

My journey through *Understanding Yoga Psychology: A review.*

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Understanding Yoga Psychology: Indigenous psychology with global relevance

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My journey toward understanding Yoga Psychology began in 1986 when I first stumbled on a paper by Professor Paranjpe on this topic. Now, nearly 40 years later, I have the honour of reviewing his book on this topic.

Understanding Yoga Psychology is a comprehensive account of Yoga Psychology as an Indigenous psychology from India. This book is valuable to a wide range of readers, from the novice yoga practitioner who is interested in the philosophical depth of yoga as a practice, to those interested in spiritual self-development, through to the cross-cultural psychologist interested in an Indigenous psychology from India, and to the experienced theoretical psychologist interested in the development of psychological theory from India as compared to many forms of “Western” psychology.

Each reader will take their own journey through this work as we all do through life and identity pursuits. Ultimately this book is about the self and self –realization, something that each of us will experience in our own manners depending upon where we are on life’s journey. I will highlight what I see as interests for specific readers as we move through this review.

The book starts off with providing the context of inquiry from a sociology of knowledge, or a knowledge systems approach, and the challenge of cross-cultural boundaries with knowledge inquiries. Paranjpe also cleverly distinguishes a philosophical from psychological approach to this work along with a discussion of the impact of British colonialism on the historical importance of Yoga Psychology and other similar Indigenous systems during the colonial and post-colonial periods of India.

Experienced (Cross-)Cultural psychologists as well as Theoretical psychologists will feel at home with the discussion of knowledge systems and the sociology of knowledge. At the same time the novice psychologist will become familiar with what Indigenous psychologists and anthropologists take as a given (Adair, 2006; Davis, 2009).

In providing a foundation for Yoga Psychology, Paranjpe begins with a clear statement of relevance and historical grounding of this account of Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras* within the broader contexts of the Indian Intellectual / philosophical tradition as well as Euro-American psychological foundations. While not engaging in the encyclopedic depth of his 1998 *Self and Identity in Indian Thought and Western Psychology*, Paranjpe situates Yoga psychology against the context of the foundational texts of the Upaniṣads and the

Vedas. This section is of particular interest to historians and theoretical psychologists comparing the development of systems of thought.

Here the basic cosmological foundations of the vedas and Upanishads are presented in a clear and historical fashion. He deftly points out the cosmology of the vedic worldview, highlighting important ontological and epistemological foundations. These include a discussion of the ideal state of human existence, the nature of mind and consciousness, and the most important concept of Self, or Purusa. There is great appeal to all readers with the full presentation of the Sāṃkhya system of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* that makes up the next four chapters, comprising the bulk of this book.

Chapter 3 begins with a presentation of the goal of Sāṃkhya as seeking to alleviate three types of suffering: internal sources of pain (body and mind), external or physical sources, and supernatural sources. Extensive detail on Purusa (self as seer/observer) is presented as pure consciousness which is entangled with Prakṛti (materiality) along with the dilemma of the multiplicity and singularity of Purusa (consciousness). This may be of particular relevance to theoretical and critical psychologists.

Paranjpe provides a detailed description of the ontology and its foundation for the epistemology of the Sāṃkhya Yogic system and offers interesting commentary on the parallel ideas of Western psychology. Detail on the three gunas (strands) of pleasure, pain & indifference that comprise Prakṛti, strands that are also common to Vedānta and Āyurveda medicine, are presented and compared to the three worlds of Popper & Eccles (1985). The evolution of these gunas into the mind, cognitive, and motor organs as well as the subtle and gross elements (psycho-physical) of sensation are also presented. This chapter closes with a discussion of the "Hard problem of consciousness" comparing the Sāṃkhya system to the philosophy of Chalmers (1995) and quantum mechanics of Stapp (2009).

Chapter 4 is dedicated to a general outline of Patañjali's eight-fold path of Aṣṭāṅga yoga, and may be of great interest to the yoga practitioner as well as those interested in spiritual development. Here, the eight limbs of the path to self-realization are presented as: behavioural restraints, observances, posture, breath control, withdrawing of attention from objects of sense, restricting the range of attention or concentration, sustaining attention for contemplation, and Samadhi the higher states of consciousness. Paranjpe goes beyond his detailed descriptions of each of these "limbs" by making relevant parallels from the history of Western psychology, including the introspectionists Wundt, Titchener, and Marbe; Locke's (1690/1959) analysis of simple and complex ideas, as well as William James' (1890/1983) analysis of the self as thinker and thought. Here the theoretical and cross-cultural psychologist might find great interest in Paranjpe's cross-comparison between Yoga Psychology and Western standards.

With a revisitation of the goal of Sāṃkhya yoga, Paranjpe highlights the need to find relief from suffering ultimately through the stoppage of the "stream of consciousness" and the realization of Self (Purusa). Interesting discussion follows with the role of the

law of Karma in this process as compared to E.L. Thorndike's law of effect. This chapter closes with the premise that suffering exceeds happiness and there is a need for Kriya Yoga to address this fundamental human problem.

Turning to an area that might be of special interest to those seeking spiritual development, chapter 5 is dedicated the afflictions (*kleśas*) and the need for Kriyā Yoga to deal with them. The five *kleśas* are comprised of "ignorance", egoism, liking or loving, aversion, and clinging on to life. Paranjpe clarifies what has been interpreted as "ignorance" as being more centrally focused on impermanence, impurity, pain, and non-self rather than the permanent, pure, pleasurable, and true self of Purusa. Patañjali's Kriyā Yoga offers a first step toward the higher pursuit of Yoga and self-realization, and Paranjpe provides a clear description of the practices of dispassion, austerity, self-study, and surrender to God that it entails. The chapter closes with a discussion of the reverse "undoing" of the genesis of afflictions through meditative practice where "to render the seeds of afflictions dry and ready to burn ... the accumulated seeds from afflictions of the [karmic] past" (pp. 75-76) will result in *samādhi*.

Paranjpe highlights issues pertinent to historical and theoretical psychologists in Chapter 6 where he address the transformation of consciousness in Samadhi, and the higher states of consciousness as the goal of Yoga practices. Again this chapter may offer a more technical and theoretical account that appeals to theoretical psychologists rather than the "how to" guide work or teachings of Jidhu Krishnamurti (1999, 2011) and Anthony De Mello (1990, 2012). Paranjpe presents the "inner core" of the eight-fold path to self-realization as the last three of those "eight limbs" of Yoga. Restricting the range of attention is the first of these where it is described how one steadies the flow of thoughts and begins to focus on a single thought. The second of these inner limbs is to sustain attention on a single thought. Paranjpe further describes the role of the removal of conventional meaning from thoughts leading to the transformation of the self-as-knower through its merging with the thought itself through full concentration on that object (of thought). Beyond this a detailed description of the transformation of sensory experience into the realization of self as pure consciousness (Purusa). The movement from this state of consciousness to Ananda (Bliss) is further elaborated upon where the true self or Purusa becomes an uninvolved witness. Paranjpe describes this penultimate state as the precursor to Dharmamegha Samanhi, or a full detachment with wisdom and "complete freedom from desires. ... just Being" (p. 88)

Chapter 7 examines parallels to the transformation of consciousness in Samadhi in Western psychology, as well as critiques coming from that tradition. Here the yoga practitioner and spiritual seeker may be left behind as Paranjpe delves deeply into the relationship between Yoga psychology and Western critical / theoretical psychology. It begins with an overview of Husserl's phenomenological reduction and his technique of *epoché*, or the "bracketing" abstinence from judgment, Paranjpe further described Husserl's (1962) six levels of phenomenological reduction and points out parallels and differences with Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. Next there is an interesting account of Jean

Piaget's (1976) ideas about religion as an "immanentist conception of the Divine" (p. 98) involving the conduct of "God" through universal values and norms. Paranjpe highlights this parallel to Yoga along with Piaget's views of consciousness as transcendent Samadhi evolving stage by stage, not unlike the ascendance through the 8-fold path of the Yoga Sutras. There is further delving into Carl Jung's (1921) views on Yoga "as a way of reconciling science and religion" (p. 101). Jung reportedly also acknowledged not only the religious aspects of Yoga, but also its elements of spiritual development. According to Paranjpe, however, Jung considered Samadhi as a state of the unconscious mind, denying it the status of an imminent state of pure consciousness; rather, that as an "ego-less" state it must be unconscious. This chapter ends with a discussion of Steven Katz's denial of pure consciousness. Katz's arguments are that Yoga does not offer an unconditioning of the mind, but rather a re-conditioning, substituting one state of consciousness for another. While Paranjpe acknowledges the constructivist position of Katz, he also points out that it is not an anathema to Yoga Psychology.

Chapter 8 begins with an account of Self-realization as the end state of meditation for the Purusa, or unchanging "seer". This is contrasted with the Western psychological concept of Self-Actualization which is more of a developmental state, having unfolded a previously teleological potential; yet still a construct that also is associated with transcendent "peak experiences". Paranjpe next provides a clear delineation of the constructs of person and personality, representing the stylistic and individual vs the ethico-legal agent as seen in Locke's (1690/1959) trilogy of mind (cognition, conation & affect). Further discussion is made regarding self as ego and its subjective and objective forms as in the works of William James (1890/1983). Lastly Paranjpe discusses the concept of identity as seen in the works of Erik Erikson (1982) where it forms the basis of self-sameness across time, specific identification, and by being identified. Most interestingly, however, Paranjpe draws parallels between these Western psychological constructs and those of *asmitā* (identity) and the transcendental Purusa (Self). The rest of this chapter's discussion is a grounding of Yoga psychology in contemporary issues of self and personhood, something that is largely theoretical but can also offer a personal sense of meaning.

Chapter 9 examines the status of Yoga in Psychology today. While clearly Indigenous and offering valuable knowledge for self-realization, Yoga remains marginalized in its homeland of India today. Paranjpe describes this as a colonial hangover based upon the prohibition of traditional knowledge during the British occupation of India. That said, it is also pointed out that there have been many contemporary attempts to resurrect various forms of Indian Indigenous psychology over the past decades, in spite of the denigration they have experienced against the standards of modern "scientific" psychology. Paranjpe further contrasts Yoga with Skinner's radical behaviorism, and compares it with constructivist cognitive psychologies (Piaget) and finally with Psychoanalysis (see Paranjpe, 2022 for more detail). In closing, Paranjpe examines a possible place for Yoga psychology in the context of "mainstream" positivist psychology

where it seems clear that research on yoga postures and breathing can be easily done, however “the problem is how to introduce the inner core (antarainga) of Yoga, which requires a reorientation of pedagogy from an extraspective and impersonal stance to an introspective and personal orientation aimed at Self-Transformation” (p. 139). Finally Paranjpe points to other forms of contemplative psychology that have arisen over the past 30 years (on meditation, mindfulness, meta-cognition and self-regulation) as partners on this re-orientation of psychology.

In closing, the appeal of this book is multifold, offering a understanding of Yoga Psychology at many levels for many differently minded readers. Many will find these views a refreshing contrast to much of contemporary Western “positivist” psychology, while others may shy away, seeing it as a form of Folk Psychology that does not stand up to the scientific rigour of mainstream Western psychology. That said, Paranjpe carefully situates this ancient system of knowledge as an empirical science of self and self-realization, themes that are common place throughout the history of Western psychology. This book further represents a growing trend of Indigenization in academia (Adair, 2006). For those looking for enlightenment and self-realization, this book may not go far enough in its account of Yoga as a system of knowledge. That said it also provides a strong theoretical foundation for those who may be seeking such self-transformation through the ideas and teachings of contemporary spiritual philosophers.

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