



Indian Psychology Institute

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NEW!

Foundations of Indian Psychology

R. M. Matthijs Cornelissen, Girishwar Misra & Suneet Varma (eds.)
Two volumes, 39 chapters. Longman (pub.)

UPCOMING EVENTS

5-7 February 2011

National Conference on Indian Psychology: Psychology, Culture and the Ideal of Human Unity

Dept. of Psychology (DU) & India International Centre, New-Delhi

16-22 March 2011

Teaching Indian Psychology: A collaborative workshop

Indian Psychology Institute (Puducherry)

8-day Intensive 5-12 June 2011 plus
4 weekends from July to December

Semester course Indian Psychology

Indian Psychology Institute (Puducherry / Delhi)

For further information: <http://ipi.org.in>



Indian Psychology News

Volume 1, issue 1

January 2011

Editorial

It is a matter of pleasure for us to release the first issue of Indian Psychology News. Such a newsletter was long overdue in the field of Indian psychology to keep academics and professionals informed about the developments in the field. We are happy that at Indian Psychology Institute we could take an initiative in this direction. We are sure that this Newsletter will grow with time as an organic instrument in the promotion of Indian psychology. Presently it will be an eight-page quarterly Newsletter, with a possibility of increasing its volume and frequency in future.

Indian psychology has been rapidly expanding in recent years as an independent field of knowledge. With its distinct approach, theories and methods of inquiry, Indian psychology is emerging as an alternative to existing Euro-American model of scientific psychology. Western psychology has dominated Indian academia for almost a century, though salutary contributions were made during this period building on indigenous knowledge. It could be a cumulative result of these efforts that in the last one decade there has been a spurt of interest and activities to learn from the ancient Indian heritage. This is evident in a large volume of research publications, including books, conferences and symposia, and teaching and training programmes in different domains of Indian psychology. As a psychology of human transformation and growth rooted in the age-old tradition of yoga and meditation, the emerging discipline of Indian psychology is redefining itself in modern times. Its contours and content field are still shaping up. Through this newsletter we are trying to reach all those who are employ-

*asato mā sad gamaya
tamaso mā jyotir gamaya
mṛtyor māmṛtaṁ gamaya*

From the unreal lead me to the real
From darkness lead me to light
From death lead me to immortality

ing Indian theories and concepts in research, teaching and practice, and thereby, participants in shaping the future of this new psychology of the Indian origin.

It will not be misplaced to state that Indian psychology is going through a critical phase of its growth. There are many choice points, diverse views and visions leading to alternative pathways that Indian psychology can possibly take. Again, the dominant socio-political ethos plays an important role in the shaping of a discipline. What directions Indian psychology will take in the coming years is anybody's guess.

This Newsletter aims to serve as a forum to keep ourselves updated about the major developments, events and activities within the field of Indian Psychology. This forum intends to augment exchange of views, ideas and insights, and dialogue and debate about the issues of concern to the larger psychology fraternity. The purpose is to communicate and interact through this newsletter and thereby connect with the larger movement of contemporizing an ancient science.

The first issue of the Indian Psychology News coincides with a major publication, *Foundations of Indian Psychology*, in two volumes. In this issue we are bringing out the details about the contents of these two volumes and excerpts from the introductory chapter of the first volume about 'What do we mean by Indian psychology?'

In this Newsletter we intend to publish short articles, book reviews, announcements about academic events, training programmes, research projects and opportunities for higher education in Indian psychology. Interested persons can write to mail@ipi.org.in for a copy of the Indian Psychology News.

Ajit Dalal

The Indian Psychology Institute

The Indian Psychology Institute (IPI) was established in 2006 with the specific purpose of bringing to the fore the concepts, theories and practices from Indian psychology and incorporating them into academics and the professional practice of psychology. The endeavour is to delineate the theoretical models, specific insights and objective and reliable methods from the Indian traditions and explore their viability in contributing to modern psychology in terms of research, teaching and practice.

Located in Puducherry in the ambience of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, IPI endeavours to work towards effective integration of science and spirituality, and of the intellectual traditions of the East and the West. IPI is set up to address the human quest for growth and transcendence, and to engage with human suffering through the wealth of Indian psychological knowledge.

Foundations of Indian Psychology

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Volume 1: Concepts and Theories

Section 1: The social and philosophical context

- K. Ramakrishna Rao* — Indian psychology: Implications and applications
- Ajit K. Dalal* — A journey back to the roots: Psychology in India
- R. L. Kashyap* — Psychological ideas in the Vedas and their relevance to contemporary psychology
- Vladimir Iatsenko* — On the Vedic symbolism in the light of Sri Aurobindo
- Kundan Singh* — Beyond mind: The future of psychology as a science
- John Pickering* — Indian psychological thought in the age of globalization

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Volume 2: Practical Applications

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- K. M. Tripathi* — Concept and scope of *pratyahara* in management of mental health

Section 2: Education

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by yoga and meditation actually does lead to greater social effectiveness and life-satisfaction. An anecdotal but undoubtedly historical support for this comes, besides, in the form of the life of the Buddha, a living example of selflessness, and yet, one of the most influential individuals who ever lived.

Regarding the need to overcome the first impressions our senses give us, this is of course quite common in modern science. In the beginning of the modern, scientific era, the sense-impression of a “rising sun” was discarded in favour of a model in which the earth turns around its axis. Quantum mechanics does not fit in our ordinary sense-based view of reality at all. Such things are accepted because they can still be processed mathematically and used technologically. In a similar way, yoga and meditation have led to insights that are hard to grasp for the ordinary sense-based mind—for example “pure consciousness”, or the presence of “the Divine” as our deepest identity—but they can be made real experientially, and then they have a perfectly concrete, beneficial effect on our psychological existence.

Though the beneficial effects of yoga and meditation on our subjective sense of well-being have been shown to exist in numerous researches, they may still not be the most important contribution of the Indian tradition to psychology as a science. The most interesting might well turn out to be what the Indian tradition can contribute in terms of detailed, incisive and reliable psychological knowledge. For we should not forget that the ancient *rishis* were not only seeking “*ananda*”; they were also seeking to overcome ignorance; they wanted true, undistorted knowledge. And real knowledge meant for them knowledge of the self, and the reason for this inward look is clear: everything we know or do, we achieve through our own nature. If our own nature is weak or distorted, everything we know or do will be tarnished by our weaknesses and distortions. So the first necessity is to clean up, to purify and to get to know our own nature as thoroughly as we can. And this is exactly what *jnana* and *purna* yoga are about: *to purify the inner instrument of knowledge* so that it can provide undistorted truth about reality as it really is. If this purification and transformation are extended to the inner instruments of action, this will automatically lead to action which is less ego-based and more in harmony with the whole.

Given the treasures of psychological knowledge one can find in ancient scriptures like the *Rig Veda*, the *Upanishads*, and in the works of modern yogis like Sri Aurobindo, it would be a great loss for humanity if modern Psychology chose to ignore this contribution. For the *rishis* developed something which mainstream psychology did not: a rigorous and effective method to develop detailed and reliable knowledge of the subjective domain. And this might well be the one thing humanity is presently most in need of.

the rishis developed something which mainstream psychology did not: a rigorous and effective method to develop detailed and reliable knowledge of the subjective domain.

IPI is active in varied areas of Indian psychology, such as designing and conducting courses, seminars, conferences, workshops, research projects and training programmes for teachers, students and the general public. It has been working towards compiling specialised articles and textual material as textbooks, and towards the dissemination of information and other related resource material through the IPI website. The Institute networks with other related organisations and people working in the field and maintains a database of available textual material. IPI is deeply involved in yoga, and uses it for the study of IP related ideas and concepts, for the exploration of levels of consciousness and their inter-relations, for research on IP processes and their dynamics, and in the application of IP in working on oneself and with others, on the individual level as well as in groups.

The significance of the lotus is not to be found by analysing the secrets of the mud from which it grows here; its secret is to be found in the heavenly archetype of the lotus that blooms for ever in the Light above ...

[Y]ou must know the whole before you can know the part and the highest before you can truly understand the lowest. That is the promise of the greater psychology awaiting its hour ...

— Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, p.1609

What do mean by Indian psychology?

The Introduction to *Foundations of Indian Psychology* explains the term Indian Psychology as follows:

By Indian psychology we mean an approach to psychology that is based on ideas and practices that developed over thousands of years within the Indian sub-continent. In other words, we use the word ‘Indian’ to indicate and honour the origin of this approach to psychology—the *origin* of the underlying philosophy, the conceptual framework, the methods of enquiry, and the technology of consciousness that it uses to bring about psychological change and transformation. It may be useful to make explicit that we do not use the word ‘Indian’ to localize or limit the scope of this approach to psychology; we do not mean, for example, ‘the psychology of the Indian people’, or ‘psychology as taught at Indian universities’. Indian Psychology is also not about the past, but about the present and the future. Indian

psychology is about how ideas and practices from the Indian tradition can be used to tackle issues in contemporary psychology and constructively inform its disciplinary practice by helping with theory building and application. We hold that Indian psychology as a meta-theory and as an extensive body of related theories and practices has something essential and unique to contribute to the global civilization as a whole.

We do not look at Indian psychology as something that belongs only to India or the past, but as a rich source of psychological insight and know-how that can be utilised to create a better future for the whole of humanity.

What is it that the Indian civilization can contribute to psychology?

The most important contribution which the Indian tradition can make to psychology, and with that to our proud global civilization, may well be something that is utterly simple in its basic principle, but at the same time, surprisingly far-reaching in its consequences: its basic method of enquiry.

When modern psychology discovered in the beginning of the 20th century that introspection was not a very reliable method of enquiry, it did not discover anything new. The Indian civilization had discovered this thousands of years ago. What was different however, was how modernity reacted to this discovery. It is good to stand still for some time at what happened, for the consequences have been far-reaching and by and large negative. Modern psychology escaped from the problem by re-defining psychology as the science of behaviour. Initially this must have seemed a splendid idea and the whole field fell for it with a stunning degree of unanimity: psychology suddenly became a real science, purely objective, third-person, dealing in undisputable facts. It took remarkably long before it began to dawn at what cost all this had come: By focusing exclusively on outer behaviour, almost everything that really matters to people had disappeared from view. And so, as a result, truth, love, joy, beauty, even meaning itself, all got an air of being intangible, unsubstantial -- and here comes the hitch for psychology as a science -- difficult to research. As behaviour was easier to study in small animals than in people, cognitive behaviour was in the fifties mainly studied in rats and pigeons. These "laboratory animals" were first starved and then taught random behaviour with the help of rewards in the form of food-pellets. And now came the real problem: the results of these animal studies were happily applied to human education, and so we have now children who are taught what at least to them appears as random facts, with the help of marks and degrees. And once children are systematically trained to do anything whatsoever as long as it produces high marks, is it surprising that we end up with 'grown-ups' who are willing to do anything as long as it produces money? So a relatively innocent looking choice regarding scientific methodology at the beginning of last century

seems to have led to one of the most serious problems our global civilization is presently facing: an ever-growing epidemic of corruption and money-mindedness.

It is obviously difficult to prove the link, and one may well argue that modern psychology is not anymore about "rats and stats". We have now the well-established quantitative methodology of statistically processed surveys, more recently the promise of qualitative, narrative analysis, and a growing awareness of how knowledge gets socially constructed. But none of this goes deep enough. Good science goes below the surface, but these approaches don't allow that to happen. The statistical surveys are limited to what representative populations of large numbers of lay people can report about themselves; the narrative analysis cannot go beyond what concerned lay people already happen to know. Both have their use, no doubt, but the first cannot deliver more than a kind of sophisticated psycho-social geography, the second will find it difficult to rise beyond high quality journalism.

In case it is not clear whether this harsh criticism of mainstream psychology is justified, it may help to consider what would have happened to astronomy if it would have followed the path taken by psychology. What if astronomy had limited itself to quantitative analysis of what large, representative populations of lay people see in the evening sky? It is clear that what people see is informed by their culture, it is also clear that one single "qualitative" interview with a farmer living high in the mountains gives better information about the stars than a large study of people living in the plains. But still, the real road ahead for astronomy was to forget about all this, and ensure that a few highly trained professionals could make use of the most powerful and reliable pieces of equipment available.

What would have happened to astronomy if it had limited itself to quantitative analysis of what large, representative populations of lay people see in the evening sky?

Interestingly, this is exactly what the Indian tradition has done in the field of psychology. The ancient *rishis* and *yogis* realized, like their modern counterparts, that what ordinary people know about themselves is not worth much, but they did not shy away from the problem. Instead they analysed the causes for this human incapacity and then they set to work on methods to overcome these defects. They found that the two main problems were egoism, and a too naive reliance on what the senses make us believe. Regarding the former, they found that the egoism expressed itself through desires, preferences and the natural "vested interests" we all have in the outcome of our self-observations. All such factors lead in their own way to distortions. What is more interesting is that they found that it is actually possible to remove these obstacles, and that this not only leads to greater clarity of thought, but also to a remarkable type of unconditional inner joy and effectiveness in action. The latter may be a surprise to those who have been brought up on the virtues of "ego-strength", but there is convincing scientific evidence that the detachment furthered