

Indian psychology is incomplete without Dharma and Ishvara

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Swamini Brahmajnananda Saraswati

Since the pathbreaking conference in Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, India in 2002 which gave rise to the Puducherry manifesto, several programmes of action emerged in the area of Indian psychology. Wonderful attempts were made to further define and articulate the scope of Indian psychology, introduce it as a subject matter of study in several universities, publish several articles and scholarly books and organise several workshops and conferences. Fifteen years have passed since this event. Being fortunate to have been present at the Puducherry conference and now fifteen years later, at this Mind Sciences – Swadeshi Indology conference in Delhi, at this critical juncture, I wish to articulate a few critical issues facing Indian psychology and contribute meaningfully to the objective of Indian psychology.

Trained as a Clinical psychologist largely in the Western Psychology paradigm followed by several years of clinical and counselling practice followed by an intensive grounding in our Shastra-s for close to twenty years, particularly Vedanta, an ordained monk in the Shankara Bhagavatpada order of Sannyasis and a traditional teacher of Vedanta, I stand at the cusp of an exciting moment in the history of Indian psychology. My position helps me see objectively and clearly that the objective and scope of this emerging body of Indian psychology is to promote wellness and human potential through the articulation of the models pertaining to psychological thought in the Indian tradition. However, my position also makes me see the many pitfalls it must avoid. The many emerging models and paradigms have to be careful to not overextend Indian psychology's flexible boundaries into the realm of consciousness studies. The very Vedas that reveal consciousness as all, also reveal the method of knowing which is to approach a qualified guru who is steeped in tradition after being suitably endowed with necessary qualities. To understand the reality of all as consciousness without being steeped in *sampradaya*, tradition of teaching-learning, a guru-shishya relationship, without recognising Vedanta as a means of knowledge will not be appropriate for well meaning Indian psychology practitioners. The danger of academic enthusiasm alongside the emphasis on objectivity without any *sraddha*, will lead to a selective cherry picking which will neither benefit Indian psychology nor Vedanta. Indian psychology can serve a very important role in promoting psychological transformation by healing the person and promoting greater connectedness and individual as well as collective harmony. Much like Ayurveda which does not treat disease but the person by restoring the cellular intelligence with least but appropriate

human intervention, I see the aim of Indian psychology to restore balance in the people of society by understanding, reclaiming and emphasising the role of dharma in artha (security) and kama (pleasure) as well as dharma for moksha. In the Vedic vision, the purpose of life is moksha, freedom from a sense of bondage. But, to commit to this pursuit the individual has to pass through the hoops of artha and kama legitimately with dharma as the guiding force. Indian psychology can certainly prepare individuals to align with dharma who are in harmony with themselves and the world. In fact these individuals are most eligible for Vedanta which they need to seek in a traditional setup. Indian psychology cannot seek to replicate the tradition as the building blocks of academia are very different from a traditional guru-shishya set up. It is in this context that I wish to articulate the non negotiable need, role and practical applicability of the understanding of dharma and Ishvara for human beings and hence establish that for Indian psychology to truly be complete it must include the understanding of Dharma and Ishvara. I establish this by covering the following key related topics :

1. The influences in the lens of Indian psychology
2. Framework of Dharma
3. Dharma confirms common sense ethics
4. Human need for dharma missing in hierarchy of needs
5. The need for dharma cannot be dismissed.
6. We are interconnected – Attitudes underlying *pancha yajna* as elements of preventive therapy and therapeutic practice:
7. Resulting richness of Indian psychology with the inclusion of dharma as the guiding framework
8. Dharma is a manifestation of Ishvara.

1. The influences in the lens of Indian psychology

While much of the paradigms of Western psychology deal with cognition, emotion and behaviour, there is a fundamental notion underlying all the paradigms - That I am an individual and me, the individual and the world are different entities. To the extent that this is considered so, all paradigms are incomplete as the individual needs to deal with the world which stands in opposition. Western psychology, grounded in notions of separation and difference draws much of its influence from the mind/body dualism first formulated by Descartes according to which the body operates on material laws, whereas the soul and the mind are entirely different substances which operate as per the Church doctrines. Rajiv

Malhotra notes that, 'the realm of philosophical speculation and scientific inquiry was split from the world of spirit and living matter and took on a life of its own. One was able to proceed without interfering with the other.... On the other hand, dharmic thought never created any such mind/body divide politically, philosophically or in spiritual practice.'¹

By consistently using the term 'laws of nature', Descartes successfully limited the need for God in understanding the world. Newton mechanised the cosmos as a creation of God but then made God unnecessary for its sustenance and the subsequent work by Galileo, Kepler etc had the effect of reducing the divine presence within the world almost to the point of nothingness. The abandonment of God's presence in the world became an abandonment of values, because the cosmos was seen to be governed by value free mechanical laws. In 1880s, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche spoke of values, not as a verb (meaning to 'value or esteem' something), but in a pluralistic sense of moral beliefs and social attitudes. But he secularised the word and delinked it from religion. Indian psychology practitioners run the risk of wearing the same lens of sacred-secular divide and to keep dharma, God and religion out of 'inner sciences and consciousness.' We cannot afford wearing this lens.

Seeing the influence of the Indic traditions on works of Carl Jung, the rise of the mindfulness movement, the emergence of consciousness studies, Indian psychology and its practitioners have been quick to delve into the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads and Puranas. While this is all good, my hypothesis is that we are putting the cart before the horse. Just as the many Western psychologists and thinkers made a beeline for *paravidya*, highest knowledge without fully understanding and assimilating dharma as the framework for all conduct, I am afraid that Indian psychology practitioners are also pursuing the mind-body dualism paradigm albeit in a diluted form without fully understanding the overarching role of dharma and hence Ishvara.

In the West, the different psychological models and hence application in therapeutics try to find fulfillment in themselves by modifying their thoughts, behaviour and emotions. The traumatic memories have to be dealt with, irrational thoughts have to be challenged, emotions have to be managed. So on and so forth. This has limited application. All these paradigms can effect modifications within the psychology of the person. However, after sometime these

¹ Malhotra, Rajiv – Being different – An Indian challenge to Western Universalism, Harper Collins, Delhi, 2011.

models don't work because these models still perpetuate the idea that the individual is separate and isolated from the whole. We can try to modify the subjectivity but the existential alienation of the individual from the whole remains. In the name of Indian psychology, if we start to glean Indian models of managing emotions, thoughts and behaviour from Indian philosophy selectively we are still wearing the same lens of the isolated individual 'dealing' with the world. However the isolation remains because it is determined by and is a function of the isolation itself.

2. Framework of Dharma

For Indian psychology to be relevant, simple and easily understood by lay people and not just to be relegated to conferences, Indian psychology has to simply and clearly answer and present comprehensive answers to the following questions for all of humanity:

- What is that guide which lifts me out of my subjectivity and makes me more objective?
- What is the framework to engage with the world?
- What is the guide to a life of joy, harmony and fulfilment?
- What is that guide for behaviour which irrespective of my gender, religion can be understood and upheld by everyone?

It is not for nothing that the many incidents and episodes of Mahabharata, Ramayana and Puranas have held sway over people for millennia. Before he proceeds to narrate the story of Mahabharata, Suta addresses the assembly of sages who have gathered in the forest of Naimisa and says, "I had the good fortune to hear the story of the Mahabharata composed by Vyasa to teach humanity dharma and the other ends of life, I should like to narrate it to you."

² It is not for nothing that the various characters in epics like Mahabharata have helped to lay the foundation of dharma and much of life for the many children and adults who have heard them. The dynamic nature of dharma is pointed out through the many stories that point out that even great people could do wrong things highlighting the role of karma, will based action and hence its resulting consequences.

The Vedas mapped human needs and goals, *purushartha*, that which is sought after, by all human beings, into four categories:

1. Artha (all forms of security including wealth, power, fame and influence)

² Rajagopalachari, C – Mahabharata Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, 1999, 36th edition

2. Kama (all forms of pleasure)
3. Dharma (universal values and ethics is one of the meanings)
4. Moksha (Freedom from the sense of bondage)

While the pursuit of security and pleasure is shared in common with other living beings according to how they are programmed, the pursuit of dharma and moksha is understood to be unique to human beings. Because the struggle for security, artha and pleasures, kama is not instinctually controlled but guided by changing personal values, it becomes necessary for the human society to have a set of standards which is independent of any individual's subjective values. Hence Dharma occupies the first place in the four categories of human goals. There is no English equivalent for the word 'dharma' and hence it is a non translatable. Dharma is not religion. Etymologically Dharma means principles that support and sustain ("*Dharayate iti dharma*") that order which protects us if we protect it. ("*Dharmo rakshati rakshitah*"). Depending upon the context, dharma can mean anyone or more or all of these, a. universal principles and ethics, b. duty in the form of responsibilities towards one another and hence meeting the rights of the others, c. natural, innate behavior of things, (e.g. dharma of water is to flow) and the principle of cause and effect here and in the hereafter (karma and karma phala in the form of punya and papa). Kalidasa in Kumarasambhavam (5.33] unequivocally emphasises the role of dharma by stating, *shariram adyam khalu dharmasadhanam* (this body is surely the foremost instrument of doing [good] deeds. In the Vedic vision, dharma is not only the means to the end but also the end.

3. Dharma confirms common sense ethics

Life involves relating, be it a monk or a party animal. Since life involves relating, some norms of relating are required that are universal and acceptable. The norms or standards of relating cannot be arbitrary or man made or even given by religion. Swami Dayananda Saraswati articulately argues that 'the dharmic mandates for behaviour and attitude, though commonly found in religious scriptures, in fact, trace their source to pragmatic common sense ethics, which religious ethics confirm. Dharma is a standard or norm of conduct derived from the way in which I wish others to view or treat me. These norms come from an inherent, common regard for the interest and welfare of yourself and the other. Dharma is not absolute. Values are universal in content but relative and situational in application. That a standard may be relative does not mean that it is subjective. There is a similarity in everyone's reaction to being hurt, cheated, lied to and bullied. Ethical standards are based on human consensus

regarding what is acceptable conduct’³ While there are scripturally enjoined actions, *vaidika karmas* and there are *karmas* that are enjoined according to the *varna*, group and the *ashrama*, stage of life, these are best referred to as *vishesha karma*, specific actions in line with *Vaidika dharma*. The scope of this paper is limited to *dharma* as *samanya dharma*, common understanding of *dharma*.

In spite of the differences across the religions emerging from India, Hinduism (*Sanatana dharma*), Jainism, Buddhism or even Sikhism, all are considered as *dharmic* traditions because they unanimously see the role of *dharma* as the foundation that upholds all of society. Even the importance of *dharma* to Indian sentiments is indicated by India's decision in 1947 to include the Ashoka chakra, a depiction of the *dharmachakra* (the "wheel of *dharma*"), as the central motif on India's flag. *Dharma* is an organising principle in Hinduism that applies to human beings in solitude, in their interaction with human beings and nature, as well as between inanimate objects, to all of cosmos and its parts⁴. The Oxford Dictionary of World religions refers to *dharma* as the order and customs which make life and universe possible, and includes behaviours, rituals, rules that govern society, and ethics. *Dharma*, according to Van Buitenen⁵, is that which all existing beings must accept and respect to sustain harmony and order in the world. It is neither the act nor the result, but the natural laws that guide the act and create the result to prevent chaos in the world. Van Buitenen adds that *dharma* is the pursuit and execution of one's nature and true calling, thus playing one's role in cosmic concert. In Hinduism, it is the *dharma* of the bee to make honey, of cow to give milk, of sun to radiate sunshine, of river to flow. In terms of humanity, *dharma* is the need for, the effect of and essence of service and interconnectedness of all life⁶

4. Human need for *dharma* missing in hierarchy of needs

Maslow 's hierarchy of human needs which he termed "physiological", "safety", "belonging and love", "esteem", "self-actualization", and "self-transcendence" to describe the pattern that human motivations generally move through, was largely grounded from the society he came from, which was individualistic rather than collectivist. The isolated individual can't find the answer in his/her psychological processes or just meeting needs. In

³ Saraswati, Dayananda Swami – The value of values, Arsha Vidya Centre, 2007

⁴Steven Rosen, Essential Hinduism, Praeger 2006.

⁵ J.A.B. Van Buitenen. 'Dharma and Moksa,' Philosophy East and West, Vol.7, No.1/2 (Apr-Jul 1957)

⁶ Paul Hacker, 'Dharma in Hinduism', Journal of Indian Philosophy, Volume 34, Issue 5. (English translated version by Donald R.Davis (2006)

fact it can be argued through enough case studies that when a person is at the level of self-actualization, much of what the person accomplishes may benefit others, or "the greater good" or what may be called dharma. Dharma is the overarching umbrella of the universal needs and values sought to be met by all human beings.

5. The need for dharma cannot be dismissed.

Acceptance as an ethical value is a subset of dharma and when this need is met, dharma is upheld. The need to accept and be accepted is universal. The words used above are 'need for acceptance' not a 'value for acceptance.' While the term 'value' implies that the practice of acceptance is subject to choice, no person can dismiss this. Is it a need at the same level of a physiological need? No. Human beings don't just have a value for dharma, they have a need for dharma, a need to be in touch with the reality of the situation. Dharma is met as a goal when we uphold the following ethical values. When the following needs are met by you and the other meets this need of yours, dharma is upheld. When you fulfill your responsibilities in a particular sphere, the other related person's rights are met.

I am citing some values and ethics from A-Z (the list is not exhaustive) which are universal which we seek to meet in all relationships across countries and regions. While the degree of the need may vary according to the age and stage in life, no one can deny its universality. No one can dismiss the need for dharma. The many values and needs that we all have are (Achievement, Belonging-Beauty-Aesthetics, Cleanliness, Companionship, Compassion, Competence, Competition, Co-operation, Courage, Creativity, Discipline, Duty, Education, Efficiency, Empathy, Equality, Faith, Fate, Flexibility, Freedom, Friendship, Generosity, Gratitude, Happiness, Health, Honour, Independence, Initiative, Insight, Intimacy, Justice, Knowledge, Leisure, Love, Loyalty, Maturity, Money, Obedience, Obligation, Orderliness, Patience, Patriotism, Peace, Perseverance, Pleasure, Prayer, Productivity, Relaxation, Religion, Respect for others, Risk taking, Moksha /Salvation/Jannat, Security, Self-confidence, Self-discipline, Self-worth, Service, Sexual pleasure, Solitude, Spontaneity, Status, Survival, Success, Tradition, Trust, Wonder/Curiosity, Wisdom, Workmanship, Worship, Zeal)

While outlining them as needs, we have to note that the paradigm of psychological needs and fulfilling them is a never ending problem. Can we say, one fine day, that finally our needs are really fulfilled? Obviously no. Instead, what is indeed our 'need' is to come into contact with

reality in the form that it is in at any one moment and live in harmony with it. What indeed is our 'need' is to be in harmony with ourselves and the world by stepping out of our subjectivity by doing actions that are in line with dharma. However psychologically healthy one claims to be, all we are doing is living out our individuality still living in our own subjective worlds without any connection to the total that is God. Happiness does not come from fiddling with our internal processes. When we welcome Reality in the form of the many situations that we face, we are not resisting situations. When we abide in an acceptance of reality in whatever form it is in we find ourselves being acceptable.

The Vedic vision of being loving and being caring is a way of being in the world, a way of being dharmika. It is not following rules but is freedom from being enclosed in egocentricity by relating to the world. Swami Dayananda says that the dynamic form of the basic person is love and care. By love, he means, being accepting. By caring, he means being non harmful, contributing and non disturbing. When we are not being loving and caring we are in violation of our basic nature. In such a condition we can't be secure or at home with ourselves.

Even the foundation and two important *angas* of *Ashtanga Yoga* as outlined by Patanjali in the *Yoga sutras* highlight dharma in the form of *yama* (avoidances) and *niyama* (observances). *Yama* includes: *ahimsa*(non injury), *satyam* (avoiding falsehood), *asteya* (non stealing), *aparigraha* (freedom from sense of ownership) and *brahmacharya* (sexual discipline) while *Niyama* includes *tapas* (religious discipline), *shaucham* (purity), *santosh*(contentment), *svadhyaya* (self study) and *Ishvara pranidhanam*(surrender to Ishvara).

Unlike the many paradigms (be it cognitive, behavioural, or humanistic) in Western psychology which don't have dharma as the guiding framework, for Indian psychology to be universal in application, it needs to promote dharma as the framework for all functioning, echoing what the Rishis said. The Vedic vision of Dharma as a way of life is born of the vision of the interconnectedness of all forms. Because the vision and way of dharma keeps us in harmony with the whole, it is basis of being secure and at home with ourselves. There is a direct relationship between our quality of mind and how we live our lives. In this view the core problem of human beings is not psychological but ethical. This is what makes the Vedic view different from the West. Also dharma is not a matter of living by an external code but rather a full expression of what we are.

6. We are interconnected – Attitudes underlying *panchamaha yajna* as elements of preventive therapy and therapeutic practice:

The Rishi-s, ancient masters had an all embracing and all encompassing vision of relationships. Our *Rishi-s* laid down the framework of dharma for sustainable peace and harmony which can be practised by all, appropriate to the age and stage of life, irrespective of the culture or belief system that he belonged to. In the Taittiriya Aranyaka section of Krsna Yajur Veda (mantra 2.10.1) *Rishi-s* speak of five sets of relationships that ALL of us are interconnected with and encourage us to enter into a reverential relationship with these five sets of relationships called *panchamaha yajna*.

- I. Reverential relationships with the five elements (space, air, water, fire, earth) including plants and animals (*Bhuta sambandha*) – Our relationships with the five elements become bhuta yajna, when we see and value the interconnectedness, make wise choices for their sustenance and contribute to least damage.
- II. Relationships with people (*Manushya sambandha*) - Our relationships with the people in our life becomes Manushya yajna when we see and value our interconnectedness, allow dharma to flow into our life and make wise choices.
- III. Relationships with parents and ancestors ; access to their blessings, wisdom and guidance (*Pitra sambandha*) - Our relationships with our parents and ancestors becomes pitra yajna when we see and value our interconnectedness, are grateful for what they have passed onto us, live out our family traditions, make offerings to the deceased. One recognises the debt to them for one's birth and family heritage.
- IV. Relationships with ancient masters through the wisdom received (*Rishi sambandha*) – Our relationships with our teachers and gurus becomes pitra yajna when we see and value our interconnectedness with them, when we serve, promote, preserve and live the teachings of the tradition.
- V. Relationships with deities (*Devata sambandha*) through the blessings and the principles that sustain the universe. - Our relationships with the deities becomes devata yajna when we see and value our interconnectedness with them, when we pray, worship and seek blessings for ourselves and humanity.

In II. Our relationships with people, an important factor in the Vedic vision is the *laukika karma*, the karma that is played out in the world. How does one decide what is to be done? Everyone must relate to the world. Relating one cannot avoid, which is different from

relationships. Relating involves a response. One may like the object, dislike or be indifferent to it or may be afraid of it. It all depends on the role one is playing. Swami Dayananda throws light on the everyday experience of every person in the world showing the inherent connection of dharma to every person as well as pointing to the invariable nature of the person. He says that ‘Every person has many roles that he/she plays (father/mother, son/daughter, sister/brother, employer/employee, friend, citizen, partner, mother-in-law, father-in-law etc). Each role has a script which undergoes changes relevant to a given situation. In seeing the script there is space between the person and the role. Unless there is space between the person and the role, they become one and the same.’⁷ Shakespeare had an inkling of this which is expressed in ‘As you like it’. He said –

All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts.

The person is invariable and the roles keep changing. Even the same role depending on the age and stage of life, changes. A parent to a two year old child has a different role to play when the child turns twenty five. Parent he/she still is but the expression of dharma, changes according to what the situation demands. The understanding of dharma is dynamic. One’s karma, *svakarma* is determined by the situations and this growing understanding of dharma contributes to emotional maturity in people. This understanding has enormous implications for inclusion in therapeutic practice and organisational development. Much of what Daniel Goleman speaks of in his work on Emotional Intelligence refers to this understanding of dharma.

7. Resulting richness of Indian psychology with the inclusion of dharma as the guiding framework:

With dharma as the guiding framework for all functioning as promoted by Indian psychology, the following will result:

1. Almost all conflicts in relationships are due to dharma not being upheld and hence by aligning their thoughts and actions to dharma, people can be helped to resolve conflicts.

⁷ Saraswati, Dayananda Swami – Vedic view and way of life, Arsha Vidya Research and Publication Trust, Chennai, 2009

2. There will be a balanced view of person's rights and responsibilities in society with equal importance given to both. The consumerist orientation for products and services extending to relationships primarily focused on 'what can I get for the best value' leads to constant frustration and anger because 'my rights are not being met'. Instead the emphasis on a contributing orientation leads to people taking responsibilities for the roles that they have and fulfilling their responsibilities in these roles. Helping people shift attention from the problem they are experiencing in their life to what they are giving and receiving in their respective roles offers a perspective on dharma and what needs to be done irrespective of the people in the situation. Shifting attention to what needs to be done takes out the subjectivity and promotes greater objectivity.

3. When dharma is at the centre of our lives, all the values such as acceptance, appreciation, justice, cooperation flow from the inside out, into all areas of our lives.

3. Relative happiness and stability of society is possible, which becomes the basis for discovery of absolute happiness i.e. moksha.

4. The pursuit of artha and kama which is considered living the good life gets expanded to include the paradigm – living the good life is living a life of dharma.

5. Resolution of psychological issues is possible only when there is alignment with dharma.

8. Dharma is a manifestation of Ishvara.

If we merely conform to dharma we are ethical people at best. This itself is great. However along with the emphasis and goal of human life that is dharma, self righteousness of dharma will come along in its wake. Many a war has been fought because of two self righteous people and armies on either sides. Dharma is not just a Sanskrit word for values and ethics. Being born in a culture that is *Sanatana dharma* it reveals an understanding that while dharma is eternal, it is not absolute. Dharma is dynamic and the laws of karma reveal deep intelligence. Dharma lives in everyone's hearts and comes alive in our actions. When we uphold dharma by practicing it, we uphold the laws and principles that sustain and enrich a society. When we live a life of dharma, we sustain the deep intelligence that is inherent through the order that is Ishvara.

Indian psychology cannot delve into consciousness studies if it bypasses the understanding of Ishvara. The very Veda that talks about the absolute reality of the Atma equates the jiva with Ishvara. Both sides of the equation are to be understood. If Indian psychology only delves

into the nature of the jiva, individual while bypassing Ishvara, Indian psychology is on a shaky ground as Western psychology as the lens of study has not yet been replaced.

A more complete word for the Lord in Hinduism and particularly Vedanta, indicating the material and intelligent cause of the world, is Ishvara. The definition of Ishvara in Taittiriya Upanishad is, 'that from which all beings come, that by which all beings are sustained and that into which all beings resolve'. The Lord is not only the creator but the creation. Therefore, the creation is non – separate from Ishvara and Ishvara is not separate from the creation. There was never any sacred-secular divide to begin with. The status of being both the efficient and the material cause is Ishvara and hence the creation is not separate from the creator. This revelation in the Mundakopanishad⁸ is supported by the example of a spider 's web. The material for the creation of the web comes from the spider and the intelligence of the weaving of the web also comes from the spider. The spider is the singular source of both the material and the intelligent cause.

Dharma or the universal principles - the physical laws of the Universe, the neurophysiological principles that govern the human body, the psychological principles that forms the psychological order (our thoughts, memories, doubts, fears, guilt etc) have deep intelligence pervaded by Ishvara. These principles which are studied by the different bodies of knowledge are really a study of the inherent intelligence of these principles. Although the principles seem inert the intelligence of these principles rests in the conscious being that is Ishvara. The principles in and of themselves do not produce anything. The intelligence or the author of these laws and principles, a conscious being makes the results possible. Appreciation of all the laws and principles without even knowing the details is an appreciation of the given. The presence of intelligence pervading these principles is the best therapy for sense of isolation. Because Ishvara is the material cause, God is not somewhere else. The very presence of the given, which is not an abstract notion, is the presence of the Giver. We can receive the presence of the Giver into our life by simply being aware of the Given. At all times we are embraced by the presence of Reality in the form of the given. This includes every aspect of what we call ourselves. God is not somewhere else. This understanding of Ishvara as the Given in our lives in the form of all principles that sustain the world is not an ordinary understanding.

⁸ Saraswati, Dayananda Swami – Mundakopanisad. Arsha Vidya Centre. 2006

Just as other principles and laws exist as a part of creation, the law of dharma in the form of punya and papa also exists as a part of the creation. Dharma is a manifestation of Ishvara. Revealed by the Vedic vision, this understanding frees us from our notions of isolation and disconnectedness. We are ever connected, ever alive to the presence of what IS. The Vedic vision is, there is no fulfillment if we are disconnected from and not in harmony with Reality. The Vedic view is all about coming into contact with God and making this contact into a lifestyle. Recognising Ishvara as the giver of the results of action is the beginning of the understanding of karma yoga which is briefly touched upon below as it is necessary for the understanding of Ishvara. However an in depth understanding of karma yoga is outside the scope of this paper and will be covered elsewhere.

Bhagavad Gita v. 18.46 highlights the role of Ishvara in one's karma, the performance of karma as worship and the resulting spiritual success from it.

Yatah pravrttirbhutanam yena sarvamidam tatam

Svakarmana tamabhyarcya siddhim vindati manavah

The one from whom all beings have come into being, by whom all this is pervaded, worshipping him by performing one's duties, a person attains spiritual success.⁹

In playing the different roles with different scripts appropriate to a given situation, the person achieves spiritual success. The person's script is *svakarma*, duty. In relating to the script and responding to the ever changing dynamics, the individual is related to the total, Ishvara through all the laws and principles. How does he relate to the Lord, Ishvara? He does not fight or resist situations or his own karma. Since he looks upon dharma as the Lord, he worships that Lord by doing what is to be done by at a given time and place. Understanding and relating to Ishvara does not involve some cosmological proposition or some consciousness theory or some spiritual elevation or even some religious practices. Even if there is psychological resistance to doing what is to be done, recognising Ishvara as the psychological order frees us from resistance and conflict. As a result, isolation and hence its resulting issues of loneliness, frustration, lack of connectedness has no place to be. The abiding peace and happiness that emerges when one relates to the total that is Ishvara through

⁹ Saraswati, Dayananda Swami – Vedic view and way of life, Arsha Vidya Research and Publication Trust, Chennai, 2009

relating in dharma is the unique contribution of the Vedic vision and can be a unique contribution of Indian psychology to all of humanity.

Only when Indian psychology is in touch with dharma, it is complete.

Only when Indian psychology resonates with the understanding of dharma as a manifestation of Ishvara, it is complete.

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