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Well-being and Self-transformation in Indian Psychology

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This paper uses instances from literature covering a broad spectrum of Indian philosophies, art, medicine and practices—attempts to offer the components of a psychology that is rooted in transformative and transpersonal consciousness. Psychology, in this instance, refers to a systematic study of mind, behavior, and relationship, rather than the formal Western discipline as such. In the Indian approach to understanding consciousness, primary importance is given to the possibility of well-being. Such an approach facilitates an immediate comprehension of the unity of metaphysical opposites, such as matter and consciousness, and its experience as empathy, love and intuition. It involves a thinking that connects the gross and the subtle, the particular and the universal, the outer and the inner, the objective and the subjective, through a discipline of transcendence. This paper argues, based on carefully selected narratives from the Indian philosophical discourse, that the theories of the transpersonal developed in Indian wisdom traditions are founded on a practical body-mind discipline designed to lead to well-being and self-transformation.

Indian philosophical traditions have varied metaphysical goals but contain much in them which argues for transformative consciousness in terms of the body, mind, and spirit. A self-exploratory, and psychological quest is articulated in Indian theories of art, aesthetics, medicine, epistemology, and metaphysics. In their practices and theories, Indian religions and philosophies such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism recognize the organic and inorganic world as interconnected. Their mythologies are rich with stories and narratives that bring stones and natural elements to life and cause transformation to human life. Life is celebrated by the practitioners of these religions through their festivals, rituals, and daily chores with the consequence that transformation lies in living and in experiential sojourns. According to the well-known commentator of Indian philosophy Hiriyanna (1952), the most striking feature of Indian thought is its many-sidedness, which includes all possible types of solutions for the problems of philosophy; and this variety, which characterizes Indian philosophy as a whole, appears over again in more than one system.

Another prominent anthologist of Indian philosophy wrote on the intimacy of philosophy and life in India:

> There are two vital reasons for studying—and understanding—Indian philosophy. . . . In order to understand the country and its people, which is impossible in the case of India without understanding its basic philosophies, because the intimacy of philosophy and life in India is so fundamental to the whole Indian point of view. (Moore, 1967, p. 1)

The emphasis on the concept of self-transformation in Indian philosophy is emphasized by a scholar of Buddhism:

> In both the Mahayana and non-Mahayana schools, the path of seeing (*darsana-marga*) is the point at which a practitioner is transformed from an ordinary to noble being (*arya*) on

account of direct meditative insight into the ultimate nature of things. (Meyers, 2014, p. 61)

Along with the celebrative mind in Indian philosophies there also exists a strand of detached critique which cautions about the apparent enchantment of ephemeral enjoyment in human life. A call for disenchantment is loud and clear in, for example, the works of the philosophers of the Darsana traditions.

An analysis and review of the philosophical concepts of self and self-transformation are important in the context of understanding wellbeing. While there are several approaches to conceptualizing and quantifying wellbeing, one of the dominant perspectives centers on the prominence given to self-recognition, and the characterization of the self as holistic, active, and empowered. This wellbeing is to be discovered through exploring and understanding one's inner core:

> Importantly, it is not just the person, but their soul, that assesses what counts as a life that is both meaningful and healthy. The person-specific "inner peace," "harmony" or "balance"—often emphasized in alternative and complementary health practices—relate to complex understandings about the self. (Sointu, 2006, p. 496)

This study on the aspects of wellbeing in Indian philosophy is founded on the concept of self and self-transformation. Since the review of the self is not complete without considering the intersubjective elements, examples and vignettes are given to identify the presence and journey of the self in the context of pedagogy, healing, and transformation.

An Organic Pedagogy

As evidenced by a medieval compendium of different Indian philosophical schools, the word *darsana* for Indian philosophy connotes the philosophical enterprise to think and to delve into ideas so as to perceive organically (Madhava Acharya, 1882). The epistemological foundations of these systems share a facility for developing a pedagogy fostering an integral development of not only the student but also the teacher (*Krishna Yajur Veda Taittiriya* Upanishad 2.2.2). One of the instances for

such a philosophy and mutual commitment is indicated in the Upanishadic *Santimantra* that elaborates the prayer invocation. This bi-directional mode of pedagogy is significant since it checks the hierarchy of teacher as the giver and the student as the receiver which leads to monologue transference.

The teacher-pupil relationship has a significant place in the traditional Indian view of pedagogy and character building, mainly in setting standards for formulating concepts and ideas and building person-oriented theories. The lineage of the *guru-sisya* is the passage for passing on the teachings of the philosophical tradition. The fundamental relying on the *guru parampara* is a feature that is seen in the schools that follow the Veda (such as the *sad-darsana*) and that do not follow Veda (such as Buddhism and Jainism). The Jaina philosophy traces its origins back to the teacher Parsvanatha, whose teachings were later codified by Mahavira, both being in the long line of liberated teachers (Chapple, 2014). In Kashmir Saivism, another important school of Indian philosophy, Utpaladeva, developing initiatives of his teacher Somananda, created the foundational texts of the *Pratyabhijna* system, which was later elaborated by Abhinavagupta (Lawrence, 2014).

Samvada, or dialoguing, is one of the methods used in communicating and debating the philosophical teachings. The practice of *samvada*—maintaining two distinct styles of argumentation while presenting a position—and *purvapaksha-uttarapaksha*—taking the alternate viewpoint before making a counter point—makes the tradition a living one. These two practices also consider the cognitive and emotive development of the people involved while indicating an interactive socio-cultural context. *Samvada* is a pervasive communicative tool employed across Indian texts of philosophy. Examples are the dialogues narrated in the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the commentary traditions of the *darsana* schools. Instances of some of the fascinating *samvada* are: the dialogue with Oneself as presented in Sankarachrya's works, such as *Vivekachudamoni* and *Nirvana Shatkam*; the dialogue between the teenager Nachiketa with Yama the god of death in *Katha* Upanishad; the

dialogue between the wedded couple Yajnavalk-ya and Maithreyi in *Brhadaranyaka* Upanishad; the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna upon self and experiential conflict in the Bhagavad Gita; the dialogue between Gargya Balaki, a learned priest, and Ajatasatru, the king of Benares, in *Kausitaki* Upanishad. *Samvada* through these dialogues can be understood as an attempt to reach out and con-nect with the other mind, and create knowledge that has the potential to transform the self. Indian philosophy discusses the various formats of formal debate and reasoning, which range from success-ful advocacy to determination of truth.

> The Naiyayikas, from Gautama downward, look upon logic both as a science and art, that the function of logic, according to them, comprises both discovery and proof, induction and deduction, and lays adequate stress on the material and formal aspects of reasoning; and that logical debate, even in its apparently non-logical forms of *jalpa* (successful advocacy) and *vitanda* (destructive objection), is never allowed to stand completely divorced from the aim of *nyaya*, viz., conclusive determination of truth. (*tattvadhyavasaya*; Sastri, 1951, p. 224)

> In the classical period, we find that individual schools try to marshal their philosophical resources to reflect upon and defend the goals of life that they take on from traditional cultural and religious authorities. These various schools were in constant dialogue. Philosophical development often involves inter-school debate, with mutually inspired refinement throughout the generations of commentators and respondents. An individual *darsana*'s arguments and positions cannot, in fact, be fully understood without determining who its disputants are, whether or not such interlocutors (*purvapaksins*) are stated explicitly or left unmentioned. (Dasti, 2014, p. 2)

Samvada has references not only to logical and epistemological methods but also to states of mind which are important in the discussion about the primal nature of self, as illustrated in the Upanishadic dialogues engaged in by Yajnavalkya, the Bhagavad Gita dialogues engaged in by Krishna and Arjuna. Discussions on metaphysical and ontological issues

are interrelated to understand ethical, axiological, aesthetic, causal, and spiritual issues. The whole philosophical system achieves philosophical growth through opponent-proponent dialogue. The opponent's standpoint is taken so seriously by the proponents that the explanation of opponents given by the proponents is more understandable to us than that of the opponents, which evidences the intellectual honesty of the philosophers (Gosh, 2015). There is an attempt to reconcile and integrate experiences and daily-life contradictions so as to generate existential responses to metaphysical riddles about self-identity, creation, purpose of life, value systems, etc. The causal connections between the nature of the ever-changing world and its causal source is an important discussion for the whole of Indian philosophy (Dasti, 2014).

The nature of *Samvada* changes its style to reasoned argumentation in later philosophical traditions. The *pramana sastra*, or epistemology, in Indian philosophy suggests various means of ascertaining valid knowledge apart from explanations on forming valid arguments (Menon, 2006). *Tarkasamgraha*, a widely used text on Indian logic and dialectics, talks about the four-fold preliminary, *anubandha catushtaya*, required for a debate and dialogue to result in proper understanding. The four-fold preliminary for any discourse are elucidations of *vishaya* (theme of discourse), *prayojana* (major goal), *sambandha* (relation between the theme of discussion and the goal), and *adhikari* (the qualified participant; Sastri, 1951).

While *Samvada* engages with logic and truth determination another Indian philosophical tool that highlights the interconnections between words, thoughts, and actions is *mantra*. The ancient text on Yoga the *Yogasutra* authored by Patanjali presents the psychology of mind and cognitive functions. The philosophy that underlies the idea of mantra is that the power of certain words and sounds can create a constitutional change in people's energy levels. Associated with this philosophy is also the importance of visualization techniques. Forms and words, to a large extent, are the initiators for thoughts and interactions. Similar words can create dissimilar experiences for different people. The same person can evoke different responses from different

individuals. The *Yogasutra* explains how alertness and better understanding of mind (and thereby controlling the vacillations of the mind) could lead people to self-stability. To be established in one's spirit, the core of one's being, it is essential to start with physical and mental stability. Before aspiring for a stable seating in the spiritual space, one must be grounded in a physical space with comfort. The realistic tradition of the *Yogasutra* hence mentions the importance of one's physical seating being relaxed and steady (Patanjali, *Yogasutra* 2:46, as cited in Swami Bodhananda, 2004) to begin with. To be stable and comfortable in the way one places oneself physically is also necessary to go farther into the experience of inner realization. At the same time, for Patanjali, the propounder of yogic traditions, the journey from the physical plane to the spiritual plane is not purely a hierarchical process, but is founded on deeper self-reflection (e.g., Patanjali, *Yogasutra* 1:3). Self-reflection, which is the ability to reflect upon oneself, objectifying not only the content of experience, but also the author and experiencer of experience, and establishing oneself in a uniting Self is a central theme of discussion in all schools of Indian philosophy, and in particular yoga philosophy (Rao & Menon, 2016).

Charity, Compassion, and Restraint

Well-being is included among the goals of many traditional schools of Indian psychology and philosophy, as indicated, for example, in their earliest wisdom literature, the Upanishads. Because the search for wellbeing is founded on self-inquiry, it is expected to also foster transpersonal changes. In a story from the *Brhadaranyaka* Upanishad (Swami Madhavananda, 1950) the representatives of three classes of beings—the humans, the demons, and demi-gods—go to Brahma the creator to know from him what is the very best for them. To their utter surprise, Brahma answers cryptically repeating a single syllable, "*da*". The delegation interpreted this mantra variously. Humans interpreted *da* as *dana* (charity), demons as *daya* (compassion), and demi-gods as *dama* (restraint). This was a nuanced formula Brahma offered for the three different personalities to achieve not only mental health but also to get rid of their lifestyle ailments. Those suffering from excessive

anger get administered with doses of compassion; those who are blinded by flamboyant lives are taught to be self-controlled; and those ruled by greed learn to share. This story is a perfect example for the organic method followed by the Upanishads. The philosophy from this story is that health, lifestyle, and co-existence with the community form an integral whole. A study on exceptional human experiences (Palmer & Braud, 2002) suggested that often optimal well-being is brought about by transformative change caused by such experiences. The inner mind, outer environment, one's attitudes, and one's value system each play a role in placing the individual within the spirit.

The reason for the emphasis on healing and spiritual progress in Indian psychology is the philosophical idea that consciousness is the foundation for the mind and the body, as exemplified in the Upanishads and other early texts. Hence mental health is equated with continued self-exploration. Transformation and evolution of consciousness imply basic attitudinal and self-identity changes and shifts. The concept of healing thus is not just a cure for an ailment but a state of perfection aimed at by one and all. Classical Indian spirituality, best described, is Indian transpersonal psychology.

Not just one aspect of the person but one's complete personality is considered in understanding complex issues of experience. Lifestyle, day-to-day affairs, ideals and worldviews define each individual, as per the Ayurvedic philosophy. According to P. V. Sharma, a prominent translator and scholar of Ayurveda, *Caraka Samhita*, the primary text of Ayurveda, upholds a holistic and integral view about the individual:

> *Caraka-samhita* holds the synthetic view of man instead of analysing him into hundreds of parts and reducing him as aggregate of tiny cells. Happiness and unhappiness are the final consequence of health and disease respectively and these affect the person wholly and not partly. (Sharma, 2014, p. 7)

Mental and social health, for Indian philosophies and religions, in the context of their spiritual practices and ideas, imply not merely curing a finite number of deficiencies or ailments but inspiring

better expression of inner potential, better social engagement, and a fuller sense of wellbeing.

Transcendence In and Through Action

More examples for the emphasis on well-being can be cited from the yoga tradition, and the Bhagavad Gita. Spiritual healing, according to Patanjali, is not a treatment for an ailment in the strict sense (e.g., Patanjali, *Yogasutras* 1.4). However it is a better approximation towards inner stability (*svarupe avasthanam*) and corresponding positive values. He talks about afflictions of mind —*antaraya*—such as disease, depression, paranoia, inadvertence, carelessness, laziness, inability to show restraint, delusion, boredom, and instability. These afflictions are to be removed or checked by the introduction of a set of positive values such as friendliness, compassion, cheerfulness and forgiveness. When the modifications of mind are restrained, the seer abides in its true nature. The restrained mind, *sattvic mind*, abides in the real nature of the seer without being distracted by thought or sensations or memories. In other cases, when there is no restraint, mind identifies with modifications and not pure consciousness.

The commonality in the various traditions on spiritual healing is the importance given for the practice of positive values. Spiritual healing and thereby mental health is not considered a secluded activity. The Bhagavad Gita (13:8-12), for instance, talks about a series of positive values, which are of personal, social, and spiritual significance, to be the best tool for self-abidance. A major idea in the Bhagavad Gita is that action, or any productive engagement, and meditation are complementary to each other. Action in the real sense, according to the Bhagavad Gita, can be executed only by a meditative mind. At the same time, one can meditate only if one has gained the evenness of mind through non-reactive performance of work. Hence, in order to be actively engaged in living, one must meditate, and in order to meditate one must be physically and mentally active. A Yogi is one who engages in work with a meditative mind, according to the Bhagavad Gita. Activity does not add or reduce one's inner contentment.

The Bhagavad Gita identifies meditation with a non-reactive mind. Control of thoughts is possible only for a non-reactive mind. Advice that Krishna gives Arjuna is to be an instrument—*nimittamatram* (Bhagavad Gita 11:33). One who guides one's psychophysical setup with the attitude of instrumentality is alert and has better ability to see events and situations in a detached and objective manner. However it is not to be taken that such a detachment is non-participation. It is not detachment in the sense of shedding responsibility or sensitivity but creating a balanced mind that can view a situation in a multi-perspectival fashion and respond creatively by being in the present. To be in the present or the now moment launches a transpersonal process. Pitchon (1998) wrote,

> The general idea is that although we have a past and possibly a future, the point of power is in the present. To become aware of the now means to become centred. The power to effect a change, to take a decision, to fix a new goal, is now. Our real world is in the present. The past is no more and the future is uncertain. (p. 117)

What the Bhagavad Gita signifies is that true and clear comprehension lies in reflecting upon the seeming conflicts and factors in a total fashion in the present, and not in compartmentalized judgment formations. Such a method for right perception and self-reflection is given throughout the Bhagavad Gita, in the exposition of *purusha* (individual consciousness) and *prakrti* (matter), individual and world, individual and God, activity and meditation (Menon, 2008).

The Bhagavad Gita gives interesting definitions for yoga that indicate social engagement and meditation as complementary. One definition is "yoga is efficiency in action"—*karmasukausalam* (Bhagavad Gita 2:50). The mind must be focused to be efficient. Hence yoga is also maintaining the evenness of mind, *samatvam* (Bhagavad Gita 2:48), for the efficient performance of work. Such an evenness of mind guides decision-making process to follow a middle path, by being steadfast in an inner calm—*samadhav achala buddhi* (Bhagavad Gita 2:53). Another definition is that yoga is disjunction from unhappiness—*dukhasamyoga viyoga* (Bhagavad Gita 6:23). Yoga must be practiced with determination and with a non-depressed heart. Here, yoga is described by the principle of

exclusion, using double negatives to indicate that yoga is not a state to be acquired, but is to be realized by the removal of the false perception of unhappiness. It is the disjunction from the apparent conjunction with unhappiness. Yoga is the disunion from the apparent identity with unhappiness.

The Bhagavad Gita advises that instead of eliminating unhappiness, one should look into the experience of unhappiness and see that it has no independent existence (Swami Bodhananda, 1998). Happiness is *akshayasukham*—the endless and perpetual joy. Spiritual healing happens when happiness is considered not a state to be acquired, but is realized as one's ontological nature. Happiness is not the transient pleasure got from an object of experience, which comes and goes. Happiness which is not bought with objects, events or persons signifies the spiritual nature of self and is identified with pure consciousness.

Healing and not Cure

Ideas about self-transformation and spiritual experiences are presented in Indian psychology in concurrence with a philosophical position. For instance, for the idealist Indian philosophical schools, the division between ordinary and transcendental experience itself is an incorrect postulation, and any experience has the potential to be a transformative experience. Therefore, healing is not an event caused by an outer agency but by the inner Self. Though the experience could be described as therapeutic, the process is not therapy, but Self-healing. Healing is not by catharsis, according to their methods, but by creating transpersonal ideas, visions, thoughts, experiences, goals, world-views and most importantly self-identity. One such method is the usage of an array of imageries and metaphors which are different, both by kind and order, to create new experiences, to re-look at the given situation from a new perspective and to respond anew from that perspective. Examples are the discussion of immortality in the *Katha* Upanishad, Selflessness in the *Chandogya* Upanishad, and the mind-body-self interactive system in the *Caraka Samhita*.

Ayurveda and yoga traditions are founded on the philosophy of intrinsic healing. Healing is the goal of Indian medicinal (Ayurveda, *Unani*, etc.)

and yogic traditions. Ayurvedic aetiology is not only about causes of imbalance but also about therapy guided by one's own mental disciplines and spiritual practices:

> Mind, self and body-these three make a tripod on which the living world stands. All depend on this (living world). (*Caraka Samhita* 1:46; Sharma, 2014, p. 6)

Since the focus is on mental health and not necessarily mental disorder, the goal for healing is not redemption but progress recorded in a scale from mental health to spiritual uplift. If we consider that Ayurveda follows an interrelated system, all components of the practice of medicine are organic contributors. Valiathan (2003) made the observation, paraphrasing the *Caraka Samhita*, that medical knowledge always existed in folklore, local health traditions, verbal testimony and many other sources. It was their periodic systematization that led towards progress (p. iii).

One example for the organic approach to wellbeing is the exposition of health and the state of absence of diseases as described in the *Caraka Samhita*. The second chapter of the division of Sarirasthanam (46–47) describes health in perhaps the most ecological manner. According to the *Caraka Samhita* (Kaviratna & Sharma, 1996), one who is free from diseases is one who follows a diet that is wholesome, keeps a proper regimen of exercise, who acts after thinking in a wholesome manner, is non-indulgent and moderate, shares what he has, is balanced in mind, truthful, forgiving, and helpful to people who are wise and accomplished. Further, diseases do not affect one who has positive thoughts, whose actions lead to happiness, who has original views, clarity in thinking, mental discipline and desire for attuning to a meditative space.

The fundamental texts of Ayurveda, such as the *Caraka Samhita* and the *Sushruta Samhita*, based on *Sankhya* and yoga, accept two ontological realities, one of which is conscious, called *purusha*, and the other which is not, called *prakrti*, loosely translated as matter (Kaviratna & Sharma, 1996). The latter is constituted by the three *gunas* or attributes, *sattva*, poise or goodness; *rajas*, dynamism or passion; and *tamas*, inertia or ignorance. All the

evolutes of matter (and this includes something as subtle as the mind at one end and something as gross as the manifest world at the other) exhibit a combination of these three attributes in various degrees. At its gross level, matter differentiates into five elements, the *panchabhuta*: earth, dominated by *tamas*; water, by *sattva* and *tamas*; fire, by *sattva* and *rajas*; air, by *rajas*; and space, by *sattva*. In relation to the human body, these five elements not only determine its physical structure but also participate in its physiology by becoming what are called *dosha*, vaguely rendered in English as humors. The three dosha are named *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*, the first derived predominantly from air and space, the second from fire and the third from earth and water. Cosmically, *vata* corresponds to air, *pitta* to sun and *kapha* to moon. The three, in that order, are responsible for the functions of diffusion, absorption and secretion within the human organism. These functions are not limited to the physical but also extend to the psychological world of humans. *Vata*, for example, not only regulates breathing, contributes energy and initiates physical movement, but also creates enthusiasm and is responsible for mental processes.

The three *dosha* are the fundamental entities so far as Indian medicine is concerned and, in various combinations, produce the seven body constituents called *dhatu*, comparable to tissues. Aetiology, patient-healer relation, diagnosis, environment, nature of medicine, life style and healing, in Ayurveda are connected amongst themselves and represent a cosmic philosophy that underlies human mind and body. The description of the healer, who is a life-saver, often reminds us of an ideal philosopher. Clarity in theoretical knowledge, repeated exposure to practice, skill, and cleanliness—these are the four qualities of a physician (*Caraka Samhita Sutrasthanam* 9:6; S. Rajaraman, Trans.). *Pranabhisara*, the life-saver, is a physician who interests himself in the ideological framework, in understanding the import thereof, in the practical application of that knowledge and in the actual practice of the medical profession (*Caraka Samhita Sutrasthanam* 9:18; S. K. Ramachandra Rao, Trans.).

Ayurveda, concerned with the unitary, spiritual and transcendental aspects of human life, is transpersonal at its very conception. Holism and the possibility for retaining balance permeates at every level starting from the philosophical and spiritual base extending up to mundane concerns of disease prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. Its concerns are at the same time grounded in day to day living, health and disease, transcendence, and liberation from the wheel of existence. Therefore, health is described in terms of overall wellbeing of the body, mind, and self. Wellbeing is experienced when there is balance in physiological and digestive processes, well-formed tissues, proper eliminative and bodily processes, coupled with self-abidance, and cheerfulness of the sense organs and mind (*sama dosha samagni ca sama dhatu-mala-kriyah; prasanna atmendriyamanah svastha ityabhidiyate*; *Susruta Samhita Sutrasthanam* 15.38; S. Menon, Trans.).

It is important to highlight that health according to the classical masters of Ayurveda is not a state which is achieved at some point of time but a process that involves various transpersonal elements connecting the immediate societal engagements, cultural practices, and the environment in large.

Cognitive, Emotive, and Spiritual Inquiry

Indian transpersonal thinking can be viewed from three standpoints. The three standpoints—of a cognitive inquiry, emotive inquiry, and, a spiritual inquiry—are based on the healing of the self through different modes of expressing and being. For instance, the different parables from the Upanishads which are at the same time symbols of subtle cognitive processes (based on negation—*neti neti*) and also the strength of steadfastness and patience indicate the foundational nature of these narratives as relating to continuous self-inquiry and self-transformation caused by an inner space. The examples are stories of Nachiketa's inquiry into that which stays after death; Yajnavalkya's discussion on the importance of the self, and the multiple interpretations of the same syllable differently by the three beings in the *Brhadaranyaka* Upanishad. Transformation addresses the bruises caused by the thorns of alienated rational processes and impermanent pleasure points of the mind. The role of love (devotion in the *bhakti* traditions), dialogue

(organic form of inquiry), and being (self-abidance) are the tools for both transformation and pedagogy.

Bhakti, or devotion, in theistic schools represents an intense experience which includes the feelings involved with love but that which goes beyond them through a transcendental divinizing of the emotions. For instance, the *Narada Bhaktisutra* is an exposition of divine love. The text considers the issue of *bhakti* not from a personalistic standpoint but from an ontological perspective. Emotions are employed as rational tools in the inquiry. They also behold an ontological factor since they transcend the limitations in the experiential level and since the ultimate objective is dedication and dissolution of the experiencer. The focus in this text is to understand the experience of intense, unconditional love, leading to self-realization of the experiencer.

Bhakti is described as *anirvacaniya* (*Narada Bhaktisutra* 2), or indescribable (Swami Sivananda, 2008). Such a description could be understood in two ways. The experience of *bhakti* cannot be translated into a cognitive concept. *Bhakti* transcends its verbal expressions. The experience of *bhakti* cannot be exhaustively translated into verbal description since "it is like taste enjoyed by the dumb" (*Narada Bhaktisutra* 3). The dumb one is incapable of describing the taste in words though he might very much wish to. The nature of *bhakti* as attributeless qualifies it as a pure experience which cannot be repeated or reported. The experience of *bhakti* happens to a desireless (*kamanarahitam*) mind. Desire is always for the other outside oneself. For a *bhakta* there is no alienated other. Through its tradition of devotion, teaching, and practise, Indian psychology leads to a method of learning that can be described as affective, systemic, and organic.

Another Indian tradition that has a rich approach to emotions, and their physical and mental expression, is aesthetics and dramaturgy. The two debates that generate exciting ideas about space in drama, philosophy, and aesthetics are about the residence of movement and space—is it in the outside object, or in the inside subject? The inner/outer and subject/object binaries define the aesthetic object in most Indian art forms. The *Natya Sastra* is a classical text that discusses the origin and nature of aesthetic experience. Interestingly, space

gets a meaning in the context of the representation of forms, plots, and emotions, in performative and non-performative Indian art. What comes through is a thread that seems to connect and present both the inner and outer space. The poignant metaphor for this is the *sutradhara* (the literal meaning is one who holds the thread) of classical Indian drama who connects the real world and narrated plot (Kulkarni, 2008). He will be the first to enter and last to leave the stage. He is neither outside nor inside the theatrical space, but both. His presence is continuous yet not intervening.

The concept of *rasa* (the flavor of aesthetic emotion) is another important aesthetic concept that serves the in-between role by invoking a particular *bhava* (emotional state) in the spectator. *Rasa* creates an aesthetic space between the actor and the spectator and uses that as the channel for the passage of complex meanings represented with the help of the story. *Rasa* cannot be rendered without a contrast to other emotions. The transition from one *rasa* to another takes place in the twilight space of the changing moods—*anubhava*. In classical drama the twilight space is rendered more clearly by the delineation of two kinds of actions—actions that are learned by watching people (*lokadharmi*) and actions that are stylized (*natyadharmi*). The goals of *natya* (mime, movement and drama) pertain to both objective and subjective features. Through the composite of external and physical enactment, subjective states of mind and feelings represented: For the spectator, in the secondary level there is an appreciation of the characters and the theme; and in the primary level, a temporary detachment with one's self-identity is experienced. For the actor, in the primary level it is the complex task of representing a character, an idea, or the nuance of a particular feeling through *abhinaya*—mime, and producing the corresponding mood—*rasa* for the viewer—*prekshaka*. In the secondary level a temporary detachment from one's self-identity and identity with the particular character's self as a whole and the narrative is experienced (Menon, 2003).

There are interesting characteristics of the in and out movement of emotions and acts used in traditional pictorial art. Representations of

two or multiple events are done with the help of demarcating them in different sections. Different areas of pictorial space render different scenes seen from different vantage points. The classic text on drawing *Chitrasutra* (Warrier, 2002) describes nine positions (*nava-sthana*) based on the form, movement, colors, and disposition of the person. These nine positions create a two-way viewpoint for the painter and the viewer to communicate that which is represented through a particular vantage point. In both pictorial and theatrical space, distance is symbolically represented. In stage it is by the in and out (or even sideways) movement of characters, the effects of the spotlight, etc. In paintings it is with the usage of lines and shapes, such as square and circle, to cordon off particular instances, with the help of colors. In drama the actor's body is the medium. A detailed analysis of the movement of every part of the body is given by Bharata in *Natya Sastra*. The varied movement of the eye through glances (*drishti*) is one instance. Apart from the *drishti* there is a detailed description of the kinds of movements of the pupils, eyelids, and that of eyebrows (*Natya Sastra*)

The in and out aesthetic space of Indian dramaturgy poses several larger issues in psychology and philosophy that seem to connect binaries of the outer and inner, object and subject, presence and absence, movement and stillness, body and spirit. Discussions are on connections between that which stays the same in space and that which changes location. The viewpoint in space goes beyond body praxis and aesthetics and implies an overwhelming attribute of creative presence, that which moves and is yet unmoved. Such connections pose questions on body-sense, body-movement, self, and identity in the context of not just drama but also lived everyday experiences. Curiously the discussion on body-sense and body-movement, together called proprioception, are two central topics of discussion in neurobiology. Proprioception is a third sense (apart from the sensations of outer and inner objects) that tells us how much effort we need to give for movement, and where the body parts are located in relation to one another, an awareness of the body which stems from sensory receptors — proprioceptors — in the muscles, tendons, and

joints, creating adequate stimuli for deep receptors (Evarts, 1981, p.44).

While this vital sense is challenged in patients with psychiatric and neural disorders (Cole, 2009), it is present in a heightened degree in performers of martial arts (e.g., *kalari payattu*) where the other person's (proprioceptive) capability is also considered as feedback (Zarrilli, 1998). For the practitioner of *kalari payattu*, an ancient martial art that originated in Kerala, the mind becomes so sensitive that one's whole body turns into the visual organ, the eye. The discussion on movement and viewpoint in space cuts across disciplines with greater relevance to drama, yogic methods, and martial arts, such as *kalari payattu*. Together seen and understood the viewpoint in space creates the identity of the performer/artist and one's presence that transcends color, form, and body, and in the process creates a transpersonal space that is still, peaceful, and aesthetic.

Unsolved Binaries and the Foundations of the Transpersonal

It is important to understand the theoretical foundations which hold together the ways of thinking in traditional Indian epistemology. This connects the entities that are gross and the subtle, the particular and the universal, the outer and the inner, the objective and the subjective, through a discipline of transcendence fringed by higher orders of ethical living and exercises for conceptual precision in thinking. Essentially, the attempt in Indian wisdom traditions is to go beyond the immediate and to connect to a larger whole. In other words, a seeking for experiences which are transpersonal, as defined by Walsh and Vaughan (1993):

> Transpersonal experiences may be defined as experiences in which the sense of identity or self extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or cosmos. (p. 203)

There are two paradigms in the classical Indian philosophical schools in spite of the differences in their metaphysical and epistemological positions, such as what we see and experience, which is constituted by the given and the immanent;

and what we can see and experience, which is constituted by the possibilities and the transcendent (Menon, 2003). It is within these two paradigms that elaborate discussion on fundamental experiences, such as pain and pleasure, sorrow and happiness, selfishness and selflessness, freedom and bondage, the given and the possible, et cetera, takes place. An apt literary instance for this stance is the epic text Mahabharata.

The Mahabharata is an epic of 100,000 verses and narrated in eighteen books. Its authorship is ascribed to Sage Vyasa. It narrates the story of a unique war within various frameworks. The story is narrated by several characters. On the simplest plane, the Mahabharata narrates the struggle for the throne, amongst cousins, the Kaurava brothers, and the Pandava brothers. Duryodhana, the eldest Kaurava, beguiles Yudhisthira, the eldest Pandava and the emperor, to a dice game. Losing their entire kingdom, and themselves too, in the game, the Pandavas are forced to go into a 13-year forest exile which includes a year of incognito exile. At the end of the stipulated period, Duryodhana haughtily refuses to return the empire to the Pandava brothers, leading to the decision for a war.

Through this tale of ambitions and human ironies, Vyasa etches the complex shades and nuances of human weakness, attitudes, and possibilities. The Mahabharata's characters and narratives are the key to understanding an individual's self-representation, relationships, dilemmas, wellbeing, and transcendence. The narrative is born out of the experiences of the characters as well as gives shape to experience in the Mahabharata. The narrative and self-representations are inseparable in the Mahabharata.

The epic is characterized by the roster of characters replete with innumerable shades of behaviors, attitudes, values, situations, circumstances and dilemmas. None emerges as purely good or bad in the good-bad binary, but each character emerges and unfurls dependent upon the context and life situations. Yudhisthira, Arjuna, and Gandhari—some of the key characters—in experiencing their desires and sorrows attempt to enhance and transform themselves through their tryst with unpredictable events and their consequences.

Almost all characters in the Mahabharata are prone to taking risks and subsequently face the consequences of actions which they do not reflect upon in advance. The impact of choice and decision making in defining risk is best illustrated by the story of the rendezvous of the Pandava brothers with Yaksha, a demi-god guarding a lake in the forest. The story of Yaksha Prashna, as narrated in the *Vanaparva* book of the Mahabharata (e.g., Iyer, 1969), is about the brothers' quest for water, which forces them to trespass boundaries and face the consequences of Yaksha's terms and conditions, which is having to answer certain self-reflective, phenomenological, and spiritual questions. All brothers fail the test and die, except Yudhisthira, who answers all the sixty odd questions of Yaksha. To Yudhisthira's happiness he is not only granted water from the lake but also the lives of the four brothers.

The Yaksha story has immense significance for understanding self-representations in crisis and dilemma. Yudhisthira responds to crisis at many different levels. At a physical level, he initially shows strength but succumbs to his emotional state upon seeing his listless brothers. At a physiological level, he endures his thirst and demonstrates a measure of mastery over his biological need. His keen sense of commitment and values deepens his psychological state. His spiritual and transcendental inclinations move him toward acquiring knowledge. At each level he manifests certain symptoms and resolves these states. Each resolution absorbed by him significantly contributes to his overall self. He uses his whole person as a position from which he can respond to the dilemma and crisis. In a sense, his thirst for knowledge opens vital space within him enabling him to understand the questions, which are life puzzles, intensely.

The brothers were already fatigued by hunger and thirst, and also by their depressed minds, due to the defeated life in the forest. When pushed to a corner, we are forced to take a risk, even if it is at the cost of a trade-off like death. In answering the Yaksha's remarkably progressive series of phenomenological questions, Yudhisthira consolidates his experiential learning and understands him-self. His knowledge leads

to an expansion of his self-representation and augments his psychological wellbeing, developing his resources and potentials to higher degrees of freedom and renunciation:

> What is the all comprehensive virtue? What is the all comprehensive thing of fame? What in one word, leads to heaven? In what is comprised all happiness? Integrity is all comprehensive virtue. Charity is the one comprehensive matter of fame. Truth alone leads to heaven. Character comprises all happiness. (*Yaksha Prasna* 13; Iyer, 1969, p. 40)

> By renouncing which things does one become lovable? By renouncing which things does one never suffer grief? By renouncing which things does one become wealthy? By renouncing which thing does one become happy? By renouncing pride one becomes lovable. By renouncing anger one never experiences grief. By renouncing desire one becomes wealthy. By one renouncing avarice one becomes happy. (*Yaksha Prasna* 17; Iyer, 1969, p. 47)

According to Neelakanta, a commentator of the Mahabharata, the renunciation of the four, namely, pride, anger, desire and avarice, enables one to control the mind (Iyer, 1969, p. 47). The life goal, according to the *Yaksha Prasna*, is the attainment of the state of a *sarvadhanee*, a person who is concerned not only about his salvation, but is deeply interested in the spiritual welfare and the happiness of mankind (Iyer, 1969, p. 80).

The Mahabharata through telling these and many other stories highlights the idea that life's options come in binaries, are interrelated, and are not spelled out most of the time as to which one could be chosen. The choices we make bring out various aspects of ourselves, allowing several possibilities to express themselves for each choice that is made. In the process of choice, and in choosing upon the actions, values, attitudes, and other critical aspects of our being, we add depth and vastness to our self. Another commentator of the Mahabharata writes:

> The Mahabharata's teachings of *sukha-dukha*, happiness and suffering, are therefore inherent in its analysis of *dharma* and *adharma*; of truth and untruth; of *himsa*, violence, and *ahimsa*, not-violence; of the attitudes towards having and not having; of sexuality; of life-in-family and life alone; of self-knowledge and self-discipline or the absence of them; and in its explorations in the question of causality and human freedom, *moksha*. (Chaturvedi, 2007, p. 264)

The concept of choice in the Mahabharata is a contextual act that carries the insignia of actions that lead to it. Arjuna, another prominent character of the Mahabharata, presents an array of contradictory and conflicting options to Krishna as an apparently reasoned argument for his plea to flee the battlefield. Arjuna at first requests Krishna, as exemplified in the first chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, to position him between the two armies, which itself is an expression of the conflict that will pull him in different directions. According to the Bhagavad Gita philosophy the self that is bruised, by the inability to engage in actions that ensue from decisions already taken, cannot be healed through an avoidance of the immanent action but only by facing the life-situation through thought out engagement. Such an engagement is possible through settling oneself in the non-shifting space of a deeper subject, which according to Indian psychology is consciousness.

Conclusion

A significant characteristic of the Indian mode of thinking is an overriding urge above all urges to connect and catapult from what is given to what is possible. Such a feature can be perceived in the Hindu metaphysics and epistemology. The conception of experience is not strictly what is caused by extraneous factors but what is possible by the intervention of the distinctive and unique nature of the individual. Therefore, experience is not merely a theme for understanding based on its immediate context, such as cause or results, but is a tool for further exploration of the self. The ordinariness and extra-ordinariness of an experience is understood from the standpoint of the deeper self than from the causal agent. The object of experience, the result

of experience, and the experiencer constitute the triad of which each is significant in understanding and contributing to the other, and thus defining wellbeing.

While the different Indian philosophical traditions hold different views towards the ultimate purpose of life, in general the Vedantic traditions offer a metaphysics that either questions or affirms the presence of a unitary reality. While the theistic traditions build a metaphysics that is based on a part-whole relationship with the ultimate reality, the non-dualistic traditions believe in the inherence of the reality in all dimensions of the experiential world (Radhakrishnan, 1940). However, in all these traditions the values that support spiritual living are the urge to know the true nature of one's self, ecological awareness that connects one with the rest of the world, empathy that is needed for an aspirant, intersubjective sharing, emotional wellbeing, efficiency in expressions and creative imagination. The distinct psychological feature of these traditions is their spiritual openness, and not just a liberal philosophy, the facility to integrate new experiences and new understandings into an evolving scheme of ideas and lifestyle, all leading and pointing to continued self-exploration (Menon, 2006). The individual, and one's experiences are key aspects for inquiry in the Saddarsana traditions. Experience can help achieve a degree of transcendence for the individual—by going beyond personal, social and spiritual limits—through transformation in one's worldview, by being sensitive to yet another point of view, and thus being open-minded, with more self-reflection, and sensitivity to oneself and others. All these would help achieve mental peace, personal growth, stability, and a sense of fulfilment. The Upanishadic stories (Radhakrishnan, 1994) and the Panchatantra tales that may seem to contradict one another at times (Bodhananda & Agarwal, 2017) for instance are based on subjective narratives and the personal urge and struggle to understand the nature of the real, and one's self.

The transpersonal in the Indian psychology and the philosophy of transformative consciousness could be sighted in its epics, poetry, medicine, and aesthetics. With eclectic methods, Indian philosophy and psychology offers transformation of attitudes and perceptions and encourages one to be grounded in the world. Being-in-the-world is crucial for Indian systems in redefining a healthy self-identity. The Indian transpersonal process is placed in the existential context of the person and one's being tied to the consequences of choices. Such a psychological process and a desire for the transcendent develop from existential predicaments and emphasizes an integral method. Experience that has personal relevance and potential for change is pivotal for creating wellbeing. The focus of metaphysical discussions in Indian philosophical literature is on how to create a dynamic and continuous process of spiritual uplift that is not distanced or alienated from the lived experiences of the person.

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