Indian Indigenous Perspective on Holistic Human Development

Dr. Sunita Singh
Assistant Prof., Dept. of Psychology
Raghunath Girls P.G. College,
Meerut 250001 U.P., India
Email: myworkspace252@gmail.com

Dr. Sachin Kumar
Assistant Prof., Dept. of Psychology
Jagdish Saran Hindu P.G. College
Amroha, U.P., India
Email: Sp.psychology@yahoo.com

Prof. Kumkum Pareek
Department of Psychology
Raghunath Girls P.G. College,
Meerut 250001 U.P., India
Email: kumkumpareekrg@gmail.com

Abstract:

The concept of holistic development represents a comprehensive and integrated blend of physical, mental, emotional spiritual and environmental progress in life. This article aims to discover the indigenous perspective and its importance in holistic human development. An extensive literature was reviewed to comprehend the Indian indigenous perspective, how the Indian indigenous perspective views the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and environmental aspects as holistic. The analysis of related literature reveals the theories and some key elements which are rooted in ancient Indian mythology and have been incorporated into scientific thinking on fundamental questions. Hindu ideology states that efforts are made to meet human needs on both spiritual and social level. According to the Hindu model, ideal development comprises the ability to integrate the spiritual growth by recognizing the spiritual aspects of human development, moral and religious significance, and cultural worldview. Description of Ashramdharma (a four stage approach to human development), fundamental goals (Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha), and Ashtang Yoga are the striking contribution of Indian indigenous knowledge system to guide the world for holistic, sustainable, comprehensive and harmonious growth by taking nature hand in hand.

Keywords:

Holistic development, Indian indigenous perspective, Ashramdharma, Ashtang Yoga.

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Introduction

The world is growingly talking about the sustainable and holistic development for the most striking reason- climate change, though the increased awareness is the core reason behind this. It is generally believed that the Indian indigenous movement is not more than just an exotic addition to the existing large number of sub-disciplines in the field of psychology. Indian culture is no exception and, as in all great civilizations, reflection on the question of development began in religion, philosophy and mythology. In Western psychology and sociology – particularly in the seminal works of Durkheim, Wundt, Weber, Freud, Jung, Adler, Campbell, Lévi-Strauss and others – when the meaning of mythological narratives and archetypes inherent in worldviews and religion was considered essential to the psychological understanding of cultural and individual identity formation, but these approaches have almost disappeared from the mainstream scene. Surprisingly, even within cross-cultural and cultural psychology, interest in the psychology of religion – a central field in the early days of modern psychology in the 19th century – is quite limited (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003).

Culturally significant and specific concepts, that are not usually the part of globally codified indigenous theories, simply appear to be supplementary of dominant Western theories. Many of the Indian scholars highlighted many issues that are central to dominant theories of development. Hindu religious ideology attempts to satisfy human needs, both spiritual and social. Therefore, it would be wrong to assume that the ultimate purpose of *Moksha* is necessarily contrary to the duties that a person must perform in his social life. Humans engage in spiritually oriented rituals and thereby create networks of symbolic meanings that characterize them as self-aware individuals within groups and societies that are structured, ordered, and reinforced certain ideas, values, orientations and commitments. Modified versions have been included several times in other books of the Vedas and other canonical scriptures, and even today, the hymns described in the Vedas and other canonical *Sanatana* scriptures are regularly used as mantras in Hindu worship rituals, even at present day.

Hindu Scriptures and Indian Indigenous Knowledge System

Hindu scriptures are the most ancient texts, rich in knowledge regarding the existence of Universe as well as human. The Hindu tradition of thought has undergone a continuous process of psychological analysis, criticism and refinement, which has led to Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and many other traditions such as the Arya Samaj, Pranami, etc. Additionally, there are many regional and local traditions that have very subtle theories about the human psyche and its development, such as Siddha

Yoga and Ayurveda. A striking feature of classical Hindu thought, and in particular of most of its theories on the human condition, is that humans, like all living beings, are primarily suffering beings. This "diagnosis" is justified on two levels. At the first level, these theories draw on various empirical information showing that it is the physical, mental, and social conditions of human life that make people prone to experiencing suffering, for example in the form of interpersonal conflict, injustice, discontent and disappointment in the form of difficulties such as hunger, thirst, loss and isolation, in the form of fear, illness, pain, weakness and death, which arise due to one's own misfortune or the misfortune of others. Here is an overview of Hindu scriptures, which are assumed to incorporate Indian knowledge system and hence analyzed to understand the perspective on human holistic development:

Primary Scriptures

1. The Vedas: Vedas are the most primary and sacred texts of the Indian knowledge system. There are four Vedas:

    1.1. Rigveda: In Rigveda, there is description of hymns and verses oriented to praise God and to uncover the life mysteries.

    1.2. Yajurveda: Yajurveda describes the rituals and sacrificial practices which provide instructions for ceremonies and offerings.

    1.3. Samaveda: Samveda is concerned with music primarily. It describes melodies and chants for Vedic rituals.

    1.4. Atharvaveda: Atharvaveda is primarily concerned with medicine, therapies and healing processes. It contains the collection of hymns and spells for protection, healing, and spiritual growth.

2. The Upanishads: The Upnishadas are also the primary scriptures of the Indian knowledge system. The Upnishadas provide philosophical texts aiming to explore the nature of reality, the self, Atman (individual soul), and the ultimate truth.

3. The Bhagavad Gita: The Bhagvad Gita is the most popular scripture of the Indian knowledge system. It is based on 700-verse dialogue between Prince Arjuna and Lord Krishna, at the beginning of the war of Mahabharata. These verses provide the most practical guidance regarding the true duty, righteousness, devotion, and reality.

4. The Ramayana: Ramayana is also a very popular scripture based on the life story of Lord Rama. This ancient epic provides the teaching of love, loyalty, and righteousness and patience.

5. The Mahabharata: A sprawling narrative about the Kurukshetra War, containing philosophical teachings, moral dilemmas, and insights into human nature.

6. The Puranas: The Puranas serve as repositories of traditional wisdom. These are rich sources to ignite the insights into Hindu cosmology, mythology, rituals, and practices. The Puranas contain stories about creation, destruction, Gods, Goddesses, Saints, and moral lessons for virtuous living.

All these ancient Indian scriptures provide a rich source of knowledge on theology, philosophy, mythology, ethics, and spirituality, shaping Hindu beliefs, practices, and values. They continue to inspire and guide millions of followers worldwide. Further, based on the teaching of these scriptures, we'll attempt to understand the concepts related to holistic development.

What is Holistic Development?

First, we'll have a glance at the concept of holistic development in the modern context. The term 'holistic' simply means *'the whole person'*. According to Phan, Ngu, and White (2021), the term 'holistic' in psychology *"...refers to a perspective that views individuals as integrated wholes, not just as the sum of their parts. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit, and considers the individual within their broader social and environmental context"*. On other hand, the term 'development' was defined by Pearson (2000), as *"an improvement qualitative, quantitative or both - in the use of available resources"*. Thus holistic development can be considered as to grow with intellectual, mental, physical, emotional and social abilities in order to cope with everyday challenges. Holism is a fundamental proposition that permeates many Indigenous knowledge systems. Human development is a process governed by social as well as biological factors. According to modern scientific understanding, individual human development begins before birth when a sperm fertilizes an egg, thereby creating a zygote, and continues with a variety of processes and qualitative changes that human organisms undergo. Although psychologists are also interested in biological influences on human development and generally focus on psychological processes, specifically motor and cognitive, such as conceptual understanding, language acquisition, interpretation, problem solving, social and moral decision-making, emotion regulation, memorization, personality, identity development etc. Biologists focus primarily on physical development from conception through death and decomposition, whereas psychologists focus on themes such as cognitive development, psychosocial development, psychosexual, moral development, faith development and motivational development.

Following four fundamental aspects inclusively termed as holistic development:

1. **Physical Development:** Physical development refers to the continuous and progressive acquisition of fine and gross motor skills.

2. **Cognitive Development:** Cognitive development refers to the continuous learning with increasing focus, problem solving and memory abilities.
3. **Linguistic Development:** Linguistic Development refers to the progressive acquisition of speech, listening and language abilities.
4. **Social-emotional Development:** It refers to the abilities of understanding and communicating the emotions, recognizing and regulating the emotions of self and others, which directly and indirectly facilitate the healthy social relationship.

The focus of developmental psychologists remains at understanding the changes in different stages of development. What leads to the emergence of a new stage and how do earlier stages, for example childhood experiences, affect later stages are major aspects of the developmental process innate or is this process significantly influenced by environment, experience, and learning? Of course, it would be more difficult to identify the universal laws of human behavior, if different environmental aspects had different effects on key factors of development. In recent decades, these questions have focused considerable attention on the role that specific social and cultural contexts play in human psychological development. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model views a child's development as being affected by four interrelated layers of the social environment, including the child's parents, others, the values and customs of the culture in which the child lives. Similarly, Super and Harkness' (1986, 1997) "developmental niche" model proposes that there are three major subsystems that are interconnected with each other and with the child's microsystem. The first subsystem includes the climate, geophysical conditions, economy, physical equipment and family size, second includes childcare routines, training techniques, forms of schooling, rites of passage, and third includes the beliefs and values, especially their subjective theories about human development. The second and third subsystems can be considered as concerned with indigenous because it emphasizes the role of culture and culture-specific beliefs. In conclusion it can be said that all of these models require a detailed description of the developmental context under examination, and to do this, we must carefully examine the indigenous aspects of the developmental niche. However, an integrated approach requires taking into account much more than just the social and cultural aspects of development. It is also necessary to consider the global dimension and its interaction with major developmental niche systems, including the different histories and roles of psychology in different cultures.

Holistic Development: According to Ancient Hindu Scriptures

a. Evolution of Species as the Successive Descendants of Lord Vishnu

In Puranas, Dashavtara, Mahabharata, Ramayana and Bhagvat Gita, we find the description of various descendents of Lord Vishnu. The striking sequential

depiction of the biological process of evolution can be seen as the gradual development of Lord Vishnu's successive descendants. Such an elaborative and systematic description of origin of human as the species can be seen only in Indian indigenous repertoire of knowledge. According to Hinduism, first life originated in water (the Fish), then amphibians (the Turtle) moving to land, and then evolving towards strictly terrestrial animals (the Boar). The evolution of land animals towards humanoids with vestigial animal features (the Lion-Man). In later stages, a fully developed but small individual (the dwarf) is followed by a larger, more ferocious tool-using individual (the axe-wielding warrior); The transition to a higher level of civilization, including that of mankind, is symbolized by the divine prince Rama, whose morality, courage and nobility serve as a model for appropriate behavior. The Indian model of development described in the Dasavatara of Vishnu does not show that the avatars of Lord Krishna and Buddha show that the evolution of life also includes a spiritual aspect and the Indian model leaves no doubt that achieving spiritual heights of knowledge means realizing the full potential of human development.

b. Fundamental Goals of Life

Another striking feature of the mythology of Vishnu is that his avatars reflect the evolution towards the improvement of human potential and character. In its doctrine of the four purposes of life, Hinduism recognizes four main purposes:

i.   **Dharma:** Justice, responsibility and moral behavior in accordance with the scriptures, including all duties - individual, social and religious.

ii. **Artha:** Achieving economic success, wealth and power to create a family and maintain a home.

iii. **Kama:** It refers to the satisfaction of physical and emotional desires to experience love and pleasure. Kama reflects both lower and higher sense. In lower form it refers to fulfilling basic needs whereas in higher form it seeks to connect with supreme/universal or spiritual sense.

iv. **Moksha:** Liberation from samsara. In simple word, to emancipate from the cycle of birth-death and rebirth.

These four life goals reflect the basic elements of a value system that allows people to strive to satisfy basic human needs without losing sight of the ultimate spiritual goal of salvation. He does this by valuing actions in the world if they are performed with an understanding of dharma.

c. Stages of the Development

The *Manavadharmasastra* mentions some important rules of dharma that must be applied to achieve each of the four goals: patience, forgiveness, self-control,

control of the senses, absence of anger, honesty, intelligence, knowledge and truthfulness. All these values incorporate the yoga system and constitute the moral premise of moksha. In *Ashramadharma*, the Hindu model of ideal human development, one can see how the human life cycle should be divided into four stages that achieve four sequential main goals of life:

i. **Brahmacharya Ashram:** The Brahmacharya Ashram is the period when child start his formal education by entering the Gurukul (school). This continues until the completion of education. The main purpose of this Ashrama is to make child with strong character and learn to take responsibilities of life.

ii. **Grihastha ashram:** It begins from the moment of marriage. In this ashram, one pays the several duties. First is service to God, service to the sages and saints and service to the ancestors and enjoys the good and noble things in life according to artha, kama and the goal of moksha. One of the duties that must be performed at this stage is the birth of a son, as during the life cycle there are certain religious ceremonies that must and must be performed by the male relatives.

iii. **Vanaprastha Ashram:** It begins after the duties of Grihastha Ashram are completed. This is called the ascetic or hermit stage of life. At this stage, a person gradually withdraws from active life and begins to devote more time to the study of the Holy Scriptures, contemplation and meditation.

iv. **Sannyasa Ashram:** The final stage of life during which a person mentally renounces all worldly connections, spends all his time in meditation and contemplation and reflects on the mysteries of life. In ancient times, but rarely today, a person separates from his family and becames a beggar.

d. Ashtang Yoga and Holistic Development

Yoga is one of India's most sacred and transformative gifts to the world. Ashtanga Yoga by Maharshi Patanjali is a classic work on yoga philosophy. The Sage Yoga Sutras offer a comprehensive understanding of the principles and practices of the subject with its scientific basis. The documentation of Yoga practices is a pearl shining identity of Indian knowledge system. Yoga is not only helpful in achieving the perfect mental, emotional and physical well-being for the human kind, but also provides a significant path for achieving *Moksha*, *Anand*, *awakening* or *liberation* (these all represent the highest conscious evolution state). A discussion of human psychology and its interaction with our bodies is explained in detail, along with solutions that can be implemented to live a life filled with happiness, health, and joy in abundance. The structured classical yoga program in India has

made a significant contribution to the development of health and lifestyle guidelines. Sadhana Pada, or the study of the eight limbs, is an essential tool for a yoga practitioner or teacher to climb the ladder to the highest level of the yogic path. The practice of yoga enables the yoga practitioner, in all aspects of his personality, such as physical, mental, emotional and moral levels, to attain the spiritual path.

Conclusion

In Hindu thought, everyday human experience is described primarily as an experience of the self, since people are assumed to imagine themselves as separate and distinct from all other objects in the world, either consciously or unconsciously. This is considered to be the result of a psychological connection between cause and effect, and subsequently to the tendency of discriminating, sorting and labelling everything. The Indian psychological theories are quiet compatible with the notion of fortune, happiness and satisfaction, and can be seen in the themes of classical Indian art and literature. These theories suggest that moments of happiness and satisfaction are limited and ultimately only serve to provoke further experiences of dissatisfaction and unhappiness. The systematic observations and analyses provided by *Sankhya Yoga* are not reserved for Hindus alone. These are theoretical assessments of the human condition as a whole, which are one of the reasons for the historical influence of Indian thought and science throughout Asia. Ultimately, from a psychological perspective, the importance of these theories is particularly clear, although doubts remain about their value as scientific theory: much of indigenous scientific thought, including its elements, is an important part of most Hindus' subjective theories of personality, attitudes, values, life goals, etc. This is therefore undoubtedly a clear example of how indigenous thinking, including in the field of human development, contributes to the creation and structuring of the development niche. The rituals accompany us throughout the life cycle, helping us structure the perception of our development as social and spiritual beings. Thus, the Hindu model of development—when viewed as a whole, including *samskaras*, does not exclude childhood, as some scholars have argued (Thomas, 1990). Hindu rituals emphasize the adolescence for acquisition of fundamental knowledge about the ideal Hindu life and the moral, social and psychological means of achieving it and continued throughout the life-span (Verma and Sharma, 2003). This is quite plausible, given the purpose of Vishnu's descent, which is to revive dharma at a time when it is most needed: the more difficult the times, the more important is world civilization and self-improvement. Kalki, the last avatar, can be understood as a reminder that there are external factors (such as limitations due to the passage of time) which, however, will not affect a truly and spiritually developed person.

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