



Consciousness and the human mind: An inquiry into Indian psychological thought

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Abstract

This study is focused on the exploration of the concept of human mind in terms of Indian psychological theories, especially concerning the difference between the human mind and consciousness. In addition, this paper considers the possibility of overcoming an egocentric paradigm of mind and developing a more complex view on concepts related to the self.

This study is based on a qualitative and interpretative research design grounded on the conceptual analysis, comparative approach and the interpretation of some classical texts including, *Patañjali's Yogasūtra*, *Bhagavad Gītā* and recent scholarly literature. Main concepts under consideration are: multi-level model of the human mind, the essence of consciousness, role of ego, and ways of mind regulation.

This study reveals that Indian psychology provides a multi-level model of human mind that separates mental processes from witnessing aspect that is consciousness. Moreover, Indian psychologists view ego as a limited construct, emphasizing the necessity of ethical action along with disciplined practices in order to achieve mental balance and coherence, demonstrating the interrelated nature of various aspects such as emotional, experiential or cognitive.

It is concluded that Indian psychological approaches contribute significantly to the development of a holistic and comprehensive framework for comprehending the functioning of human mind and also provide basis for developing an integrative paradigm of studying psychological phenomena along with substantial significance in current debates about mental well-being and human development.

Keywords: Indian psychology, Consciousness, Human mind, Selfhood, Mental regulation, Indian knowledge systems

1. Introduction

▪ Background of modern psychological thought

As a discipline, psychology, particularly Western psychology, has developed significantly from the observation and understanding of human behavior, thoughts, and identity. Classical psychologists like Sigmund Freud have stressed on the importance of the influence of unconscious motivations and internal conflict in shaping human behavior. Cognitive and humanistic perspectives on human behavior have also been important in defining human identity. Although important, both psychoanalytic and certain humanistic approaches have, at times, been interpreted as engaging with ego-centered models of identity, although they also include perspectives that go beyond such frameworks.

In addition to the psychoanalytic and humanistic traditions, psychology has also been strongly influenced by the emergence of behavioral studies in the twentieth century as part of the process of developing empirical psychological science. Behaviorists like B.F. Skinner have stressed on the need to understand objective aspects of human behavior through scientific study rather than personal experience. Behavioral analysis is crucial to establishing empirical methodology in psychology akin to other sciences.

Following this, the emergence of the cognitive revolution has led to an increase in focus on internal processes, including perception, memory, reasoning, and problem solving. With the introduction of models for information processing, the concept of human cognition was further extended to incorporate an understanding of the human mind. Although this advancement increased our insight into the working of the mind, also many early models of cognition relied on computational analogies, with the mind being likened to machinery at times, but advancements have moved past this approach.

Furthermore, there have been several psychological models, such as those relating to positive psychology, and therapy, which have attempted to address themes such as happiness and resilience. The inclusion of these aspects indicates that psychologists are increasingly cognizant of the significance of the subjective experience of meaning in life. Nevertheless, even within these new theoretical frameworks, the self is often seen as a fairly coherent concept in many psychological theories, although other approaches are possible.

To summarize, despite the diversification of approaches used in contemporary psychological studies and theories, it can be concluded that they remain paradigmatically based on issues associated with personal experience and adaptive mechanisms.

Despite all the progress that has been achieved through this methodological approach, it also shows certain shortcomings.

▪ **Limitations of ego-centered models**

However, despite these theories being immensely beneficial to psychology, they might, in certain instances, give priority to the tangible and practical components of psychological functions rather than the transcendent levels of existence like cognitive thinking, emotional regulation, and behavioral responses. Moreover, ego-based theories, to some extent, do not focus much on transcendence, which deals with higher planes of consciousness. Therefore, psychological health becomes associated with adaptation, functioning, and other notions that do not take into account a person's ability to transform himself or herself.

Another disadvantage associated with ego-centered models is the fragmentation of human experience into separate psychological functions. For example, dividing the human mind into thinking, feeling, and behaving does not reveal the integral nature of human beings. Instead, it results in studying particular aspects of psychological processes in isolation rather than within the context of a person's entire life.

Moreover, in many cases, the criteria for what constitutes a normal and healthy state of mind can be determined by external characteristics. In evaluating the quality of psychological wellbeing, in some applied or sociocultural context, aspects like productivity and social function may be highlighted, although several psychological models place an importance on subjective well-being however the depth of internal self-experience may not always be entirely explored. As a result, there is no need for any attention to internal factors that might facilitate understanding of a complicated nature of human psychology.

Moreover, ego-theories of personality are concerned with controlling and mastering various facets of the mind rather than analyzing their origin. In this sense, such practices as thought control and emotion management are supposed to ensure stability but do not promote a critical analysis of people's beliefs and attitude towards themselves. Thus, the root causes of psychological problems are overlooked.

Finally, certain classical theories of personality focuses on relative stability, while modern psychology generally recognizes the process of personality development throughout life. Consequently, a person's perspective on reality remains the same regardless of circumstances. However, this idea precludes the investigation of other ways of experiencing life, which would be essential for a comprehensive analysis of the subject. It becomes evident that despite the importance of ego-centric approaches in developing psychology, there may be some aspects of human consciousness that cannot be properly accounted by using this type of approach alone. For this reason, it seems necessary to develop new paradigms that would help to address the above-mentioned issues and gain a deeper understanding of the human mind.

▪ **Indian psychological perspective**

First of all, it should be noted that the Indian tradition offers an alternative and, in many respects a different framework that

focuses on a holistic perspective of the human psyche. Being based on the philosophy of life and spirituality, this approach sees consciousness as the primary reality, which makes the mind just an instrument rather than self itself. It was in classical works like *Patañjali's Yogasūtra* or the *Bhagavad Gītā* where one could find an explanation of how consciousness differs from human mind.

One of the features of this paradigm is its recognition of experiential knowledge as an acceptable way to comprehend the workings of human mind. Instead of relying only on observation or reasoning, Indian practices emphasize the practice of introspection and awareness as forms of inquiry. In this sense, the person is no longer considered only an object of research but also a researcher, actively involved in his/her own discovery.

The other characteristic feature of Indian psychology is its connection to some broader philosophical systems like Sāṃkhya or Vedānta. They provide the necessary metaphysical background for explaining reality and consciousness. In addition, they present us with a coherent philosophy which integrates different aspects of reality together, and makes it possible to understand the mental activity in terms of this philosophy. This allows viewing the processes in terms of an integrated world view where different dimensions like psychology, ethics and ontology are united together.

The third distinguishing feature is related to methodology. It consists of the fact that there is a systematic path toward mental enlightenment presented in these theories and philosophies. It presents some gradual stages that are essential for reaching mental clarity and self-understanding. Moreover, these practices are very well systematized, and thus we can speak about a high level of sophistication. The last important element that should be mentioned here is the significance of the continuity of mental traces in the process of one's life.

Generally speaking, Indian psychology is an example of an interdisciplinary and complex approach to studying the psyche of a person. The combination of philosophy, experience-based methods, and specific practices results in a unique point of view on how the mind should be studied.

▪ **Objective of the study**

The primary objective of this paper is to discuss how Indian psychology views the human mind outside the limits imposed by ego. This approach is likely to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of selfhood, including not only thoughts but also actions and awareness.

In addition, it is important to place Indian psychological perspective in relation to contemporary discourse. As such, the research is expected to analyze the relevance of the topic under discussion in the context of current issues of psychology and show its importance in helping psychologists expand existing paradigms.

Moreover, the paper endeavors to provide a systematized and organized Indian psychological framework that could also offer some level of theoretical and pragmatic insight. Through an exploration of the basic tenets of Indian psychology, this paper aims to highlight the role of this discipline in promoting inclusiveness in mental comprehension.

2. Materials and Methods

▪ Research design

The methodological framework utilized in this study involves qualitative and interpretative research techniques. This study is concerned with the theoretical exploration and analysis of ideas and concepts, thus fitting well into the discussion of philosophical and psychological works.

As a result, the analysis undertaken in the course of this work does not have anything to do with numeric analysis and experimental methods; instead, the focus is put on textual examination and interpretation of ideas presented in philosophical works.

▪ Primary sources

The primary sources used are Indian classics like *Patañjali's Yogasūtra* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. These texts can be treated as philosophically deep and systematic sources of knowledge about psychology even though they are different from contemporary approaches to science. This means that these sources will be analyzed through a theoretical and interpretive framework grounded in philosophical thought. This, in turn, means that by considering these sources from the point of view of a psychologist, important insights about Indian spirituality can be obtained.

▪ Secondary sources

In addition to that, the study utilizes contemporary views on Indian psychology from eminent writers such as Girishwar Misra and K. Ramakrishna Rao.

These works serve as an important means of placing the ancient ideas into a context appropriate for contemporary scholarly debate. These frameworks are used for relating the ancient ideas to modern psychological perspectives.

▪ Method of analysis

The analytical method that is used in this research paper is conceptual and comparative. The main concepts that will be analyzed include ego, consciousness, and mental control. The comparison will be conducted between Indian psychological ideas and prevailing theories in the West.

The analytical approach used in this study includes identification of key concepts that exist in the two above stated frameworks. The meanings of these concepts in relation to each other are then investigated. Comparison and contrast of these two views will help identify similarities and differences between them.

3. Results and discussion

▪ Layered structure of the human mind

As per Indian Psychology, the human mind can be considered multi-layered, with each layer performing a different task when dealing with information. The mind consists of four components, namely, 'Manas' that attends to sensory data, 'Buddhi' that makes the decision, 'Ahamkāra' that helps create the concept of 'I', and "Citta," which can be considered to be the wider mental domain that encompasses memory,

impressions, and mental modifications. Hence, the multi-layered nature of mind provides a more detailed explanation of mental operations than unitary theories do.

This model of the mind also facilitates a better understanding of the interactions within its different components. In fact, sensory information perceived by the manas is not just recorded, but it is also analyzed by the buddhi. Afterward, the information that enters the manas is linked with the 'I' through the ahamkāra, whereas the citta serves as the wider mental domain that encompasses memory, impressions, and mental modifications, which will then affect future actions.

Through this process, it is a useful framework for comprehending cognitive operations. In essence, the workings of the mind involve continuous processes such as perceiving, interpreting, identifying, and memorizing.

▪ Distinction between mind and consciousness

One key concept that can be identified within Indian psychological context includes the notion of the difference between mind and consciousness. In particular, consciousness is defined as Puruṣa which represents the witnessing aspect of one's experience. The importance of this distinction lies in the fact that it makes it possible to identify self-awareness that is independent from both thoughts and emotions, which can be used as an opportunity to increase one's understanding of oneself. Thus, the distinction in question can be viewed as providing a new perspective on the interpretation of mental experiences.

According to Indian psychology, the mind is characterized by constant modifications, including thoughts, emotions, and sensations, whereas in the Sāṃkhya-Yoga school of thought, consciousness (Puruṣa) is perceived to be static. With such an approach, people are able to consider their mental processes as objects of observation rather than components of their identities. The notion of distinction between consciousness and the human mind makes it possible for people to have stable consciousness by observing the changing aspects of themselves.

▪ Ego as a limited construct

Here, ego or ahamkāra does not refer to the self; rather, it is defined as the construct of the self, based on the identifications with thoughts, identities, roles, and experience. In many Indian philosophical schools, the ego is regarded as one of the elements that cause human suffering by way of attachment and identification. Therefore, the emphasis on transcending the ego is common to many traditions within India, where it is considered central to psychological and spiritual wellness.

The notion of a limited ego reveals its contingency and its potential to change since it shows how this identity depends on one's continuous interactivity and experiences, but it is not fixed. This implies that the identity produced by the ego is subject to revision and alteration due to awareness of it. The realization that ego is limited allows for the exploration of the identification process and thus leads to a reinterpretation of the self, moving away from personal stories and roles.

▪ **Mechanisms of mental regulation**

One of the important principles of Indian psychology is that of training the human mind. Abhyāsa which is known as the process of continuous practice and vairāgya which is known as the practice of detachment are introduced as two practices which can help one decrease mental modifications.

What is unique about these practices is that they need to be applied continuously and gradually. The idea is not to control one's thoughts right away but to develop a certain level of discipline while doing so. It allows creating a condition where one will not respond to internal alterations and learn how to observe his thoughts and feelings as if watching another person's behavior. On the other hand, such practices help to develop a new approach towards psychological processes, helping people to realize what is going on inside and not resist it.

▪ **Ethical action and psychological well-being**

The theory of Nişkāma karma brings together ethics and psychology by positing that mental stability is closely related to the ways in which actions are carried out. Actions done without any sense of attachment and expectation lead to peace of mind and absence of any disturbances.

According to this theory, the very notion of action gets transformed. Instead of considering actions as a way of attaining some external goals, one has to see how they influence their inner personality. This means that if they do certain things as a matter of duty without expecting some external rewards, the person's mentality will remain stable.

Moreover, it helps people develop a certain attitude towards their accomplishments as well as failures because there is no point in trying to control any results. Thus, people are able to work constantly, regardless of their conditions.

▪ **Holistic nature of Indian psychology**

In contrast to a reductionist approach, Indian psychology encompasses all four: the cognitive, the emotional, the ethical, and the spiritual dimensions of the human being. It does not confine itself to the study of mental processes apart from existential issues, but rather seeks to address those processes in the light of the larger issue of self-realization.

With such an outlook, there is greater interrelation between various elements of the human condition as it is no longer necessary to study each element separately but rather in terms of its relationship to others, such as the values and purposes of human action. This makes it possible to achieve greater coherence while interpreting human behavior since its various aspects can be considered in one single context.

Finally, a holistic approach allows for a more comprehensive conception of development since it does not limit itself to functional or adaptive purposes alone, but rather seeks to promote a continuous refinement of understanding.

▪ **Relevance to contemporary psychology**

There has also been increasing interest in such things as mindfulness, meditation, and holistic healing in contemporary

psychology. This can be viewed as an attempt to achieve partial integration between Indian and Western concepts of psychology. But unlike the practices used today, Indian teachings provide a deeper insight into the matter by raising important questions related to the nature of consciousness and human identity.

This increased interest is also seen in the application of such contemplative techniques in the realm of therapy and treatment. For example, the use of yoga and meditation for the alleviation of stress and anxiety is quite popular today. However, these methods are mostly implemented within the narrow confines of particular techniques and their practical use rather than a larger philosophy. The result is that the philosophical background is sometimes less considered in modern applications.

At the same time, the importance of Indian psychology goes much farther than its practical application in therapy. Such concepts as awareness, harmony, and introspection can become highly beneficial for solving many problems of contemporary people. Through the exploration of this knowledge a better and broader understanding of the human mind is presented.

4. Conclusion

It is possible to claim that Indian psychological theories allow us to gain a deeper and richer understanding of the human mind. Through shifting away from ego-based conceptions, and instead considering consciousness as a starting point, they allow for a more integral approach.

The inclusion of ideas of self-discipline, detachment, and morality shows the potential for transformation of individual that is inherent in Indian psychology. It is not limited to adaptation and regulation, and instead focuses on personal growth and self-knowledge as its main goal.

Given the problems that modern world faces today in terms of human psychological well-being, this implies the enduring applicability of Indian psychological insights. They widen the scope of psychology itself and enrich it with knowledge drawn from other disciplines.

Going even further, one could argue that Indian psychology represents much more than just another way of seeing things. It provides a unique theoretical framework through which we can reinterpret our understanding of mental states and processes, as well as distinguish various layers of human mind, including the witnessing of awareness.

The stress on the importance of constant practice, non-attachment, and ethical behavior also shows that this point of view has a very practical aspect. In this sense, it can be said that an important lesson can be taken away by all those who want to have a better understanding of their mental processes and states. Namely, it will help them switch from a passive position to a more active one, allowing for the process of self-improvement.

All in all, taking into consideration the complexity of the modern world, there emerges the necessity to develop integrative theories within the field of psychology that would cope with multi-dimensional issues faced by people. As a result, Indian psychological thought opens up new perspectives

for interdisciplinary cooperation, such as that with philosophy, pedagogy, cognitive science and others.

Thus, this research demonstrates the significance of Indian psychology as a systematic form of knowledge for the science of human psyche. Indian psychology with its focus on depth, synthesis, and experience can provide a different kind of vision which might prove helpful in developing psychological theories and gaining deeper insights into human consciousness.

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