

AN INTRODUCTION TO “INDIAN PSYCHOLOGY”

Divyanshu Dave

Director General

Children's University, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India

E-mail: ddave1811@gmail.com

The purpose of this paper, as suggested by its title, is to introduce “Indian Psychology.” First of all, let us admit that the approach which we call “Indian Psychology” is not prevalent now-a-days. The prevalent psychology, or say, the western psychology, as it is the case, believes that there is nothing like ‘Psychology’ in India. Moreover, it is added that whatever is claimed to be “Indian Psychology” is a web of philosophical ideas and not the psychological one. This is a belief only and shows lack of study about Indian thought. In act, this type of belief has its roots in the passion for opinion and not for knowledge. As a result of the efforts of homogenization of national, cultural and individual identities, the main-stream psychology today is ‘uni-cultureal’. There is no doubt that the human mind, in addition to a culturally variable part, also consists of a common core element. For example, hormonal changes at puberty are common; but how an individual responses to these changes has a socio-cultural aspect. So, while studying the most common core content of the human mind, the uncommon part must also be dealt with. Psychology, as taught today, emphasizes on ‘etic’ part whereas the ‘emic’ is almost avoided. This dominance of Euro-American thought in the field of psychology is understandable but not excusable. Also, the process of homogenization must also face resistance; and the realities of the “Global Era” and resultant awareness of diversities of people and cultures must perform the academic decolonization.

The study of human mind requires a holistic approach. It must be studied from both stand-points viz. “Mind-the knower” and “Mind-the known”. The main stream psychology today admits that mind is the faculty that “Knows” and accepts that “Knower can not be known”. So, the psychology today emphasizes on the study of behavior rather than the study of mind itself. Woodworth, ironically pointed out this dilemma of present psychology: “Psychology first lost its ‘soul’, then its ‘mind’, then it lost consciousness; it still has a behavior of a kind”. This situation has arisen out of their inability to consider the idea of “mind-the known” or say, “knowing the knower”.

In this situation, a new hope, namely Indian Psychology is emerging from the darkness of avoidance, with slow but firm steps.

First of all, let it be clear what is meant by the words “Indian Psychology”. By these words, we do not mean the psychology of Indian people. Neither has it meant the psychology taught at Indian universities. It actually means: “An approach to the study of human mind as developed under the knowledge-tradition of India”. In this meaning the Indian Psychology has five firm pillars namely: 1. Origin. 2. Underlying Philosophy. 3. Conceptual framework. 4. Methods of enquiry and 5. the Technology of Consciousness.

The origin of Indian Psychology is evidently India, the cultural India, truly speaking, the Indian subcontinent. It is well-known and universally accepted fact that India is the birth

place of strong Knowledge tradition. India has been extending her contribution to each and every field of knowledge and practice. In spite of the grand cultural heritage and strong knowledge tradition, surprisingly there was no word like मनोविज्ञान (Mano-Vijnana) in Indian dialectic. This word came into existence in the end of Nineteenth century as a translation of the word "Psychology", when Indian scholars came into contact with their western counter parts. The Indian scholars of that time studied "Psychology" and rejected it saying that this cannot be the science of mind. Because studying the human mind was an age-old practice in Indian knowledge tradition. Although there was no word like मनोविज्ञान it can't be said that there was no study of mind in Indian knowledge tradition. On the contrary, the Indian scholars promptly identified the lacking of 'Psychology' of that time and presented reflections on the aspects of the human mind, untouched by the western psychology. Swami Abhedananda, a direct disciple of Shri Ramakrishna, wrote a book whose title was "True Psychology". Swami Akhilanand a monk of Ramakrishna Order, gave a series of lectures on "Hindu Psychology" in the US which was warmly welcomed by the scholars of eminent universities of the US.

Moreover, Swami Akhilananda delivered another series of lectures on the subject "Mental Health and Hindu Psychology" in which he presented the practical psychiatry based on Hindu psychology and put before the world the theory and practice that evolved during the study of human mind in Indian tradition.

Thus, this approach to study the human mind is indigenous to India and may therefore be framed as "Indian Psychology."

The next thing is the underlying philosophy. There is no surprise that roots of the Indian Psychology lie in Indian Philosophy. Actually speaking, because of India being a spiritual country, each and every discourse in Indian knowledge tradition has an inclination towards spirituality. Here let it be clear that the word spirituality is not used in a narrow sectarian meaning. Rather it is used to show people's basic conviction that the roots of this apparently visible world lie in the non-apparent, non-visible reality that is consciousness.

As the famous dictum "एकं सद् विप्राः बहुधा वदन्ति ।" states, "Truth is one, Scholars represent it in diverse ways." Behind this apparent diversity lies a real unity. This fact is the essence of Indian Spirituality.

The conceptual frame work of Indian Psychology comprises of the fact that 'mind the knower' can be brought under observation and can be known. Actually speaking, Indian Psychology describes 'mind' as an instrument that thinks. Yet this is an instrument which gets activated in the presence of "Atma". Sense-organs are called outer instruments whereas mind is called 'Inner instrument. Furthermore, mind the inner instrument is subdivided into four faculties i.e. Mann (Mind) that receives thoughts from the sensory organs, Buddhi (Intellect) that analyses the condition and reaches up to a decision. Chitt (consciousness) which acts like a storage device for memory and Ahankar (Ego) which takes the process in a self-relative manner and grabs the experience. The sum total of this four is collectively known as "Antah-karan" chatushtaya. (Collection of four).

In another terminology there is a concept of different sheaths or levels of consciousness, viz. Annamay kosha-the gross body or the physical

level, Pranamay Kosha-The ethereal body or the physiological level, Manomay Kosh-the thinking level; Vijnanamay Kosha-the logical level and Anandmay Kosha-the bliss level.

This conceptual framework has been made profound with the texts like Upanishads and Bhagavad Geeta. Moreover, the writings of different thinkers of Indian dialectics and discourses provide a sound basis for this conceptual framework. Altogether, this framework has been proved good enough to provide solutions and explanations to each and every mental situation.

The methods of inquiry comprise of both subjective and objective parts. Also, as we have seen earlier, both ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ approaches are given equal importance. Indian psychology has enough space for both – the internal as well as external observations. The dialectics and discourse developed for this purpose are not only scholarly but also practical.

The technology that is used by the Indian Psychology may be defined as the technology of

consciousness. Patanjali’s Yogsutras describe this technology very well. Also Yogsutras present both the theoretical as well as practical aspects of psychology. They describe how *chit* (चित्) - mind works and how to make it an obedient servant, how to achieve mental health, how to fight stress and anxiety - in short, how to get and maintain mental health. This technology guides an individual to develop a harmonious and balanced personality. It treats different types of people differently. Actually, there is enough space for diverse thinking in Indian system of Psychology. It is totally practical. Anyone can follow the practices given by Patanjali and achieve good mental health and stability of mind.

Thus, a brief account of Indian Psychology is presented herewith. There is ample space and earnest necessity at the same time to put these principles before the world. The world is suffering under the tyranny of homogenization of identities; a break-through is needed.