

The Indian Journey to Self-Discovery: A Psychological Examination of Ancient Texts and their Relevance to Self-Actualization

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ABSTRACT

This review paper delves into the concept of self-actualization from the perspective of ancient Indian psychology. By examining the philosophical traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, this paper explores the indigenous understanding of self-actualization and its attainment. The review discusses key concepts such as Atman, Dharma, and Moksha, and their relationship to self-actualization. It also examines the role of mindfulness, meditation, and self-inquiry in facilitating self-actualization. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of self-actualization in ancient Indian psychology, highlighting its relevance to contemporary psychological discourse. By exploring the intersections between ancient wisdom and modern psychology, this review seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of human flourishing and self-actualization.

Keywords: *Indian Journey, Self-Discovery, Psychological Examination, Ancient Texts, Self-Actualization*

For centuries, Indian texts such as the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali have offered profound insights into the human situation, imparting a wealthy and nuanced understanding of the self and its capacity for growth and transformation. These historic texts, rooted inside the expertise of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, have lengthily been recognized for their relevance to religious increase and self-cognizance. In recent years, however, there was a growing recognition of the relevance of Indian texts to the concept of self-actualization, a relevant assemble in modern psychology. Self-actualization, as conceptualized by way of psychologists along with Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, refers to the conclusion of one's complete ability, the pursuit of private boom, and the cultivation of a sense of motive. Indian texts, with their emphasis at the cultivation of self-focus, the transcendence of ego, and the conclusion of 1's authentic nature, provide a completely unique and treasured attitude on the manner of self-actualization. This paper will discover the relevance of Indian texts to the concept of self-actualization, examining the key concepts and concepts that underlie those historical knowledge traditions.

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A number of the key concepts in an effort to be explored on this paper include:

1. **The idea of the self:** How Indian texts understand the character of the self and its courting to the world.
2. **The significance of self-awareness:** How Indian texts emphasize the cultivation of self-recognition as a key factor of self-actualization.
3. **The role of ego transcendence:** How Indian texts view the transcendence of ego as an important step inside the method of self-actualization.
4. **The idea of dharma:** How Indian texts apprehend the concept of dharma (duty, righteousness) and its relationship to self-actualization.
5. **The significance of mindfulness and meditation:** How Indian texts emphasize the significance of mindfulness and meditation in the manner of self-actualization.

By analyzing these concepts and principles, this paper aims to provide a much deeper understanding of the relevance of Indian texts to the concept of Self Actualization, and to explore the ways in which, all of these ancient wisdom and traditional approaches can inform and enrich modern psychological understandings of human growth and development.

DISCUSSION

The Idea of Self

Indian Psychology propose the idea of “the Self” which can be seen as the dynamic, interconnected and ever-evolving entity. The self is not seen as a fixed or any kind of static entity, but rather as a fluid and adaptive system. The self (Atman) refers to the true nature or identity of an Individual which is beyond limitations of the ego. According to modern psychology, the concept of ego central to mind is defined as the part of the ID which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world (Freud, 1923). However, the self (Atman) is associated with infinite, pervading consciousness which is not bound by desires (Taittiriya Upanishad, 2.1.1)

India Psychology views the concept of self as a holistic entity, comprising of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects. This perspective provides a comprehensive approach to understand human behavior in a broader aspect and develop more holistic frameworks for modern psychology.

The influence of the concept of “the self” (Atman) are on different aspects of modern psychology such as:

- a) **Humanistic psychology:** The Indian concept of self has influenced humanistic psychology, which focuses on the inherent value and dignity of an Individual (Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers).
- b) **Transpersonal Psychology:** this branch of psychology (often associated with humanistic psychology) that focuses on the study of human experiences that transcend the ordinary boundaries of the self, such as spiritual, mystical, and peak experiences (Grof, 1969) strongly correlate with the concepts of the self from the Indian psychological perspective. It aims to integrate the spiritual and transcendent aspects of human experience into the field of psychology.
- c) **Holistic approach:** this concept (of Atman) majorly focuses on the interconnectedness of physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of human experiences. Thus, making an influence on the modern psychology’s shift towards a more holistic approach to health and well-being.

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- d) **Developing techniques:** Ancient Indian practices such as mindfulness and meditation were initially incorporated in daily life by Individuals for self-realization. Also in modern psychology, these techniques are used in psychotherapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).

Basically, there are many parallels that are drawn between the Indian psychological concept of “The self” (Atman) and its attributes in modern psychological aspects which includes physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual dimensions of an individual. Hence giving a proper and holistic approach to the framework of mainstream psychology.

The Significance of Self-Awareness

Self-awareness in Indian psychology is the Idea a person has a true self, or atman, that is separate from their empirical self. While, the empirical self is the existential self, which is subject to change and clinging to it results in suffering. The true self (Brahman) is unchanging and observes the empirical self (Atman) without being affected by it. The general meaning of self-awareness is said to be the ability to understand one’s own feelings, behaviors, and characteristics. It states that the self is a separate entity from others. Meanwhile, the concept of self-awareness in Indian psychology is the knowledge of the existence and the nature of universal consciousness (Brahman). It is the consciousness of one’s own real being, or primary reality (Mandukya Upanishad, n.d.).

Upanishads describes four states of consciousness or awareness to explain the nature of self, which are Vaisvanara (waking state), Taijasa (dream state), Prajna (state of deep sleep), Turiya (pure awareness). While these four states of consciousness strongly correlate with the modern understanding of the states of consciousness, it can help in connecting the layers of internal and external patterns of thoughts, emotions and behaviors by emphasizing the flow and interconnectedness of consciousness.

The shiv sutras revealed that ignorant minds which are stimulated by desires often suffer the bondage of limited knowledge. Limited knowledge causes us to identify with the body and not with the consciousness. By differentiating oneself from the body in the 3 states of awareness (waking state, dream state, deep sleep), one enjoys the birth of the fourth state, i.e., pure awareness.

While, it provides a theoretical framework for the concept of pure awareness but along with it these texts also provide techniques to cultivate that level of consciousness. Understanding and incorporating these concepts in modern psychological interventions can result in better understanding the nature of human consciousness and emphasizing the cultural aspect of an Individual.

The Role of Ego Transcendence

In Indian philosophy, the ahamkara (Ego) refers to the false sense of attachment to the body, mind, and material possessions. It creates a sense of duality and separateness among individual beings.

Ego transcendence can work as bridge to move beyond the false sense of Individuality to recognize the empirical self (Atman), which is in unity with the universal self (Brahman). Indian texts talk about two major kinds of ego transcendence i.e., Moksha (Liberation) or Jivanmukti (Liberation while living) where one transcendence over the worldly desires and

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other false sense of individuality to spiritual freedom and realizes the nature of universal consciousness (Brahman), Hence, attaining the state of pure awareness (Bhagavad Gita, 2.71).

One of the major schools of philosophy impacting the Indian perspective of ego transcendence is Advait Vedanta which emphasize that the sense of individuality (Ego) is illusory (Maya) and the nature of existence is Non-dualism (Advaita). This school of philosophy gave the idea of “Tat Tvam Asi” which means the realization that the individual self and the universal self are one which means the individual’s consciousness and the universal consciousness are interconnected and not separate entity. Although it contradicts with modern concept of individual psychology proposed by Alfred Adler, which deals with the individual’s experiences, characteristics and complexities it also distinctively shifts the focus on the interconnectedness of experiences, behaviors and characteristics among human beings.

Indian texts emphasize on ego transcendence as a precondition for self-actualization, which corresponds with Maslow’s concept of self-actualization which states that the highest stage of growth involves transcending the ego to connect with universal values like truth, oneness and compassion. Some aspects of ego transcendence such as Samadhi (absorption) where ego dissolves and the individual experiences unity with the universe correlates with the concept of peak experiences which are moments of highest happiness and fulfillment.

On the other hand, Buddhism directly questions the concept of a fixed ego or self, emphasizing that clinging to ego-based identities leads to suffering and letting go of this attachment allows one to experience liberation (Nirvana). While, it sounds like the concept of self-actualization stated in Upanishads but interestingly, Buddhism denies the existence of brahman or any kind of permanent self and emphasizes on a different term called the Anatta (no-self). The reason behind this is the avoidance of metaphysical speculations and having the primary focus on the practical path to end sufferings. While Buddhism does not emphasize the concept of brahman or any other form of self, there are shared themes such as the recognition of interconnectedness and the pursuit to liberation. However, these concepts are understood very differently in both the traditions. Buddhist concept of suffering strongly correlated with the modern approach of existential psychology since both focuses on understanding and accepting suffering as a fundamental aspect of life.

In yoga philosophy (Patanjali’s yoga sutras), the ego (Asmita) is seen as a primary obstacle for liberation (Kaivalya). But along with theoretical groundwork, Indian texts also reveal some practical applications and techniques to transcendence ego and realize the nature of self (Brahman) which then results in attaining the state of pure awareness. Some of the major techniques that were stated to dissolve ego and realize one’s true self include:

Meditation (Dhyana): this helps in cultivating inner awareness, stillness in mind, and foster insight into the nature of the self beyond Ego. According to the yoga sutras, meditation leads to Samadhi (absorption) where ego dissolves and immense peace develops. Meanwhile, Buddhist teachings emphasize the importance of insight meditation (Vipassana) to increase the awareness of impermanence and non-self (Anatta). Interestingly, the modern psychological approach also emphasizes the importance of meditation while conducting different types of psychological interventions such as Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).

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Knowledge and Self-Inquiry (Jnana Yoga): this technique emphasize the importance of self-enquiry and realizing one's self in its true nature. This starts with realizing the distinction between the ego and the self. This method strongly correlates with the modern therapeutic approach of Rational-emotive behavioral therapy (REBT) due to its primary focus on rational enquiry and transformation of thought patterns.

Detachment (Vairagya): this approach deals with cultivating non-attachment to material possessions, desires and ego-driven identity. It generally develops through a dedicated practice of mindfulness and letting go of temporary possessions. Along with it, there many other techniques such as discipline (Tapas), compassion and loving kindness (Metta and karuna), etc.

Indian texts advocate a multifaceted approach to transcendence the ego and focus on the self-actualization, blending intellectual inquiry, righteous and moral living, meditative practices, and devotion. These practices play an important role in dissolving the ego-identity and enables individual to live a life away from mental and emotional conflict, realizing their true self (Kabat-zinn, 2003).

The Idea of Dharma

dharma plays an important role in literally every Indian school of philosophy; it refers to the individual's way of living in a righteous way considering the moral order and duties. It encompasses all the major dimensions of Individual responsibilities such as personal, social and emotional. In the context of self-actualization addressed in ancient Indian texts, dharma has a significant impact on the consciousness (Chetna) since, it shapes the thoughts and actions of an individual.

Union with Purpose: With proper conduction of one's duties (Dharma), the individual gets clarity in their life. Acting according to the nature of their Dharma, reduces inner conflict and promotes a sense of purpose which aligns with their actions and thoughts of the individual. Hence giving them a sense of self fulfilment, which strongly correlates with the modern concepts of psychoanalytic which emphasize on the reduction of inner conflicts and focusing on the harmony of the 3 components of human mind which are ID (pleasure seeking desires), EGO (balancing ID and Super Ego), Superego (moral and ethical aspects).

Selflessness (Niswarth) and detachment (Vairagya): the mindset of performing duties (Dharma) selflessly, without attaching to the result (Karma Yoga) shifts the individual from ego-driven actions to actions rooted in service. Long term practice of actions without any form of expectations cultivates humility and foster equanimity, as one learns to accept success and failure with composure. This results in the transcendence from the ego-driven identity to the realization of one's true self (Atman).

Dharma provides a framework for understanding one's purpose and meaning in life which aligns with the concept of self-Actualization in modern psychological aspects. The focus of dharma is enriched in the spiritual and cultural aspects of individuals as it acknowledges the importance diverse perspectives and its significance.

The Significance of Mindfulness and Meditation

The significance of mindfulness and meditation has been observed in both ancient and modern concepts of psychology on a very broad level. The Indian texts, particularly the

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Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, discuss the role of mindfulness and meditation in achieving self-actualization in broad details. These texts focus on cultivating the deep level of self-awareness and understanding of the self (Rao, 2011). Frequent practice of mindful practices can lead to increased self-awareness, better emotional regulation and enhanced inner peace which ultimately leads to self-actualization (Kabat-zinn, 2003). Along with it, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali also provides a better framework for mediation and mindfulness, emphasizing the wight limbs of Yoga (AshtangYoga) as the path of self-realization (Taimini, 2011).

The Buddhist texts, particularly the Dhammapada and the Mahayana sutras, extensively emphasize the role of mindfulness and meditation in achieving self-actualization. Texts such as the Satipatthana Sutta, focus on the practice of mindfulness meditation as a means to cultivate self-awareness, detachment and wisdom (Analayo, 2004). The Buddhist concept of self-actualization, often referred to as enlightenment or “Nirvana” is deeply emphasize the importance of mindfulness and meditation for achieving a deeper understanding of oneself and the world.

The analysis of these ancient texts highlights the significance of mindfulness and meditation in attaining self-actualization, revealing that these practices can facilitate a deeper connection with one’s own true self and promote overall well-being. Integrating these concepts in the modern psychological interventions can develop the understanding of one’s thought, emotions and behavior and how it is influenced by the spiritual and cultural aspects of life.

CONCLUSION

This review paper has undertaken an extensive analysis of ancient Indian texts such as the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Dhammapada, Mahayana Sutras, revealing their profound relevance to the concept of self-actualization. With a psychological perspective, we have explored the concepts of mindfulness, meditation, and self-inquiry, as well as the focus on developing values and overcoming ego-based attachments. These ancient wisdom traditions offer valuable insights into the life of human beings, providing a unique perspective on the nature of self and reality.

The convergence of ancient and modern concepts of psychology are getting the focus recently. The focus on mindfulness, self-awareness, and emotional regulation in ancient texts strikes similarities with modern psychological theories of self-actualization. The review of the ancient texts and modern psychological concepts reveals that the work of Maslow, Rogers, and other humanistic psychologists finds similarities in the teachings of the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Buddhist sutras. This convergence shifts the focus on the timeless and universal nature of human consciousness and the quest for self-actualization.

Furthermore, ancient texts offer a distinctive approach on the nature of self and reality. The concept of "non-self" (Anatman) in Buddhism and the emphasis on the interconnectedness of all things (Advaita) in Hinduism challenge modern perception of individualism and separateness. The prime focus of ancient texts is to realize and cultivate the understanding of “The self” which is the true nature or identity of an Individual which is beyond limitations of an ego-based identity. And, the emphasize of these texts of making continuous efforts to realize the true nature of “the self” reveals the important significance of it in the spiritual and cultural aspects in the life of an individual. The statement “Tat Tvam Asi” reveals that the

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self (Atman) is interconnected with the universal consciousness or the ultimate reality which is termed as “the brahman”. The profound concepts mentioned in the ancient texts of India provides extensive framework for modern psychological approaches. These texts discuss in details about complex aspects of human psychology and its impact on the mental, emotional, social and spiritual dimensions.

Along with the theoretical framework, ancient Indian texts also imply practical methods to cultivate detachment from the ego-derived identity and develop a sense of selflessness which will then result in dissolving of ego and experiencing the sense of interconnectedness with the nature or the universal consciousness (brahman). Texts like the Bhagavad Gita, which states different methods to cultivate self-awareness include detachment from the result of our work (Karma Yoga), surrendering to a higher power (Bhakti Yoga), emphasizing on self-inquiry (Jnana Yoga) and mindfulness. While, Yoga Sutras of Patanjali reveals methods like breathing techniques (Pranayama), eight limbs of Yoga and concentrative meditation.

These texts hold a profound importance in the spiritual and cultural aspects of life but along with it, the timeless wisdom and the detailed and unique approach on the human consciousness and its different aspects hold similar importance in the field of psychology. Integrating the teaching of these texts with modern psychology can highly impact our understanding of the complex structure and functioning of human psychology. The study on these concepts can provide a holistic understanding of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of life. By incorporating these texts, modern psychological approaches can become more culturally sensitive, emphasizing the importance of cultural context in shaping human experience. This integration can foster a deeper understanding of human nature, encouraging a more nuanced and empathetic approach to humanistic psychology. This can result in the emergence of new and unique perspectives regarding the concepts of self-actualization, mindfulness-based interventions, etc.

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Conflict of Interest

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