

“Life is sustained only by individuals... There is no life of millions”:

The Importance of Individual Differences in Students and Teachers and their Interaction with Culture: The Indian context

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After introducing Carl Gustav Jung's theory of Psychological Types, the roots of which partly go back to ancient Indian philosophy and its operationalization by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) in Part I of the paper. The Part II puts special emphasis on the necessity to understand the meaning of Psychological Types within India's cultural framework, rather than merely translating their interpretation from Western sources. We encourage adopting Jung's theory of Psychological Types in an Indian context in order to appreciate each individual student's and teacher's personality as well as their interaction with the culture. Further, research with respect to a culturally adequate understanding of Psychological Types is recommended.

Keywords: Personality, MBTI, India, School Psychology, Culture.

Culture and elements of psyche

Jung set a footing for associative thinking and its behavioral analysis, however, for Jung a greater challenge was in the meaningful analysis of psyche. This has special significance because the associative network of cognition develops in a socio-cultural milieu, which further leads us to a deeper inquiry into correlative thought in corpus of religious texts accumulated over centuries, to which we shall return soon. In *Culture and Psyche*, Sudhir Kakar (1997) has two essays 'Culture in psychoanalysis' and 'Encounters of the psychological kind: Freud, Jung, and India.' The first essay concludes with a statement that psychoanalysts can "advance psychoanalytic propositions about a culture" perhaps "by testing them in the crucible of the culture's imagination" (Kakar, 1997; p. 17). In the second chapter, in context of Jung's involvement in Indian thought, Kakar has made some very incisive remarks. He wrote that "Jung's attraction to Indian thought had to do with his feud with Freud" (p. 28). However, an important note of Kakar, which is appropriate in the present context is: "Some of the psychological concepts of Yoga that Jung found common and thus incorporated in his own theorizing are citta, with its parallel

to Jungian psyche, tapas and what Jung calls 'active imagination', 'guru' and 'thought being', atman and Jungian self, samaskaras and the 'archetypes', especially mandala, as the pre-eminent archetype of wholeness" (Kakar, 1997; p. 28).

It is the concept of archetype, the samaskaras, which takes us into cosmological realms without losing contact with the innate psychic predisposition (Pirta, 2012). Most significantly, Jung's archetype allows us to comprehend a priori psychic elements in mind, similar to those emphasized by European ethologists (e.g. innate schemas or engrams), that questioned the tabula rasa theory of American behaviorists. But, Jung incorporated symbols from religions (e.g. the mandala) of the world, which perhaps allows interpretations of contents of unconscious mind.

Pirta (2014) underlines that correlative (associative) thinking is an important characteristic of higher level systems, and is an indicator of complexity of cognitive elements emerging at any particular level, and is dependent upon exchange of information originating within a culture. Exegetical studies to explore "correlative thinking" in Vedas is a challenging task for Indian Psychology.

An observation of Kakar about Jung needs mention for a different reason. Kakar writes that Jung may have recognized the non-Western people as “a class of noble savages, close to unconscious rhythms of life and nature and processes of an intuitive wisdom” (Kakar, 1997; p. 31). Such anticolonial stances are not uncommon among academics in India, if these insinuations go in the making of “cultural psychology”; they rather perpetuate a biased view, and hamper growth of a new discipline. Our concern should be to further develop or critically evaluate concepts that have significance in theory or in practice. In this context, Pirta (2014) stresses on the significance of Jung’s work on intuition, and he elaborates at length to suggest that gnosis, trance and intuition are correlated and have significance for the acquisition of knowledge. While Jung cherished rational explanations of psychic phenomena, he never lost interest in intuition. His novel thesis, records the visionary experiences Jung went throughout his life since 1915. The *Red Book: Liber Novus* (2009) of Jung, a compilation of personal spiritual experiences (see Ovens, 2011), presents a new synthesis of gnosis and logos before the academic community. We gain proficiency in ‘deriving meaning’ from direct experiences of a client inside the clinic, there is little or no effort on understanding experiences of people in oral records, layered texts and embodied in other cultural artifacts. Exegesis, a method (process and tool) of deriving meaning, has not attracted the attention of psychologists. However, though, it is highly culture specific, one has to understand the meaning of words in much larger contexts, as we notice in Jungian writings.

Intuitive knowledge and Samadhi (ecstasy)

We can take an example from an analysis of Sri Aurobindo’s writings by Cornelissen (2011). He has described four types of knowledge: separative knowledge by indirect contact (scientific knowledge), knowledge by separative direct contact (introspection), knowledge by intimate direct contact (experiential knowledge), and knowledge by identity (intuitive knowledge). The last one, in the Indian Vedanta tradition, has special significance; here one takes an inner path, rather than the outer path (of science or reasoning). This inner path involves

various techniques of purification of the internal instrument (e.g., mind), various ways of meditation or askesis, and finally the states of trance, which may be hierarchal (lower to higher level). These trance states yield varied kinds of knowledge, which is intuitive, and may be in consonance with the rational knowledge, or there may be great dissonance between this intuitive knowledge and rational (scientific) knowledge.

It is important to refer to two psychoanalytically informed analysts, who have made important contributions in understanding some phenomena that have long been part of gnosis in the East as well as in the West. Spirit possession and trance are important part of various cultures all over the world. Yet these phenomena have remained out of the domain of mainstream psychology. According to Obeyesekere (2004) trance is of two types—Dionysian or possession trance and Apollonian or contemplative trance. It is the contemplative trance, which Buddha developed through meditative practices to achieve samadhi. However, an important hypothesis of Obeyesekere is that both forms of ecstasy can yield knowledge through intuition and revelation. Perhaps in Buddha’s time, experience of these contemplative trance states was essential for an accomplished scholar. For Masson (1976) distinguishes that in Indian aesthetics there is distinction between *vyutpatti* (holistic learning) and *pratibha* (inspiration or intuition). During ecstasy a person undergoes experience of knowledge whereas through learning a person acquires knowledge rationally.

These Dionysian and Apollonian visionary experiences have immense diversity in the Indian landscape (Kakar, 1982). Nevertheless, Kakar (1982; p. 105) admits that the spirit possession is ubiquitous and culturally variable, the explanation given (p. 106) is couched in neurology. There is some psychoanalytic insight when ‘*peshi*’ or ‘trance like state’ is compared with hysteric personality. He, then, involves ‘individual’ and ‘group’ to explain possession. Here, Kakar’s radical assumption that traditional healing is: “a harmonious integration with one’s group, in the individual’s affirmation of the community’s values and its given order, in his obedience to the community’s goals and in his cherishing of its traditions.” (p. 88).

As far as traditional psychology is concerned, Lieberman (2000), in an exhaustive review wrote that intuition is “a phenomenological and behavioral correlate of knowledge obtained through implicit learning.” He suggested a two-way relationship between social institution and implicit learning, mediated by intuitive social action and cognition. The intuitive processes are a part of everyday experience to make sense of the world around us.

MBTI in Indian context

The preceding analysis has given significant context of the introduction of MBTI in assessment of personnel in India. However, the proposition we are making is that MBTI has got special use in pedagogical settings. In the latter case, one has to go much deeper in understanding the Jungian theory behind MBTI. It is a strange coincidence that while the earlier drafts of MBTI have already been prepared in the United States to measure preferences of people, Jung’s theory of psychological types also appeared independently in Europe, during the same period. The incorporation of the Jung’s theory of personality types in MBTI naturally raises questions when one analyses the meaning of the preferences obtained for an individual, as the former has strong yet contentious relationship with gnosis.

Our reading of some studies reported on MBTI suggests that the investigators are almost oblivious of these underlying theoretical assumptions of Jung; rather it is simply a presentation of the profiles of individuals. For example, an article (Tyagi, 2008) devotes 4 pages in the introduction to highlight that MBTI is a good measure, without saying a word about other measures of personality that are in vogue in India. There is no reference to cultural aspects. The findings mimic the western MBTI profiles, for example, in India one would expect more emphasis on intuitive decision making. Intuition or *pratibha* is central to proficiency in music, dance and other fine arts (assumed largely as a natural ability), which is further developed through practice or *abhyas* in the close contact of a master or guru. It is a holistic learning or *vyutpati* (see Pirta, 2012). Another concept which finds unqualified mention is that of “energy”. Sandhu and Kapoor (2013) refer to ‘outward

flow of psychic energy’ or ‘inner energies’. Now if someone coins another concept and says that it is a source of ‘energy’, there will be perhaps no end to such conceptualizations of energy.

To summarize the developments in personality research in India, the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) surveys of advances in research in psychology (fifth survey see Jerath & Sibia, 2009; the ongoing sixth survey: Pirta, personal communication September 2013) indicate that MBTI is not a part of mainstream psychology research in India. It has just entered through management departments involved in personnel development. We may briefly point out that these surveys indicate some interest among Indian psychologists to use concepts of indigenous origin to develop some tools for assessment of personality (e.g. based on *trigunas*: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*). But, a greater emphasis is on using indigenous concepts broadly in an attempt to understand personality. It is this aspect perhaps where there may be a meeting ground for Jungian personality types and the concepts of indigenous origin such as *jiva* (self), *ahamkara* (ego) and others entrenched in Vedanta philosophy, and theory of karma from Bhagvad Gita. “We may briefly point out that these surveys indicate some interest among Indian psychologists to use concepts of indigenous origin to develop some tools for assessment of personality (e.g. based on *triguna*: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*; see Singh, Misra, & De Raad, 2013).”

Cultural Expectations and impression management

In the West, MBTI has some tendency to be answered in the sense of social desirability or impression management, i.e., people may reply in a way to be perceived favourably by others. For example, Kubinger, Karner, and Menghin (1999) found in an Austrian study that Extraversion scores tended to be higher when MBTI was administered in a group setting as compared to an individual setting. Recently, McPeck and Breiner (2013) summarized findings pointing to marked preferences towards E, N, and T types, by males at least, in the Western culture, supplemented by a bias in favour of Judging as opposed to Perceiving, thereby meeting the expectations of an industrialized,

overly rationalist society (the affinity of Judging-types to the typically Western idea of “time management” has also been shown for example by Williams, Verble, Price, & Layne, 1995).

The proposed triple interaction: Student x Teacher x Culture

At the same time, with MBTI getting translated to many foreign languages and getting standardized for many additional cultures, there is growing evidence pointing to cultural differences as an important source of variance. For example, as early as 1993, Sim and Kim developed a Korean version of the MBTI and found that Korean respondents had higher scores on Introversion, Sensing, Thinking, and Judging as compared to U.S. American respondents. The distribution of types among the Korean respondents differed considerably from the U.S. pattern and so did social desirability. Recently, Xiaolan and Moody (2013) compared Chinese and U.S.-American executives, with Chinese leaders typically being ESFJ types, in contrast to American ones being ENTJ. At this year's Biennial International Conference of the Association of Psychological Type International (APTI), in Miami (FL), Morris, Kendall, and Thompson (2013) introduced worldwide endeavors to develop translated versions of the MBTI by near-representative samples and Fuellgrabe (2013) addressed the question, how Psychological Type could be employed fruitfully in order to facilitate international contact.

As pointed out in the introduction, MBTI is in widespread use as a tool of personality assessment in human resources management in India. Still, both, from an Indian and from a universal point of view, Dhar, Datta, and Nandan (2008) emphasized that MBTI would be able accomplish much more by tapping the spiritual dimension of human existence as well as issues of spiritual health: “Firstly, the journey of unity, is that of the intuitive thinker (NT), comprising 12 percent of the population and is exemplified by Buddha and Albert Schweitzer along with the vast majority of theology professors. The second, the Journey of Devotion, is that of the sensing feeler (SF), comprising 38 percent of humanity and is represented by Muhammad and St. Francis of Assisi. The third, the Journey of works, is that of the sensing thinker (ST), making

up 38 percent of the population and typed as that of the intuitive feeler (NF), making up 12 percent of the population and is exemplified by Jesus of Nazareth and the Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore” (p. 204).

Discussion and desiderata

Our review of research on MBTI use in a pedagogical context has only partly yielded informative results. As far as students' personality is concerned, the literature abounds. Whereas, for highly gifted students the results quite consistently point to an advantage of N and P types, in more diverse samples, not unexpectedly, results on academic achievement are inconsistent. This can be attributed to the different demands, which are posed by various majors and learning environments. Moreover, as a means of assessing students' achievements, Grade Point Average (GPA) was frequently employed as an outcome criterion, the psychometric problems of which are well known. Still, GPA may be attested to possess a certain degree of face validity with respect to a student's advancement and well being at school.

With respect to teachers' aptitudes, however, a reasonably valid criterion is lacking. Winning a “Teacher of the Year Award” by no means certifies this teacher's excellence, but only indicates that he or she conforms to his or her colleagues' expectations very well. This bias may be increased by the person's ability to evoke a positive image in others, which again does not necessarily reflect educational talent or didactic quality.

Rather than aiming at finding an “ideal” teacher or student, the idea of student x teacher interaction seems more plausible. Still, also in this case, the literature seems inconsistent, as some sources suggest, “matching” students' and teachers' personalities, whereas others rather favour the opinion that students should be motivated to learn from opposite types.

The expectations about what constitutes “good” students and teachers are highly influenced by culture. We have learned from the literature that the relative frequency of personality types as measured by the MBTI varies between one country and the other. Even more importantly, though, it should be understood

in a cultural context, what Psychological Types mean on the respective cultural background of, for example, India, Egypt, Germany, or the USA.

As pointed out before, Western individuals may feel urged by society toward a sociable, gregarious, and active way of life, representing Carl Jung's Extraversion, whereas in the "East" a more contemplative, thoughtful, and reflecting type of person might be honoured more. Also, much research has been done with respect to cultural specificity of emotions and thus, Feeling types may differ from each other dependent on the respective culture. Shweder and Haidt (2000) summarized these findings and emphasized that emotions differ between cultures with respect to their somatic concomitants, their affective experience, antecedents and eliciting conditions, to their effects on self-esteem, social acceptability, and overt expressions. This has obvious consequences for the question what constitutes culturally specific ways of Feeling vs. Thinking. Similarly, Shweder and Haidt (2009) also pointed to varying meanings of sensory experiences, e.g. of sexual passion, amusement, or the horror at sight of blood. Such differences of course affect the cultural meanings of Sensing vs. Intuition in the sense of Jungian typology. As far as perception and use of time are concerned, "time management" strategies differ: Western "monochronic" cultures emphasize doing only one thing at a time and focus on deadlines, whereas "polychronic" cultures, e.g. India, feels that various things can be done simultaneously, i.e., they "view time as a system where the same events occur in natural cycles" (Nonis, Teng, & Ford, 2005, p. 412). They rather emphasize the importance of human relationships than feeling obliged to keeping deadlines. Therefore, Judging and Perceiving types, in the West as compared to the East may be expected to encounter very different degrees of societal appreciation and, moreover, the cultural definitions of what constitutes a Judging vs. a Perceiving type may be expected to differ.

Thus, speaking of individual differences in an educational context, not only students' and teachers' personality, but also the expectations of the respective culture, as well as the interactions of these three variables must be taken into account when considering personality for

example, as a predictor of successful schooling.

As a consequence of the amazing progress of neurophysiology, Western psychology currently is at risk of the fallacy of ontological reductionism i.e. the assumption that personality traits would be nothing else, but the outcome of underlying brain functions. If this were correct, human beings and animals would be mere automats, their personality traits being reinforced by cultural expectations, reward, and punishment, and culture would make no difference with respect to the meaning of human action and decision-making. A promising alternative to the reductionist fallacy has been suggested by Cronbach and Meehl (1955), who devised personality traits as hypothetical constructs, which are made up by societal convention as artefacts, and may be employed in their current meaning as long as they are useful to predict overt behaviour. If, and only if a hypothetical construct can be successfully employed to testing hypotheses, construct validity is attributed to it. Thus, hypothetical constructs like Psychological Types do not "exist" per se, in a natural science sense, but they are made up by humans in order to serve a purpose. Therefore, constructs change their meanings over time (one may think of the construct of intelligence as an example, which initially was devised as assessing schooling aptitude and later put more emphasis on abstract thinking, but still was related to general knowledge; next, "culturally fair" testing was recognized as important, the current trend being "social" intelligence. Possibly, and hopefully in a few decades "ecological" intelligence might complement the current concept). Hypothetical constructs, however, not only are adapted by society in the course of human development over time, however, but they also differ cross-culturally.

We suggest further research aiming to clarify, how Jung's Psychological Types manifest in India's present culture, especially in the context of schooling with respect to students' learning and faculty's teaching styles. By far the largest part of humankind are "Non-Westerners", whereas psychology still is dominated by a White, middle class North American and Central European mainstream. We should invest all possible effort into continuing a scientific trend, which has just

begun about the turn of the millennium: East and West should start cooperating intensely aiming at widening the scope of academic psychology beyond its conventional cultural and geographic boundaries.

From the present review of the literature it became clear that there is neither an “ideal” student nor an “ideal” teacher personality. Following Carl Jung’s programmatic saying in the title of this paper, however, teachers should remain aware of their own and their students’ individuality as well as of their culture’s uniqueness, taking in all three sources of variance into account in their daily interactions.

In two recent articles, Renner, Ramalingam, and Pirta (2013; 2014) have argued why Indian youth, although accepting the challenges of globalization are in need of preserving their cultural identity by integrating both, the local and the global. They should be aware of what the West can learn from India’s great cultural heritage. As pointed out in the introductory chapter, Carl Jung’s Psychological Types have been inspired partly by Indian philosophy and spirituality and thus, are an excellent example of how the “West” can learn from the “East”. Now, as a part of globalization, Jung’s types have been brought to India again by means of MBTI. We are convinced that it will be a valuable tool to help assess students’ and teachers’ individuality and personality, provided that further research will promote a culturally adequate understanding of Psychological Types.

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