



# Indian Psychology News

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Volume 1, issue 3

July 2011

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## Editorial ....

Indian psychology does not pertain to only one aspect of human life, nor does it promote a particular perspective or viewpoint. It encompasses human life in its completeness and is inclusive of diverse schools and methodologies of attaining the higher states of being. It integrates material and moral, real and ideal, physical and spiritual to present a comprehensive system of knowledge. In this sense, Indian psychology cannot be deemed as a separate branch of psychology, like industrial, clinical, social or educational psychology. It is a holistic way of thinking about human existence, growth and evolution.

One of the major goals of Indian psychology is to facilitate the movement from ignorance to knowledge — complete knowledge. Both, knowledge about the self (*parā-vidyā*) and knowledge about the world (*aparā-vidyā*) are considered important for attaining true knowledge. Descartes very consciously separated these two, as parts of religion and science. In western educational institutions this separation was the basis of the emergence of modern science and technology, and its present ascent is attributed to its so-called secular credentials. Though, in the last many decades concerns have been raised about science losing its direction, and technology having another side, which is causing havoc for man and environment, and becoming an instrument of self-destruction.

In the Indian system of education, knowledge was never partitioned between science and spirituality, both were considered integral for man's search for truth. Spirituality provided the broad framework within which education about the world was imparted. It was an education with a purpose. This educational system thrived for centuries: Nalanda and Taxila epitomized its success. This kind of education was woven into the fabric of cultural and social life in India. The present educational

system has remained incompatible with the Indian values and ethos, and thus has no roots in the soil. It has remained insulated to its rich spiritual heritage and the decadence we see seems to be a natural outcome of this dissociation.

In this issue of the IP News we have brought up the issue of education. It is a matter of satisfaction that there is a resurgence of interest in integral education. Many innovations and experiments are going on in the country to integrate spirituality in school education by redesigning curriculum and pedagogy. We invite our readers to share such innovations with us. Indian psychology does not only have much to contribute but will also get enriched with these innovations.

Ajit Dalal

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## Education in India

From days immemorial the Indian civilization has put forward the concept of integrality. It knew that a human being is composed of many parts, each with a specific role. It sees our surface consciousness, consisting of our body, feelings and mind, as instruments for acting in this world. But it always acknowledges that deep behind and above this surface consciousness there is a universal consciousness that pervades each and everything in this creation. Each human being carries a spark of this supreme consciousness deep within, the soul, and, this enables the contact with the eternal and infinite consciousness which presides in and over everything. The Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita, express each in their own way aspects of this integral living. These texts show us the integration of spiritual knowledge and world-knowledge. They give us insights for solving the problems of our present day world and indications for a more integral education.

### *Significant elements in Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita*

Vedic psychology is based on the fact that everything in this world is a manifestation of the Supreme. The world is constantly evolving, and life on earth offers a human being again and again the possibility to progress to ever higher levels of perfection. With a greater perfection comes a greater harmony; we become aware of a truth that does not create division. In the Rig Veda there are several narrations of the fight between dark and light forces. We are encouraged to increase the forces of light in us by invoking the highest we can perceive, by allowing our soul to come to the foreground and radiate its light in our daily thoughts, feelings and actions. The Vedas do not shun worldly life; they give us a life-affirming spirituality. They do not enforce spiritual living, they make us aware that integrating spirituality in daily life offers the possibility of a more fulfilled existence.

During the time of the Upanishads our human mind had evolved considerably. In several of the Upanishads the combination of spirituality and intellect is worked out; a process that arose as man became more mentally developed. The Upanishads put forward the concept of integral knowledge — knowledge that is discovered and grasped with the innermost being, the Self, and is expressed through the intellect, the mind. It is through action in the world that we can practice this combination of *vidyā* and *avidyā*, and find a progressive balance for expressing our innermost Self in this world.

The Gita is placed in a crisis situation of human existence. In the Gita the question of the goal of human conduct is addressed. The dialogue of Krishna and Arjuna enlarges this with the question of the meaning of God in the world. It teaches us that life can serve as a many sided opportunity for self-development and self-finding. It is often in a crisis situation that we look for “answers beyond”. The essence of the Gita clarifies yet again that a human being is more than a mind living in a body. The dialogue of Krishna and Arjuna is education par excellence, and evolves around questions like ‘Who am I?’, ‘What is my relation with this world?’, ‘By what part or what considerations shall I let myself be guided in my decisions?’ When Arjuna asks Krishna for a law by which to live, Krishna does not impose a fixed way. He makes Arjuna aware that there is not just one answer, that there is even a higher solution than following a law, but he leaves it to Arjuna to choose. In our modern parlance we could call Krishna a brilliant facilitator invoking maximum human potential. What a difference it would make if we would help students to probe these questions in depth, freely — without compulsion, without presupposition.

### ***Respect and tolerance for the individual***

India’s philosophical foundation is based on the deep inner knowledge that a single underlying Truth manifests itself in various ways and in different forms on multiple levels, each level and occasion having its own truth. The belief at the root of the Indian culture is that each human being can experience this Truth, totally or partly, and that each individual has the ability as well as the freedom to express this in a great variety of forms, according to his disposition, capacities and qualities. This implies that for each individual there are various points of reference in his or her experience of the universe. The deepest inmost quality of a human being is a part and an expression of the supreme consciousness; the inner and outer qualities and capacities of the human personality are some of the myriad forms in which this supreme consciousness expresses itself here on earth. The different sects and religions emphasize each an important aspect of that Oneness and give rules and rituals to adhere to. In India these religions were seen as forms originating from one single spiritual source — the Supreme not bound by the directives of any religion. This provided for a high tolerance towards others and a pluralistic society, and it generated a culture known lauded for its opulence.

### *Integral education*

The composite culture of India could emerge and flourish because of an all-pervasive tolerance. The perennial cosmology of India is integral. In India's past the process of education combined the unfolding of the soul with the expansion of the mental, the affective and the physical domains. It allowed for an individual development in which the whole ladder of consciousness is present—the physical, vital, mental and spiritual parts of the being—each individual starting from his/her own level. It was understood that the human being is marvellously complex and that this process of self-finding and self-perfection has a variety of paths that can be climbed separately or simultaneously. Unfortunately, over the ages this concept of an all-round integral development was disregarded. Though our education policy talks again about learner-centered education, at present so much potential in children and adolescents is wasted by the rigid system of a single textbook for millions of students, regardless of the huge differences in their capacity and environment. If we really want universal and inclusive education for all, it must respect individual differences and provide education that is meaningful for each and every student. This means changing the process of education in such a way that it allows individual choices for an integrated development of body, heart and mind, soul and spirit. In this way education will facilitate and develop a sense of self-worth in each and every child, each and every adolescent, each and every citizen of India.

We live in a time in which the government is introducing changes in the educational system. We will do well to make use of this opportunity to integrate the depth of India's psyche: respecting individual variety and self-discovery through offering a wide diversity in learning material. In this way each student can reach optimum potential through a truly learner-centered education. Concepts of *vidyā* and *avidyā* can be introduced in such a way that they become vibrantly alive in the awareness of the students. Here is just one example: stories are excellent starters. They should be followed by activities that foster assimilation, like drawing, discussion, writing an essay, etc. Similarly, in higher education, short video clips followed by frank open-ended dialogue. If this is done well and with respect for the ideas the students articulate, most of them on their own will then start to explore deeper layers of consciousness; begin asking themselves questions like 'Who am I?', 'What is my relation with this world?'

Life is a continuous process of learning through experience and reflection, ceaselessly sensitizing ourselves to the relations with the other, the world. At present we are living in a world in which values are changing rapidly. Isn't it high time that we create learning environments that facilitate self-observation and reflection, help students to grapple, without imposition, with existential questions? Education holds a key to a more fulfilled tomorrow for us all.

Neeltje Huppes

*Yā kundendu tuṣāra hāra dhavalā yā śubhra vastrāvṛitā  
 Yā vīṇā varadaṇḍa maṇḍitakarā yā śvetapadmāsanā  
 Yā brahmācyuta śankaraprabhṛtibhirdaivaiḥ sadā pūjitā  
 Sā mām pātu sarasvatī bhagavatī niḥśeṣjādyāpahā.*

Fair as a jasmine flower, white as the moon and snow, dressed in white  
 garments,  
 Hands adorned by the graceful veena and staff symbolising boon-giving,  
 seated on a white lotus,  
 Always adored by Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and the other deities,  
 Oh Goddess Saraswati, protect me, you who are the remover of ignorance.

## Education and Indian Psychology

The field of education has benefited immensely from theories, concepts and principles of psychology — be it understanding learners' personality, cognitive processes or pedagogic practices. With increasing acceptance of Indian Psychology, it may be pertinent to understand some of its concepts and examine their implications for the field of education.

Theories of Indian psychology consider each individual as 'unique' with a unique '*svabhāva*' i.e. inner nature in accordance with the nature of the individual soul and '*svadharmā*' i.e. one's inner law of action. The individual is considered to be an essentially positive, conscient being, striving to reach his / her true potential at all levels – physical, social, emotional (vital), mental, higher mental and spiritual, as the Vedāntic *jīva* has been described as a five layered entity comprising *annamayakoṣa* (body) *prāṇamayakoṣa* (life or 'vital'), *manomayakoṣa* (mental), *vijnānamayakoṣa* (supramental) and the *ānandamayakoṣa* (bliss). The ultimate goal of each individual is to find their 'real' self and be one with Brahman.

As the real quest is the quest for the real self, understanding the inner being is important for realizing one's true potential. Pursuit of knowledge leads to the discovery of self, which is a source of liberation. Therefore, knowledge is characterized in terms of modifications, structures and reorganization of the knower or the person engaged in pursuit of knowledge more than changing or controlling the object of knowledge. Knowledge is supposed to transform the whole personality by introducing changes in mental, linguistic and behavioural functioning of a person. Both *vidyā* (knowledge of self) and *avidyā* (knowledge pertaining to material world) are considered essential for the realization of Brahman.

The Indian perspective presents several models for 'knowing'. Individuals are capable of *śravaṇa* (sense driven and literature based learning), *manana* (intellect

guided understanding) and *nididhyāsana* (intuitively obtained realization). Therefore, it recognizes scientific knowledge, reflection, and experiential as well as intuitive knowledge.

These are only a few concepts taken from the realm of Indian psychology, but they have wide-ranging implications for school education. The content of education must strike the right chord with each individual learner, in keeping with their *svabhāva* and *svadharma*. Therefore, school curriculum needs to be broadbased enough to offer ample choice in terms of subjects, syllabus components and method of learning – to help learners identify and choose their life goals and paths in keeping with their true interests. At the primary level especially, schools need to orient learners to a diverse range of activities and tasks as this would help them discover aspects of their inner nature and enable them to identify interests in line with their *svabhāva*. This needs to be accompanied with an unconditional acceptance of each learner (inclusive the choices made by them) as each learner has immense potential for growth and self-realization.

The choice of subjects and organization of syllabus can benefit from understanding the *kośa* theory. The concepts of physical, vital, mental and spiritual self for each individual acknowledges that human beings have tremendous potential for evolution. The school curriculum can incorporate a range of disciplines and tasks addressing the physical, vital, mental and spiritual growth of learners. These could form the basis for classroom methodologies as well as other aspects of curriculum. School curriculum needs to be enriched with multifarious co-curricular activities. These can include physical education, sports, yoga, dance, choreography, music, instrumental and vocal, gardening, drama, movie appreciation, excursions, nature club, environment clubs, social service, quiz, projects, debates, discussions, meditation and many more. To begin with, learners need to participate in most of these. Gradually, they can be asked to choose what they have an affinity with.

Classroom transactions can incorporate games, experience-sharing based on the context of learning, tasks based on critical thinking, reasoning, inferring and synthesis. Reflective practices to help individual learners be in touch with aspects of their inner selves need to be included as well. Since the self is both individual and relational, and coexisting in peace and harmony is one of its potential aspirations, peer group and cooperative learning practices need to be incorporated along with reflective practices such as maintaining diaries and journals, individualized learning with the help of mind maps, concept maps, tutorials and mentoring systems.

Practices that help to get in touch with aspects of their self need to be adopted. This could begin with playful concentration exercises, experiencing silences and sounds and gradually moving to meditation exercises. Young learners may be initiated into self-observation — to begin with at the physical/ vital levels; gradually

this can lead to a mental stepping back as well. This would help learners to become self-contained individuals, ready to embark on a journey within themselves.

Education viewed from the prism of Indian psychology can have a far reaching impact on the society by promoting mental health, harmony, happiness and satisfaction.

Jyoti Kohli

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## Indian psychology workshop — A report

An 8-days intensive Indian Psychology workshop was held at Puducherry from June 5th-12th, 2011. The group comprised of 31 participants who varied in age, backgrounds, professions, etc., and came with an intrigue about understanding their own inner workings, about Indian psychology as a subject, and about its applicability in their field of work. The workshop aimed not just at information transfer but at stimulating the participants' inner journeys. The orientation and endeavour of the workshop was closely connected to the free-progress approach. This approach upholds that nothing can be taught; that the development of each individual progresses in its own unique manner, pace and direction; and that learning proceeds from near (known) to far (unknown). The need and desire to learn is inherent, which enables each participant to absorb the learnings from the workshop in different ways, and to different extents, depending on where each participant is in his/her journey;

A non-threatening, non-judgmental atmosphere was the hallmark of this workshop. This encouraged a free, open exploration by the participants of the areas in which each one wanted to work as part of the individual projects they had to undertake. These projects were chosen by the participants to help them delve inside to get a feel of their inner workings, and to be able to apply and integrate the learning during the classes and the several exercises engaged in during the course, to help one become aware of one's consciousness. The workshop gently steered the participants to look inside, to realize that one's subject and the laboratory are essentially within oneself, and that true learning proceeds as one begins to keenly grasp the finer nuances of one's inner workings, which essentially is the true spirit of Indian psychology... that of knowing oneself.



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### The Animal School

Once upon a time, the animals decided they must do something heroic to meet the problems of “a new world.” So they organized a school.

They adopted an activity curriculum consisting of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, and encourage an “all round development” all the animals took all the subjects.

The duck was excellent in swimming, in fact better than his instructor, but he made only passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to stay after school and also drop swimming in order to practice running. This was kept up until his webbed feet were badly worn and he was only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in school, so nobody worried about that except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of the class in running, but had a nervous breakdown because of so much make-up work in swimming and attempts at flying almost cost him his life.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing until he developed frustration in the flying class where his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He also developed a problem from overexertion and then got a C in climbing and a D in running.

Does this fable have a moral?