

EDITORIAL

Indian mental concepts: Looking forward

T. S. Sathyanarayana Rao, L. Sam S. Manickam, Roy Abraham Kallivayalil¹

Departments of Psychiatry, JSS University, JSS Medical College Hospital, M.G. Road, Mysore, ¹Indian Psychiatric Society, Pushpagiri Institute of Medical Sciences, Tiruvalla, Kerala, India

“Only he who can see the invisible, can do the impossible”
–Frank Gomes.

THE BEGINNING

When we envisaged this project 2 years ago, we were clear as to what we intended to do. However, as we moved along we realized its complexities as aired by some of the eminent members of the psychiatry community. Though there were differences of opinion among the editorial team, we felt that we have to make a beginning. Over the years of practice of psychiatry in India, we realized that in order to provide effective care of the persons and families with mental disorders, we need to be innovative and inclusive of the diverse cultural setting which we hail from. Therefore, the real art of psychiatry depends on how well one integrates the diversity in one's practice. When we announced this initiative, several eyebrows were raised as to where we are heading to. Though we are not completely content with what we have achieved, but we could see the end of the tunnel after 2 years of incubation. We are hoping that there will be more psychiatrists who would dare to tread the path that we are laying, though it is not easy.

THE IMPETUS

The models that we have are the steps taken by some of the pioneers in psychiatry who made solo ventures during their times and dared to move forward from the “scientific” tradition in which we are trained. Concepts that were considered alien to medicine and psychiatry were keenly searched and brought under the fabric of science. One of the treatises that was left unnoticed is ‘*The Yoga Sutras*’ written by Girindrasekhar Bose.^[1] Efforts by Vahia,^[2] on bringing in Yogic concepts into the main stream has helped develop the branch of Yoga into a wider perspective and now a separate journal of Yoga is being published from

India. Guru-Chela relationship that was proposed by Neki^[2] made researchers re-look at the doctor-patient and teacher-student relationship in the Asian cultural context.^[3] The concept of mind that is referred to in different Indian philosophical schools of thought intrigues many.^[4-6]

THE CURRENT EFFORT

From the time we launched this project two years ago, we have received numerous articles and many have shown interest to write. Out of the articles that we received, the editorial team has accepted almost half of the submitted articles for publication in this current volume. This decision was based on the pattern and flow of the content, relevance, completeness, and congruity with the basic Indian mental concepts as envisaged for this project. The very important determinant was its application to behavioral sciences, in general and psychiatric practice, in particular. Above all, space constraint had a significant role in the final outcome.. We would like to interact with those authors in future and provide mentorship to the young researchers as well. Some of the authors have considered Indian thoughts, without referring to the Indian treatise but have solely relied on authors from abroad that were available in Google search. However, there are several researchers in India, who have worked on different concepts but those may be in the libraries of different institutions in India or published in journals that are not yet accessible through the net search. Till Indian Journal of Psychiatry was available online and was indexed in PubMed, a lot of Indian research in psychiatry also went unnoticed by the International Community of Psychiatrists. Therefore, we urge those who are interested in the Indian mental concepts to unearth the unpublished doctoral and master level thesis as well as those articles that are published in several Indian journals, including the “Journal of Indian Psychology” and to scan through the comprehensive list of articles that are available in the ICSSR publication.^[7]

Address for correspondence: Dr. T. S. Sathyanarayana Rao, Department of Psychiatry, JSS Medical College Hospital, JSS University, M. G. Road, Mysore, Karnataka - 570 004, India. E-mail: tssrao19@yahoo.com

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SOME THOUGHTS

The current issue is being brought out as a first volume/supplementary and we look forward to your valuable suggestions, creative and critical comments, and feedback on this initiative, which would help us to develop a guideline for the new authors to explore the Indian mental concepts. It may also help us to develop a blue print for a workshop on Indian mental concepts in the near future. It may be good idea to get the potential authors for a workshop and work toward the objective of churning out meaningful work. Scholars from different disciplines, including neurology, computer science, psychology, and philosophers, including Sanskrit scholars apart from psychiatry can be brought together for a dialogue and aim at arriving consensus on some of the concepts. For example, the “personality” viewed differently by the major schools of philosophy and therefore it would be difficult for us to come to the conclusion of “Indian Personality.” Even for the Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas based tests of personality, there are more than 12 tests and are likely to increase in number.^[8] But increased number of tests on the same concept may not help us in developing in depth research on the concepts and may not help reach the level of research achieved with the Hamilton scales or the Beck’s tools.

HURDLES TO OVERCOME

The ancient treatises from India are written in Sanskrit and Paali language and hence, poses difficulty in defining the concepts, especially, when the same word in the original language gets translated into different words in English. Different authors interpret the term Manas, as consciousness, mind, and self.

Apart from the barriers of language and equating the concepts with religion, there are several attitudinal issues that block the researchers from exploring the Indian concepts. Manickam had identified five major attitudinal hurdles in researching the Indian concepts, which are related to the interpretation of the concepts.^[9] While some of the authors tend to claim that, “It is propounded by the Indian sages centuries ago...”, there is another group, which equates the Indian concepts with that of the western concepts, like equating yoga with relaxation or biofeedback and thereby losing the real meaning of the concept of yoga, and decreased interest evinced in conducting research on these concepts. Thirdly, there is a neglect to anything “Indian” since we do not value what we have and are unwilling to explore and experiment with concepts of Indian origin. The change that we have now started accepting articles related to Indian mental concepts for publishing in the mainstream journal is a sea change, which was unheard of, a decade ago. Another issue is that those who are exploring the topics do not network with each other to generate a multi-center collaborative study on any of the concepts. Nine major hurdles were identified in the pursuit of research on Indian concepts: Unity versus

diversity (referring to the diverse schools of thought), science versus philosophy (discarding the concepts that they are not scientific) specific versus integrative (based on specific concept, generalizing to the whole) technique versus theory (yoga asanas are different from yoga as a way of life) clinical versus therapy (specific culturally valid techniques), experimental versus experiential (newer forms of research methods to evaluate the concepts), qualitative versus quantitative (overemphasis on quantitative methods), practice versus publication (practice inclusive of spirituality, but shying away from publishing), stagnant versus vibrant (willingness to modify concepts to meet the needs).^[8] As we move forward, we need to accept/enquire, identify/explore, maintain/persist, and communicate/modify the concepts. The concepts related to Buddhist thoughts have advanced far beyond the concepts from other schools of thought. And it is time to act.

THE ONWARD JOURNEY

We would like to invite our young psychiatrists to listen to the wake-up call given by Swami Vivekananda and end this note with his quote, “The one characteristic of Indian thought is its silence, its calmness. At the same time, the tremendous power that is behind it is never expressed by violence. It is always the silent mesmerism of Indian thought” (p. 274).^[10] And we hope that there will be more takers to explore the Indian mental concepts when the words of Vivekananda resounds in us as he continued in his writing, “... as you go on studying them, they fascinate you; you cannot move; you are bound; and whoever has dared to touch our literature has felt the bondage, and is there bound for ever”. Like the gentle dew that falls unseen and unheard, and yet brings into blossom the fairest of roses, has been the contribution of India to the thought of the world (p. 274).^[10] The journey is begun and let us look forward to the next volume with many more concepts that help us practice more effectively.

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