



# Indian Psychology News

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## Editorial ....

With greater acceptance of IP as a legitimate field of study within academic psychology, the question which is paramount now is 'how to teach IP?' What should be a pedagogy which would be compatible with its subject matter and teaching objectives? People even ask why the pedagogy of teaching IP should be different from that of teaching other subject-fields in psychology? In its growth as an alternative human science IP has to address these questions.

For almost hundred years, psychology in India was dominated by the positivist-empiricist approach in which the emphasis was on objectivity and empirical data. The science of psychology was built on scientific methods borrowed from physical sciences. The subject matter of psychology was observable behaviour that could be verified and validated through these scientific methods. Tests and experiments became the most trusted tools of studying human beings. Use of these methods created a psychology of the other person, in which a person could be studied the same way as a rock in a physics laboratory.

As a science of human consciousness IP deals with the inner, experiential world of human beings. It primarily deals with the first person account not only of emotions, motives, aspirations and thinking, but also that of transcendental experiences. To access these inner states and experiences different methodologies and approaches are needed. Yoga as a method has been used for centuries to study mind and consciousness. Many new reflective methods have developed in recent times (like cooperative inquiry). This gives a different texture and content to the emerging discipline, focusing both on the transformative and universal nature of the human being.

IP is growing in strength as more institutions and universities are offering courses on this and related areas. There is now a substantial body of literature which can form

the basis of developing a course-curriculum for teaching IP at undergraduate, post-graduate and professional levels. Since IP is concerned with self-growth, observation of inner states, dealing with emotions and mental processes, self-reflection and other such topics, it cannot be taught like any other subject. Its pedagogy needs to focus more on personal experiences, self-observation and life narratives, than on imparting theoretical knowledge about others. This understanding of one's inner world can be subjective, logical and intuitive. Such a shift in emphasis throws up many new challenges for IP which deserve the attention of teachers in this area.

There is a growing need to address these issues by opening a dialogue through workshops and consultation meetings at various levels, at various forums with teachers, practitioners and students. There can be no best way to teach IP, nor can the issue of teaching IP be dissociated from the learner-teacher matrix. We have to learn from our experience of engaging in teaching IP, reflect on our own motives and preferences, and feedback from the students. We need to get actively involved in the process of learning and teaching. The growth of IP is contingent on arousing interest in the young generation and finding creative ways of dealing with its subject matter.

Ajit Dalal

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## Report on Workshop on 'Teaching Indian Psychology' <sup>1</sup>

The Indian Psychology Institute (IPI) based in Puducherry organised a six-day collaborative Workshop on 'Teaching Indian Psychology' from 17 to 22 March, 2011. The first such workshop, it was primarily addressed to teaching IP in the academic context. Consequently, most of those present were involved in academic teaching and/ or research in IP; the others were professionals using IP in counselling, health, education, organisational management, etc. The 16 carefully selected participants represented a cross-section of ages and together with the 5 resource persons, were drawn from diverse institutes and universities.

The central concern behind this workshop was that teaching IP entails much more than mere transfer of information — an inner engagement is imperative, for both teacher and student. Since the primary concern of IP is the inner transformation of the individual, the teaching process should seek to touch something within, lead to self-observation and self-reflection. In contrast to Western psychology, which is from beginning to end third-person, IP begins with oneself and involves the other only on a solid basis of personal experience.

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1 For further details, see the web-page: <http://ipi.org.in/second/teaching-ip.php>.

Example is the best teacher, and the manner in which the workshop was conducted was itself a lesson in how to engage. Though there was a variety of stimulating new content, the emphasis was on providing space for reflection, for going within. This was done primarily through exercises and projects involving individual exploration and group interaction, and focussed discussions around 'sample classes'. The atmosphere during the workshop was characterised by 'soft' features, such as a non-judgemental attitude, the acceptance of persons with contrary views, the encouragement of frank exchange. This touched the participants, provided them a space in which they could express themselves freely, in which many of their inner restraints could loosen. The significance of attitude was underlined by the participants' responses to a reflection exercise on "the teacher who made the greatest difference for me". Invariably the answers had to do with their teacher's personality, their being someone who 'makes me come home'. In this context it was observed that Krishna in the Gita exemplified the best possible teacher. A teacher should help the awakening of that which needs to be awakened most, the inner teacher.

This was followed by a reflection exercise on "what I need to change in myself to teach IP" and by group work on the IP syllabus. The snowballing-type exercises, which started from individual reflections and moved to progressively larger groups brought out the meaningfulness of multiple answers to single questions.

One of the exercises for going within provided a simple and effective way for locating one's consciousness in different places in the body, e.g., when concentrating on a mental problem the consciousness tends to be found behind the forehead, while during feelings of love or compassion it tends to be found in the heart region. It was observed that awareness of the place of one's consciousness, and the ability to change its location at will could well be taught to children in school.

The participants' "mini-projects" offered another substantial method to increase individual engagement. They provided an exploratory space for integrating self-observation and self-development, with theory. Some participants had been thinking about their topics before the workshop, and an awareness of the factors behind their choice was found to be "like a door into yourself". These little journeys were shared during the oral presentations towards the end of the workshop and in their written reports. The range of topics chosen was itself a revelation: love, death, humour, fear and anxiety, all in the light of IP. Some were directly spiritual, such as personal meanings of Shiva or the significance of yajna, while one was a very personal exploration of "my life's mission statement". Others explored the application of consciousness exercises and calming techniques for education, counselling and therapy, while yet others' explorations were on perception and on moving from consumerism to contributorship.

The sessions by the resource people stimulated all those present with their variety and

depth of insight. The two non-university scholars, Devdip Ganguli and Sampadanand Misra, introduced certain aspects of Karma Yoga, the Upanishads and the Gita.

'Sample classes' were given by the three senior teachers, professors of psychology, Kiran Kumar Salagame, Ajit K. Dalal and Suneet Verma, from Mysore, Allahabad and Delhi Universities, respectively. The one by Suneet included a documentary on Kabir and since it happened to be the day of the Holi festival, he spoke about the significance of colour in folk spirituality. The sessions by Kiran and Ajit, on the self and the unconscious respectively, were focussed more on a penetrative clarification of concepts. They led to a lively discussion on methodology and pedagogy. The main facilitators from IPI, Dr. Matthijs Cornelissen and Neeltje Huppel provided an insight in the 'multiformity' of IP and its teaching methods. They were also responsible for the conduct of the exercises, the projects, and the workshop in general.

A wide variety of resources related to teaching IP have been posted on the IPI website (see <http://ipi.org.in/second/teaching-ip.php>). This web-page provides details of IP courses and syllabuses at various universities/ institutions, recommended reading lists, and a section on suitable research methodologies. The hope was expressed that this would lead to a workshop on research in IP in the near future, since IP is not just about ancient wisdom, but about the development of a living and growing science.

Sanjay Kumar

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## Concept of *ahamkāra*

In the Indian traditions the term *ahamkāra* is used in two different contexts. In Sāṃkhya *darśana*, it is considered as a *tattva* (principle) derived from the interaction of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* in the process of evolution from which both cosmological and psychological phenomena occur. In this sense this concept is very abstract and difficult to comprehend from ordinary consciousness level. On the other hand, it is also used to represent a function of the mind in all the six *darśanas*. It is in the latter sense the term *ahamkāra* is discussed here.

*Ahamkāra* is derived from the word *aham*. *Aham* in Sanskrit simply means "I- feeling" as in the question 'who am I' (*koham*) or self-sense in the language of contemporary psychology. In this fundamental sense, the term *aham* can be used as a prefix to indicate with what we identify and consider ourselves to be. Usually we identify with body, age, gender, caste, religion, nationality, race, psychological traits, social positions, organizations, and so on. That gives us a sense of identity. A British psy-

chologist termed it as “belonging identity” (Curle, 1972)<sup>2</sup>. It is identity in terms of what belongs to us and what we belong to. Much of the discussions on *ahamkāra* in Indian thought relates to this aspect and how erroneous it is to locate our identity in terms of bio-psycho-social aspects.

A question that may arise is if that is erroneous, then what else is there to identify with. For this the answer is that there is a transcendental state of pure Consciousness, (uppercase is used to indicate the transcendental quality) which is the ground of all our experiences in waking, dream and deep sleep, which is the ‘true Self or identity’. It is called *ātman*. Curle has termed it as “awareness identity” rooted in “supraliminal awareness”, as distinguished from “awareness identity” rooted in “psychological awareness” enhanced by psychotherapy.

From Indian psychological perspective we can have our *aham* (I-feeling or self-sense) defined primarily with three different aspects of human existence viz., *deha* (body), *jīva* (soul), and *ātman*. Experiencing oneself as *deha* and *jīva* are regarded as belonging identity and experiencing oneself as *ātman* is regarded as awareness identity. One is expected to shift the locus of one’s identity from *deha* and *jīva* to *ātman*. That is *ātma sakshatkara* (Self-realization). It involves a process of de-identification and re-identification. These ideas are very well elaborated by Adi Shankaracharya in *Vivekachudamani* and in *Nirvana Shatka* or *Atma Shatka*.

Elucidation of the nature and function of *ahamkāra* can be found in the *ślokas* related to *Anthakarana*, *Aham-Padārtha-Nirupana*, and *Ahamkāra Nindā* of *Vivekachudamani*. The term *antaḥkaraṇa* is usually translated as ‘internal organ’. It is used in contrast to *bāhyakaraṇa*, external sensory and motor organs. This internal organ is nothing but mind and this usage corresponds to psychoanalytic concept of psychical apparatus. In *śloka* 103 Shankara states that *antaḥkaraṇa* dwells in the sensory and motor organs and in the body as *aham* with *abhimāna* in the reflected brightness of *ātman*. *Śloka* 104 states that is to be understood as *ahamkāra*, which due to *abhimāna* (identification) becomes *kartā* (doer) and *bhoktā* (enjoyer) and also due to its association with *sattva* and other *guṇas* will have *avasthatraya* (three states viz., waking, dream and sleep states). It is made clear that *ahamkāra* experiences happiness and sadness in relation to favourable and unfavourable circumstances and therefore *sukha* (happiness) and *duḥkha* (sorrow) are its *dharma* (features) and not of *ātman* which is *sadānanda* (forever bliss) (Salagame, 2011)<sup>3</sup>.

Shankara further makes a distinction between *ahamkāra* and *aham-padārtha* (VC

2 Curle, A. (1972). *Mystics and militants: A study of awareness, identity and social action*. London: Tavistock Publications.

3 Salagame, K.K.K. (2011). Ego and *ahamkāra*: Self and identity in modern psychology and Indian thought. In M. Cornelissen, G. Misra, & S. Varma (Eds.). *Foundations of Indian Psychology: Concepts and theories*. Delhi: Pearson.

*ślokas* 292-296). He equates *aham-padārtha* with *ātman* and elucidates it as the self-sense which remains even in deep sleep and which is the witness even for *ahamkāra* and other functions. Therefore, he exhorts to give up *abhimāna* (identification) with *māmsapinda* (body made of flesh) as well as with that *ahamkāra* which has *dehābhimāna* (bodily identification) and is fashioned out of *mūḍha buddhi* (dull intellect). Further, Shankara exhorts to give up *abhimāna* with *kula* (caste), *gotra* (clan), *nāma* (name), *rupa* (form) and *āśrama* (stage of life), which are dependent on the “living corpse” (*ardrashava ashriteshu*). He also exhorts to give up *abhimāna* with the doer and enjoyer of the *linga śarīra* (subtle body). Thus, in modern psychological terms, Shankara is exhorting to give up the sense of identity with bio-psycho-social and even so called subtle aspects of human nature, all of which constitutes *ahamkāra*, in order to realize *ātman* and attain *śānti* and to be *akhaṇḍānanda*, inseparable bliss, itself. Thus, it appears that *abhimāna* is the essence of *ahamkāra* (Salagame, 2011).

According to Upanishads and Vedanta all human problems begin when this non-essential factor adds its influence in our life. Therefore, *ahamkāra* is considered bad and we find many *ślokas* denigrating *ahamkāra* (*ahamkāra nindā*) (14 as against 3 describing its nature) in *Vivekachudamani*. *Ahamkāra* is looked down upon with the following metaphors and descriptions (*ślokas* 297-310): It is *vikāra*, *duṣṭa*, *rāhu*, powerful wild serpent, residue of poison in the body even after it is purged from a body, a thorn in the throat of a person taking food, an enemy to be slayed with the sword of *vijnāna*, and fashioned out of *mūḍha buddhi* (dull intellect). Even after it is completely rooted out, if it is thought left for a while, it sprouts hundreds of *vṛttis* (mental modes, movements, and disturbances). Even after it is completely controlled, it should not be given scope through sense objects. If it is given, it is like watering a withering lemon plant that will come into life (Salagame, 2011).

How can *ahamkāra* be a non-essential factor? Swami Rama has illustrated this with a very good example. He says we see or experience a rose, it is not necessary that we are conscious of it at that moment. There need not be that self-sense in the foreground. However, when we say “I saw a rose”, *ahamkāra* has appropriated that experience leading to the sense of *karta* and *bhokta*. In other words, in life we can have experiences, positive or negative, without identifying ourselves with them. This is non-attachment that Bhagavad Gita is teaching. In this sense *ahamkāra* is a non-essential factor. Then the question comes how do we practice?

Shankaracharya’s *Nirvāna Shatka* also called as *Ātma Shatka*, in six verses, provides one systematic way of de-identifying our I-feeling from bio-psycho-social aspects and re-identifying with *ātman*, through chanting them regularly. It is a type of verbal de-conditioning which begins with overt repetition of the verses, which negates one’s identity with all that one usually identifies with. If one can eventually internalize these ideas and this negation gets habituated it can become a covert process of de-identification. The ending of each verse is “*śivānandarupahśivoham, śivoham*”. This is

the process of reaffirming one's true identity as that transcendental consciousness, which is auspicious (*śiva*), which is *ānanda* (bliss). This is re-identification.

Some empirical studies conducted using a questionnaire developed to measure the construct *ahamkāra* and differentiate it from the concept of 'ego-functions' of psychoanalysis support the observations made by Adi Shankaracharya that *abhimāna* is the essence of *ahamkāra*. It is possible to use this concept in understanding normal and abnormal behaviour and can be used in counselling and psychotherapy.

S. K. Kiran Kumar

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## Report on Individual & collective transformation: Delhi conference on IP

A national conference on "Individual and Collective Transformation: Insights from Indian Psychology" (February 5-7, 2011) was organized by the Department of Psychology, University of Delhi in collaboration with the India International Centre, New Delhi. The conference focused on themes such as Indian perspectives on individual and collective growth and transformation; Integral Yoga and individual and collective transformation; the ideal of human unity; spirituality and organizational management, development and transformation; spirituality and transformational leadership; peace education; Buddhist/Jain/Sikh/Sufi/Christian perspectives on transformation; folk healing practices; spirituality and health; and synthesis of matter and spirit, as well as science and spirituality. The event was attended in large numbers both by faculty members teaching and pursuing research in the area of Indian Psychology, and by students who displayed great interest through paper presentations and participation, hailing from Delhi as well as other parts of the country.

During the conference, active deliberations were carried out on applications of Indian Psychology to contemporary life, as well as on-going research in this area. The conference was inaugurated by Dr. Karan Singh, who spoke on the immense potential of Indian Psychology towards the making of a holistic and complete psychology. At the end of his Inaugural Address Dr. Karan Singh released the two volumes of Foundations of Indian Psychology (Editors R. M. Matthijs Cornelissen, Girishwar Misra, and Suneet Varma), recently published by Pearson Education. Amongst the prominent individuals who have contributed to research and knowledge-generation in the area of Indian Psychology, and who addressed the gathering were Prof. K. Ramakrishna Rao, Prof. Anand Paranjpe, Prof. Max Velmans, Prof. Girishwar Misra, and Dr. Matthijs Cornelissen.

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### **The road not taken**

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveller, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost