

K. Ramakrishna Rao · Anand C. Paranjpe

Psychology in the Indian Tradition

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Reviewers' Comments

Rao and Paranjpe are masters in illuminating the rich, complex, and sophisticated tradition of Indian psychology. In the present work, they do so in a way that enables us who live outside this culture not only to appreciate its history, its practices, and its significance in today's world, but as well to absorb its potentials. This is not only a careful and systematic synopsis of a complex array of concepts, values, and practices, it is also a compelling invitation to "try it on"—both conceptually and in our daily lives. The need for such understanding and appreciation of who we are as human beings has never been greater.

Kenneth J. Gergen, Professor of Psychology,
Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, USA

This book offers a way out of the morass in which psychology in India, cut off from its native habitus, finds itself today. In mining the rich vein of psychological insight in the Indian tradition, especially Yoga and Advaita, it outlines a new paradigm for the discipline which is Indian in essence and universal in its reach and application. [It is] a major work that is certain to provoke much discussion among students of psychology, philosophy, and the social sciences.

Sudhir Kakar, Psychoanalyst, Writer,
and Honorary Professor of Psychology,
GITAM University, India

Are mind, body, and consciousness irreducible? Does mind have the potential to survive after death? In the western world these are preoccupations of philosophy and religion. Indian psychology does not make such distinctions. Professors Rao and Paranjpe take up the challenge of providing answers for these and other equally intriguing and challenging questions on the nature of mind, exploring the new frontiers of Indian psychology. It is indeed a remarkably laudable effort.

Malavika Kapur, Professor,
National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore

[This book] is far more than an indigenous South Asian psychology. It is a systematic and comprehensive explication of an ancient yet contemporary classical Indian theory of the implications of the very existence of consciousness and the close connection between mental states and the spiritual nature of human beings.

Richard Shweder, Harold Higgins Swift Distinguished
Service Professor, Department of Comparative Human Development,
University of Chicago, USA

This book ... is an outstanding contribution to psychology and human sciences in more ways than one. ... The work deserves the serious attention of all those who believe that humans are, and desire to be, more than their bodily selves.

Rama Charan Tripathi, Former Director,
G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad,
and Former Professor and Head,
Department of Psychology, Allahabad University, India

This book is a serious advancement of basic ideas in new science of psychology that transcends the limited perspectives of Euro-American assumptions of the deep bases of the human psyche.

Jaan Valsiner, Niels Bohr Professor of Cultural Psychology,
Aalborg Universitet, Denmark

Preface

Although the history of Indian psychology goes back to millennia, its modern phase—or revival, if you will—began only recently. Of the many psychologists who had realized the painful neglect of the indigenous tradition, about 150 came together at a conference in Pondicherry in 2002 and unanimously proclaimed the Manifesto of Indian Psychology. It was a declaration of their conviction that psychological concepts and ideas inherent in Indian tradition have much to contribute to advance psychological knowledge in general and that their neglect by psychologists in India is responsible in a large measure to the current unsavory state of psychology in the country. They reiterated their resolve to reorient psychology along the lines shaped by India's intellectual and spiritual history and ethos. About a year later, a smaller group assembled in Visakhapatnam and worked out a plan to prepare a set of three volumes, a handbook, a textbook, and a sourcebook of Indian psychology.

The first to be published was the handbook. The *Handbook of Indian Psychology*, edited by K. Ramakrishna Rao, Anand C. Paranjpe, and Ajit Dalal, was published by Cambridge University Press, India, in 2008. Despite some serious attempts and significant support from the Indian Council of Philosophical Research when K.R. Rao was the Chairman, the project for developing the sourcebook has languished. This is so mainly because it has not been easy to find either psychologists who have deep knowledge of the classic works in Sanskrit, Pāli, and Ardhamāgadhī or classicists sufficiently aware of the perspectives and needs of psychology today. The plans to complete this work are still on, and we hope that the sourcebook project would soon be completed.

We took upon ourselves the responsibility of writing the basic text book. Due to our various other commitments, both of us could not focus on the textbook project; it dragged along for almost a decade. During this long period we thought and rethought about what should go into this volume and how it may be presented. The result is what we are presenting here. As the readers will note, it is not exactly a typical textbook. In some places, it may read like a monograph. We think, however, that it serves the main purpose it is expected to address, which is to provide a basic grounding in Indian psychological thought and its place in current psychological science.

One of the major trends relating to psychology in the world at large is that consciousness has become an active interdisciplinary field of study rather than being a topic within psychology. This change in approach is clearly reflected in the contents of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, which attracts contributions from relatively few psychologists and a whole lot of philosophers, neuropsychologists, neurobiologists, and researchers from a variety of related disciplines. The concept of pure consciousness, which is at the core of psychology in the Indian tradition since the time of the Upaniṣads, has now found a place in discussions about the nature of consciousness by scientists and scholars belonging to diverse disciplines. Against the backdrop of current debates on the nature of consciousness, our discussion of this topic had to address neuropsychological and a host of other perspectives.

Another emerging trend of the past decade is the increasing popularity of meditation as a technique in the tool box of contemporary clinical psychologists. Needless to say, varied techniques of meditation, whether yogic or along the lines of Buddhist *vipāśyanā*, are primarily products of the rich spiritual traditions of India. Whether we are addressing our writing to our students or colleagues, it is essential that we convey to the readers the classical views on meditation, as well as the way it is being used in psychological study and research today.

A third emerging trend is positive psychology, which focuses on happiness, fulfillment, bliss, and various other desirable aspects of human experience as opposed to the strong focus on various forms of psychopathology that were the focus in earlier years. This trend is clearly consistent with one of the core aspects of psychology in the Indian tradition, and this had to get reflected in our writing.

Our overview of the recent research on meditation took us deeply into data and data analysis. Clearly, this is an area where a typically traditional Indian concept and technique has been subjected to wide ranging empirical scrutiny. The current zeitgeist of psychology in the world at large is clearly more data-driven than theory-loaded, and as such it is but natural that our readers would ask us to tell them more about facts than just concepts. Surely the main sources of Indian psychology have more concepts and theories than empirical data. But then the Indian emphasis has been more on practice than on gathering data. There has always been a connection between theories and practices even though this is often implicit rather than explicit. Traditional theories are not always pure speculations. They are often grounded in observations of human behavior. However, the observations made by Indian psychologists through millennia were not recorded or statistically analyzed in the popular contemporary format. As our survey of the burgeoning literature on meditation indicates, the Western demand for empirical evidence complements the Indian emphasis on practice. A related issue is the evidence of the relative effectiveness of traditional techniques, and this is reflected in our overview of the relevant literature.

The traditional focus on human development has been on self-realization and the major forms of yoga aim at total personal transformation in real life. This is different from the current interest in measuring the gradual changes in specific aspects of individuals brought about in the course of the therapeutic uses of traditional

techniques such as meditation. The Indian perspective is more holistic than molecularistic and piecemeal. As such, from the traditional Indian viewpoint, the proof of the pudding lies in the lives of people who successfully practiced various forms of yoga leading to the state of self-realization. Against this background, the life histories of sages and saints present crucial data about the effectiveness of some of the major forms of application of psychological knowledge in the Indian tradition.

The three case studies presented in Chap. 9 of this book constitute significant data about ideal forms of human behavior as conceived in the Indian tradition. Although such behavior emphasizes spirituality, it does not imply focus on some other-worldly gain; it clearly involves behaving in this world. The last chapter, which is on Mahatma Gandhi, attempts to demonstrate that spirituality as conceived in the Indian culture is not aimed at some other-worldly gain; rather it aims at positive changes in the individual as well as the society here and now. Indeed, the life history of M.K. Gandhi clearly shows that psychology in the Indian tradition is not only alive and well, it is capable of presenting to the world innovative ways of solving major problems in today's troubled world.

In concluding this preface, we express our gratitude to all those who directly or indirectly helped us in this enterprise. We learned much from the writings of several scholars who wrote on the subject of Indian psychology, from Jadunath Sinha to S. K. Ramachandra Rao. We are equally benefitted by our association with colleagues who share our interest in Indian psychology. These include Sudhir Kakar, Girishwar Misra, Matthijs Cornelissen, Ajit Dalal, and a host of others. Shinjini Chatterjee of Springer has been a source that kept us on track with her interest in the project. Also, we express our appreciation and thanks to Smt. V.K.V. Prasanna, who ungrudgingly typed various drafts of the manuscript.

Finally, if this modest attempt by us could stimulate interest in Indian psychology among psychologists in India as well as among those psychologists around the world who are looking for an alternate model to study human nature, we would feel well rewarded for the several years of intellectual labor that went into bringing out this book.

K. Ramakrishna Rao
Anand C. Paranjpe

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