

Refurbished Ancient Indian thought in Contemporary Clinical Psychology

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Abstract

India has been known as the land of Saints and Sages who made world spiritually aware of how to deal with various life issues. Different philosophers, thinkers, saint and sages have revealed about human nature i.e., how do we think, perceive, act and use our cognitive functions as well as emotional aspects to solve our problems. Indian system of thought is guided through compilation of interrelated aspects of philosophy, religion, spirituality, yog (yoga) and meditation. In Vedas four main branches of Yog - Karma (action) yog; Bhakti (devotion) yog; Gyan (knowledge) yog; and Raja (meditation) yog, has been described. Further, according to the Vedas the soul is said to be connected with mind, which connects to the body and this to the outer world causing knowledge and action. The mind has three elements/virtues (Gunas) - Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Principles of social wellbeing are also highlighted, for example - being patient, altruism, tolerance and avoiding anger. There are five foibles - lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego that are root cause of many problems in life. According to Gurbani (which means the knowledge provided by God through His messengers like True Gurus (spiritual teachers), Saints, and Great Incarnations, wherein they provided us the true knowledge of God) there are five principal virtues - Truth, Contentment, Self-control, Patience, and Good-will for all which are of immense healing potential for any problem. Further, the Gurus have suggested collective prayers, surrendering to the God and being happy in His cause, and simple living. The developments in the fields of science and technology have revolutionized human life at material level but it is only superficial: underneath modern men and women are living in conditions of great mental and emotional stress, irrespective of culture and economic background people are suffering from mental illness. Although, ancient Indian techniques, such as yog, meditation, spirituality and guideline of saints, sages and great thinkers are preventive in nature, they can be of great help if used in refurbished manner in counselling and psychotherapy.

Keywords: *Clinical Psychology; Triguna; Gurbani; Indian Thought; Yog; Vedas*

Introduction

Indian techniques and thinking, basically, are preventive in nature; hence, it's easy to bring into daily life practices. These concepts can very easily, effectively and efficiently be applied in Clinical Psychology. In India, very peacefully and persistently the concept of spirituality has been developed into science of yog and then carried on further with exceptional experimentation, discovery and accomplishment in the mighty field of Yog. Across the globe, now a days, yog has been practised for both prevention as well as treatment resort for physical and psychological problems. India has been blessed with many great souls and many of them were not born in India but were influenced by way spirituality was being practised here. Through their writings and speeches and by setting themselves as role models these pious souls inspired millions of people showed them the path to Self-Realization.

These sacred souls were born with a purpose and are still active in our minds, even if they are physically no more on the earth, and through their thoughts, preaching, memories and deeds they are guiding human beings. Their thoughts, preachings and actions, present

in the form scriptures, have distinguished preventive as well as healing effects, and are of utmost importance. For example, Devotee Namdev (1270 - 1350) says - "Always meditate on the Lord's Name, remember Him constantly. Love the Lord with all of your heart and serve Him together with your hands" [1].

Saint Tukaram (1608 - 1650) proposed the concept of living as a service to the community, similarly Mother Teresa says, let us touch the dying, the poor, the lonely and the unwanted according to the graces we have received and let us not be ashamed or slow to do the humble work [2] and group worship through music [3]. Further, Saint Tukaram believes, one should love God and should remain free from shackles of different traditions. Further, mystic poet Kabir says during bad times, we start praying to god. However, during good times, we often forget him. If we were to always remember him, bad situations would never bother us. Most important of all was the privilege of being a devotee and to exercise in life, meditating on God's name says Sant Tukaram [3]. Baba Bulleh Shah (1680 - 1758) says that it's important to remove ego from within us and to control the foibles inside us and rest of the deeds are useless, we need not struggle psychologically with worldly affairs [4]. In the following sections understanding of human psyche and preventive and healing effects of Indian thought has been discussed.

Triguna (three virtues) theory: Three states of mind

The Guna theory has its origin from the Sankhya school of Indian philosophy which states that the entire physical universe is made up of three elements - Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas [5]. These Gunas interact with the environment and are expressed as personality traits. This system incorporates the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of personality and this widens the scope to understand human nature. With its focus on the innate qualities of the three Gunas whose varying balance embodies personality, the Indian perspective offers a deeper, holistic, and spiritual understanding of human nature. The word "Gunas" has contextual meaning and is used with different meanings in different contexts. In context of music, vowel phonology and arts literature it's used as string or thread, rope, sinew, chord [6], in dharma (religion) and soteriological literature it's been used as virtue, merit, excellence [7] and in shastras, sutras, the Epics, food and analytical literature it has been used as quality, peculiarity, tendency, attribute, property, species [8] but for this present work the meaning of Gunas is restricted to virtue, merit, quality, tendency, attribute, or property. In Bhagavad Gita, Verse 17.2 refers to the three Gunas as inherent nature, the psychology or personality of an individual [9]. Gunas enclose all existence and actions, and there is a dynamic transformation of energy among them [10].

According to the Triguna theory there are three states of mind:

- **Sattva Guna:** Sat is basically translated as sattva "pure, truthful" and satya "truth" [11]. The concepts of Sattva and Tamas have been mentioned in the Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad (1.3.28) [11]: "Asato mā sad (sat) gamaya - "lead me from delusion to truth; tamaso mā jyotir gamaya - from darkness to light; mṛtyor mā amṛtam gamaya - from mortality to immortality." Further, sattva means being cool in pleasure and pain, the practise of truth, and process of acquiring knowledge and is characterized by qualities such as cleanliness, truthfulness, dutifulness, detachment, discipline, contentment, and staunch determination, being free from attachment and vanity [12,13].
- **Rajas Guna:** It has been described as an intermediary between Tamas and Sattva (Prabhupada, 1976) - the dynamic, passionate and is marked by agitation, anxiety, nervousness, desire for sense gratification, little interest in spirituality, envious, and materialistic mentality, imbalance, the state of being impatient and arrogant [13].
- **Tamas Guna:** Tamas means darkness (ignorance, lack of knowledge) and is manifested through dullness, lethargy, fatigue, and even depression. Qualities associated with Tamas include mental imbalance, anger, ignorance, no desire to learn, arrogance, and helplessness [13]. The quality of Tamas overcomes the illumination of knowledge and leads to many errors and being a product of ignorance; it blinds all living beings and enslaves them of negligence, indolence and slumber [12].

Tamas has negative correlation with Sattva and positive correlation with Rajas, and these findings are in line with Vedic knowledge that Sattva is related positively to well-being, while Tamas has negative effects on well-being [10]. The negative relationship between Sattva and Tamas has also been found by other researchers [14]. Sattva has been found to be positively correlated with emotional well-being, psychological well-being and social well-being while Rajas and Tamas were negatively correlated with all well-being domains [14].

Yog (yoga) and Mental Health

Yog is a physical, mental, and spiritual practice which has its origin in India. Expansion of conscious knowledge and making oneself the master of one's mind are the basic aims of yog. Yog has been known to heal and treat many psychological problems simply by practicing and believing in it. It requires focusing on the breath and body, which makes it a great way to soothe a person's mind and relieve worries. Yogic postures and breathing exercises keep a person free from tension and stress. Modern interest in relaxation can be traced to studies on Shavasana (Corpse Pose). Increasing fame of meditational practices links psychology to oriental religious practices and philosophy.

In Vedas four main branches of Yog (yoga) has been described:

1. Karma (action) yog
2. Bhakti (devotion) yog
3. Gyan (knowledge) yog and
4. Raja (meditation) yog.

Karma yoga as preventive therapy

The word "Karma" means "to do, to act". Any mental or physical act is called Karma (Action). Karma is also the word used to describe the consequence of this act, thus the word also refers to the Universal Law of Cause and Effect. Our present situation is a result of our past deeds and our present actions will determine our future. Once we understand this, we can no longer blame anybody else for what happens to us, but rather accept responsibility for ourselves [15]. Karma Yoga has been loosely translated as 'Action without expecting results' that can be used for Cultivating equanimity (calmness) of mind with respect to results, living with purpose, prasada buddhi (Graceful acceptance of results) and recognition of the Lord as a way to achieving healthy psycho-spiritual growth [16].

Other forms of Yog

- **Raja Yoga proposes:** Self-control, non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, pure way of life, non-accumulation of possessions, discipline, physical exercises, breathing exercises, and withdrawal of the senses from external objects, concentration, meditation, and complete realisation.
- **Gyana Yoga proposes:** Potential to discriminate, refraining from materialistic assets, to stand above things, faith and trust in the Holy Scriptures and the words of the Master (Spiritual teacher) and constant striving for God - the burning desire in the heart to realise God and unite with Him. Atma Gyana, the realisation of our true Self, is the experience that we are not separate from God, but are one with God and all of life.
- **Bhakti Yoga proposes:** Devotion to God, repetition of God's name, to hear and read about God, to sing the praises of God, good spiritual company, Withdrawal and control of the senses with regard to worldly things, to show honour to people who have dedicated their lives to God, contentment.

In Sikhism, the Five Virtues - Sat (truth), Daya (compassion), Santokh (contentment), Nimrata (humility), and Pyaar (love) - are fundamental qualities which one should develop in order to reunite or merge with God [17]. Further, Sikhism proposes three basic pillars of life:

- **Naam Japo (contemplating God's names):** Meditating on God's name to control the five foibles and a simple living.
- **Kirat Karo (work diligently):** One should work honestly, without exploitation or fraud.
- **Vand Chhako (Sharing with others):** Sharing meals with others, helping the poor one or needy person.

Spirituality and mental health

It has been found that religion and spirituality can enhance mental health through positive religious coping, community and support, and positive beliefs. Further, religion and spirituality can be damaging to mental health by if negative religious coping, misunderstanding

and miscommunication, and negative beliefs is there [18]. Spirituality leads to better mental health, increased well-being, and heightened quality of life [19]. Spirituality exerts its effect on health in terms of mortality, ways coping and compliance, and recovery:

- Spirituality had a favourable impact on recovery, improved well-being [20,21] and
- Lowered levels of depression [22,23].
- There are more tangible positive effects of spirituality on health [24].

Some studies have shown that religious coping strategies, like turning to God for help and feeling God's presence, alleviate anxiety and apprehension in patients with multiple myeloma and additional physical symptoms in patients with cancer.

Shraddha - Faith

Why should Kabir (the mystic poet) worry, what good it is to worry? God worries for me; I do not have any worries. Further he says that - Why should the man weep when the God resides in his heart? Only one tide of the sea will sweep all poverty and pain. Guru Nanak Dev ji says we need not be worried, Waheguru (God) will worry for you. He will take care of you and is taking care of everything on the on the globe and universe as well [25]. Religious beliefs and practices, and religious attendance in particular, are associated with better mental health in family caregivers of persons with dementia [26]. Religious involvement/religiousness has beneficial and protective effects on people's mental and physical health as well as on people's longevity [27]. Researchers have found high significant positive correlation between religiousness and mental health - widening the populations to young, adults, older people, general community residents, immigrants and refugees, the sick, addicts, homosexuals, personality disorders and so on [28-30].

Prayer

Prayer is the key of the morning and the bolt of the evening [31]. Praying as a special worshipping ceremony has been found to reduce mortality [32]. Prayer means asking someone (here, especially religious deity) very politely for help. "Help" may encompass solving life issues, health problems, financial issues, psychological problems, etc. This polite request involves a kind of surrender to the deity as if he/she is the last resort to seek help. Prayer may include chanting mantras or just remembering the deity/God or it may also include rituals. By surrendering and talking mentally/orally to the beloved deity one feels relieved - and it works as catharsis. Prayer has been positively related to a number of health and psychological outcomes [33]:

- Purpose in life [34]
- Adjustment in marital issues [35], optimism [36]
- Happiness [37]
- Psychological well-being [38]
- Self-esteem [39] and
- Satisfaction in life, existential (meaning and purpose in life) well-being, and religious satisfaction [40].

Attachment to God - secure or anxious

Psychiatric symptoms have a positive correlation with Anxious attachment to God, while secure attachment to God has negative association with psychiatric symptoms. Further, prayer has negative correlation with symptoms of anxiety-related disorders among individuals who have a secure attachment to God, but has positive association with these outcomes among those who have a more insecure/avoidant attachment to God [41].

Surrendering to the God and being happy in his cause

Complete surrender to God, realising that He alone is our Saviour, nothing happens without His knowledge, and that whatever happens to us, good or bad, is by His will and only for our ultimate good. Resigning oneself to the dispensation of God is the essence of absolute

surrender or Saranaagati. True surrender is surrendering desire itself, not surrendering to desire. It is becoming the offering, rather than the offeror, the sacrifice rather than the sacrificer. In that holy ritual, person does not offer mantras, but only his/her silence. It is a rite, in which one communicates with Silence, through silence and by silence [42]. It is giving your-self to God, the silent power that may never respond to your prayers and calls, without expectations In the Bhagavad Gita; Sri Krishna has given an assurance that He will absolve from sin those who surrender themselves to Him [43]. Kabir Ji (the poet) says - this (human body) is the abode of love, not the house of your aunt. Only by severing your head and folding your hands, can you enter this abode (Severing your head is a metaphor for losing one's ego).

Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469-1539), a saint from Punjab, repeatedly reminds us of 'Hukum' (Will of God) in his compositions: -'walking according to the Will of God is the key' where walking denotes 'living our life'. Further, Guru Nanak Dev ji says that - "Everything happens as per the Will of God; Nothing is outside the Will of God. Nanak says that "the one to understand this concept has no ego" (Japji Sahib, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs). Your Will tastes sweet (as nectar). Constant remembrance of God is what Nanak wishes for. Means - 'All that Nanak seeks is constant remembrance that Your Will is as sweet as nectar' [44].

Compassion and health

Compassion may have ensured our survival because of its tremendous benefits for both physical and mental health and overall well-being. Research by APS William James Fellow Ed Diener, a leading researcher in positive psychology, and APS James McKeen Cattell Fellow Martin Seligman suggests that affiliating with others in a meaningful way aids us enjoy better mental and physical health and enhances recovery from disease; furthermore, research has revealed that compassion may even lengthen our life spans [45].

We feel happy when we give something to someone or offer help to someone. This is how compassion is related to mental health - by acting in a helping way one may feel happy and that may lead to better mental health. A brain-imaging study led by neuroscientist Jordan Grafman from the National Institutes of Health suggested that the "pleasure centres" in the brain work potentially when we notice someone offering money to charity as when we get money ourselves. Giving to others even escalates well-being far beyond what we experience when we spend money on ourselves [46].

Altruism

"One of the greatest diseases is to be nobody to anybody" - said by Mother Teresa [2]. Guru Nanak Dev ji said that if one wants to serve the Lord, the Ultimate Realty, one should serve the poor. Altruism (Parupkaar) can reduce stress as well as improve mood, self-esteem and happiness.

- Helping others feels good
- Keeps people stay connected and thereby reduces isolation
- It helps to keep things in perspective
- Nature always pays back - is you help someone, you will be helped by someone else and this phenomenon is contagious too.
- It can relieve stress
- It helps wash off negative feelings
- It can help us live longer and better.

Love

Baba Bulleh Shah says that one may demolish or destroy anything but should not break any one's heart because God lives there - means one should love and care for human beings that's the only way to love God [4]. Love is worship, a blessing that comes from personal helicon and the opposite is true for hatred and selfishness are curses, great psychic forces that frame human experiences. Research has that children who are reared in an atmosphere of love perform better than those who do not have such an environment. Love can bring out the

hidden powers and potentials from within the children; fill them with the power of confidence to face the challenges of life. All the great visionaries had this blessing of love. The rise and fall of nations depends on the degree with which leaders behold the principles of love to run them. Health practitioners have affirmed the fact that hatred arising from selfishness may be responsible for most of the emerging physical diseases that cause sudden death [47]. Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the 10th Sikh Guru said that "I speak the truth, listen everyone: Only the one who is absorbed in True Love shall attain the Lord" [48]. Mystic poet Kabir Ji has said that the person who has no love inside him he is like as corpse - means one should love others. Mother Teresa has said that, intense love does not measure, it just gives. Even the rich are hungry for love, for being cared for, for being wanted, for having someone to call their own [2].

Humility

Kesebir [49] described humility as "a quiet ego" and explained that it "involves a willingness to accept the self's limits and its place in the grand scheme of things." Put simply, a humble person has a calm sense of self-mastery - they know their strengths and weaknesses, and they don't seek praise or confirmation from their peers because they neither want nor need it.

- Humble people are better in developing interpersonal relationships
- Humble people tend to be less prejudiced
- Less likely to impose their own beliefs onto others [50].
- More likely to offer their help - as well as their time and their money - to people who needed it [51].
- Humbler people make the best employees [52,53].
- Humbler students scored better academically [54].

Contentment

Contentment, one factor that influences happiness, is an attitude which encompasses satisfaction and peace, regardless of external circumstances. Another definition, penned by Rachel Small on www.tinybuddha.com, describes contentment as 'being completely at peace with who you are and what you're doing in the moment while simultaneously maintaining a vision for the future'. In Buddhism, contentment is the lack of suffering. It is acquired through learning detachment and reducing desire. Much suffering results from our desires. Detachment is a way of accepting things as they are. It is not a detachment from life, but from specific outcomes [55]. In Sikhism contentment (or Sabar or Santokh) is known as attainment of First Treasure. Contentment, in Sikhism, has been categorized into two forms: Contentment (Santokh) and True Contentment (Satt Santokh/Sabar). Contentment can be broken, turning souls greedy for the temporal world, but True Contentment is never broken and such a soul is eligible for the Supreme You are true and content; the Word of Your Shabad (sound current) is cool and soothing. Through it, we are lovingly, intuitively attuned to You. ||3||, Page 1038, Adi Granth] [56]. The soul having contentment is called (contented) Saabari or Santokhi [57]. Neither illusion nor the mind, only bodies attained death. Hope and delusion did not die, so Kabir said [58]. Illusion (Maya) means wealth or anything that human being strongly desire for is never gone/ dies the person dies. Kabir warns us through this Doha to remain happy and satisfied with whatever god has blessed us with and not to be jealous with those who is richer and not to take any wrong path to become prosperous and wealthy [59].

Conclusion

The concepts discussed in afore mentioned topics are quite simple and interesting which can be put in to daily life activities. These concepts have their inbuilt, natural and spiritual potentials which can heal as well as prevent psychological problems. Indian thought and spiritual frame work is quite vast and is far beyond the limits of this small piece of work. We can keep on exploring.

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