and the culture, it is nearly impossible to conceptualize the construction of universally acceptable theories, models or studies.

DISCUSSION

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The western ideological belief to contemporary psychology differs in the sense that there are varied perspectives to life and death, consciousness, human nature, life- orientation, goals and virtues when compared with an Indian ideological belief. So much so that on the surface the western form of thought-belief psychological perspective seems a bit too materialistic, probably which is why some of the theories and literature lacks practical applicability when assessed in the Indian psychological environment and population.

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CONCLUSION

The contributions of Indian psychologists have been noteworthy. Keeping in mind their enormous contribution and research evidences in this relatively vast and abstract sub-field, this qualitative review is an attempt to explore the historical and indigenous roots of the Indian perspective on Psychology, emerging trends and future scope and implications of research in a field which deals majorly with human consciousness, spirituality and balance, by maintaining the balance with the western psychological perspective.

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Future Scope and Implications

Better and comprehensive data, both qualitative and quantitative can be analyzed keeping in mind the applicability of the Indian roots and philosophical foundations. We need more comprehensive researches in the area of triguna and tridoshas with adolescent samples. There is also a lack of assessment scales in the same area, more psychological testing scales can be developed to assess personality of the individuals on these tridoshas and trigunas. University curriculum has to be also be updated not only in government but in private ones also so that the students can get a grip of the ancient text and literature, and can get inspired to carry out research in this domain as well. The paucity of research in the Indian psychology is a core reason to be addressed due to which there is lack of availability of empirical literature.

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Acknowledgement

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Sharma M. (2021). Indian Psychology- Exploring the Historical Roots, Emerging Trends and Future Implications. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(2), 1686-1695. DIP:18.01.168.20210902, DOI:10.25215/0902.168