Spiritual Embedded Clinical Approach Part-II: Lessons from Sikh Faith

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Religions are philosophies of life to help human beings choose their ways of living and open new frontiers of consciousness for them. The first part of the paper reviewed studies to understand how religious traditions enrich transpersonal experiences and have significance for psychology as a science of healing. The second part explores the numinous through the teachings of Guru Nanak, one of the Santas of the Bhakti sect of the fifteenth-century, and the founder of Sikhism. They are significant for the mental health of people in India and suggest a new vision for transpersonal psychology. Guru Nanak's teachings directly relate to the numinous and do not involve the intricate ways of gods and goddesses of the great and the little traditions.

Keywords: Transpersonal psychology, consciousness, *ahamkar*, *haumai*, *chardi kala*, *sahaj*.

In the first part of the paper, the main objective was to review studies to understand how religious traditions enrich transpersonal experiences and have significance for psychology as a science of healing. The second part of this paper explores the numinous through the teachings of Guru Nanak, one of the *Santas* of the *Bhakti* sect of the fifteenth century, and the founder of Sikhism. They have significance for the mental health of people in India and suggest a new vision for transpersonal psychology. Guru Nanak's teachings directly relate to the numinous and do not involve the intricate ways of gods and goddesses of the great and the little traditions.

First of all, it is important to recall that the two important revolutions in psychology—the humanistic and the transpersonal (the other two being psycho-analysis and behaviorism)—were inspired, perhaps, to some extent by the Eastern spiritual traditions (Daniels, 2001; Walsh, 1988). In transpersonal psychology, particularly, the major emphasis is on 'trans', to move beyond the individual level. It is attached with the sense of numinous, which has been eluding psychologists, philosophers, and even historians. It is related to questions such as—what is that which arouses reverence for natural phenomena; what makes the innermost part of the temple experientially sacred; what transpires between the deity and the devotee; what makes us to aspire for higher states of consciousness, and so on. If our inquisitiveness about the numinous is so all-embracing, the concern for it more or less universal and its expression touching almost every aspects of life, the arguments for inclusion of numinous as a part of psychological enquiry seems valid. However, the institutionalization of numinous as a religious activity also takes place side by side. For, in day to day life, it is the success and failure of these institutions, which is more visible to people than the numinous.

Transpersonal experiences have been known to have existed for centuries in religions of the world. Interestingly, some chemicals recapitulate these phenomena by adding a new transpersonal dimension (Grof, 1975/1996), and all these natural and supernatural experiences form a spectrum of consciousness (Connolly, 2000; Wilber, 1977/ 2002). The major issue before transpersonal psychology is to understand the transcendence of consciousness (Daniels, 2001; Friedman, 2002) along with the diversity of spiritual traditions (Caplan, Hartelius, & Rardin, 2003; Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2007). Therefore, transpersonal psychology focuses on non-ordinary states of consciousness *"that have heuristic, healing, transformative, and even evolutionary potential"* (Grof, 2008). On the one extreme are primordial forms of spiritual healing practices (Winkelman, 2004), and on the other extreme are purely

experiential forms of spiritualism (Krippner, 2001). The cross-cultural approach to these phenomena is likely to strengthen four basic assumptions of transpersonal psychology (Cunningham, 2007)— the impulses toward an ultimate state are universal; awareness of these impulses is not necessary; the realization of an ultimate state is possible; and, the individual has freedom to choose a path.

Current reviews on the role of religion and spirituality in mental health reveal some important lacunae in research as far as the Eastern traditions are concerned (Bhui, 2010; Dalal, & Misra, 2010; Hussain, & Bhushan, 2010; Rao, 2011; Sharma, Charak, & Sharma, 2009). People engage in religious and spiritual practices in various ways and to various degrees; however, a significant aspect of religion and spirituality is to achieve connectedness with others through transcendence (Chattopadhyay, 2007; Verghese, 2008). Religious people are explicit about supernatural entities whereas the spiritual people are implicit about such entities. None of the reviews refer explicitly about the supernatural (transcendental) elements, their nature and varieties, the *emic* properties or cultural diversity in the Indian landscape. Even more glaring omission is that these reviews do not refer to another core issue how religion and spirituality contribute to the vision of connectedness in a person. Kakar (2009) has reiterated this query seeking direct answer on this issue in religion and spirituality, whether there are some meditational practices which enhance empathy among people.

Consciousness everywhere

Life is a dance of emergence and merges back to the Creator, the *Akal Purakh,* visualizes Sampooran Singh (2007). Like Ken Wilber (1977/ 2002), Sampooran Singh has been marshaling ideas on consciousness and persistently and trying for a holistic view of understanding the resolution of human crisis. On the one hand, he finds the meditative state of mind crucial for its mutation, but on the other hand, human survival requires the transformation of human social structure. Thus, the path Sampooran Singh visualizes is the one chosen by the Sikh Gurus,

from psychosocial revolution to spiritual revolution. In the present days, for such a change, the emphasis has to be on holistic education, focusing on the transcendence of ego.

Such beliefs about the supernatural elements in the human mind have a significant role in mediating the development, transcription, and actualization of scripts that influence our lives (Pirta, 2011). Coincidently, Puran Singh, a scientist in industrial chemistry, became a proficient scholar of Sikhism (e.g, Singh, 1928/ 2002). In the same way, S. Grof , through his clinical work on patients experiencing extraordinary realms of consciousness after ingesting psychedelic chemical (Grof, 1975/1996) became the founder of transpersonal psychology. In this context, it is pertinent to note the comment of Grof (2008), "*However broad and encompassing our vision of reality, in practice we have to pare it down to those which are relevant for solving the problems we are dealing with.*" In other words, for them, social issues were equally important.

Sampooran Singh (1986) conceptualizes the human psyche functioning according to exchanges, two-way interactions, in states of energy or consciousness, one arrow indicating self-integrative and the other, self-differentiating potential of mind (Figure 1). The former process removes the psychological matter whereas the latter process adds the psychological matter. The conscious, subconscious, and unconscious states involve ordinary waking, dreaming, and sleeping processes where 'I' and 'my' dominate,
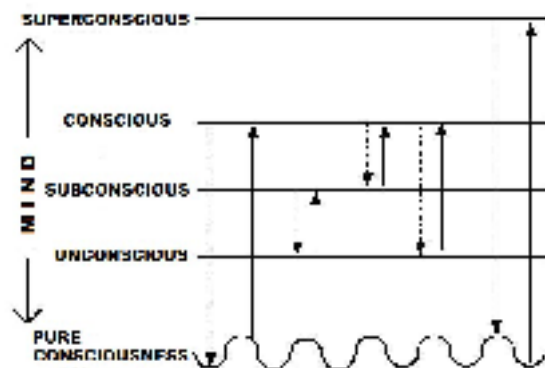

Figure 1. Mind-brain equipment (Singh, 1986; p. 47)

but a person achieves super-consciousness through special religious practices by dissolving 'I' and 'my', and the change is a 'quantum jump'. Though pure consciousness and super-consciousness states are equivalent, perhaps, the former refers to the assumed eternal state of the Divine (the *Akal*) and the latter indicates the personally experienced state of the *bhakta*, the aspirant. The following sections on Sikhism have special significance in understanding these states of consciousness for the transcendence of person.

The remaining part of the paper has three sections. After a brief introduction to Nanakian philosophy, there is a case study of Bhagat Puran Singh, a well-known Sikh to whom selfless service of people became a way of life, and lastly, psychotherapy may have some inputs from the teachings of Gurus in the Sikh tradition.

Glimpses of Nanakian Philosophy

There is dynamic relationship between religion and spiritualism; for, religion may not survive long enough without the spiritual content and the spiritual without religion has a narrow scope for its cultural transmission. Each religion allows *emic* (culture specific) and *etic* (culture universal) views of phenomenal and spiritual worlds. Sikhism has unique ways of looking into these issues (Kapur & Misra, 2003, 2011; Mann & Saron, 1988). This section explores Sikhism to highlight major themes that have relevance for psychology, such as the states of consciousness, process of transcendence, purpose for aspiring for some ultimate potential, the nature of the numinous, and the vision and process of self in phenomenal world (Cunningham, 2007). Sikhism is derived from the Punjabi word '*Sikhi*' and refers to the teachings of Guru Nanak (Chahal, 2010). The core concepts of Sikhism according to the Nanakian Philosophy are: the *haumai*, *Dhur ki Bani*, and *chardi kala*, respectively, the involution of the Absolute, the true knowledge of self, and the ascending state of consciousness.

The process of individuation or *haumai* (Neki, 2002), in the Nanakian Philosophy, allows a psychologist to understand the common view that prevails in Sikhism about the cause of misery and how to alleviate it. *Haumai* leads to formation

of *ahamkar* or ego which is the major cause of misery (Figure 2). *Ahamkar* is the extension of pride, known in Punjabi as *swaiabhiman* (Chandan, 2005). In the formal language, in India, it is *swabhiman* and is at the essence of *ahamkara* (Salagame, 2011). In his analysis of '*ahamkara*' in the Vedanta tradition, Salagame writes that the great Sankara made a distinction between *ahamkar* and *aham-padarth;* the latter is a part of atman, whereas *ahamkar* has its origin in false identification (or *abhiman*) with the body and its functions. This is a way of wiring of Indian psyche, but the texts of (Western) psychology have a different view of *ahamkar* or ego, it is an important part of personality.
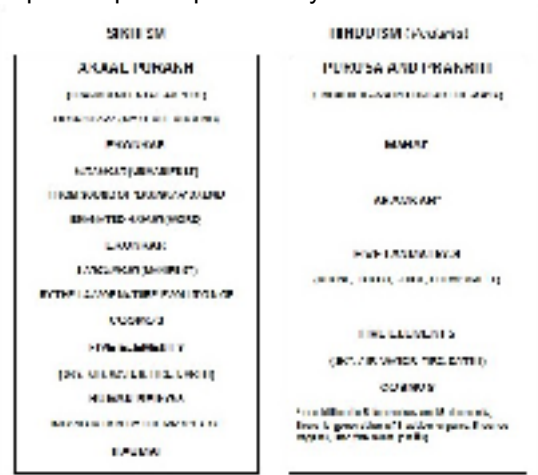

Figure 2. Two world-views of cosmos: Sikhism and Hinduism (Vedanta)

For a Sikh, three things explain the path of salvation from the misery of *haumai*, the phenomenal world or *Dharti* as a battle field. It is true and not *maya* or illusion, and he follows the path of *Dharma* as revealed by the Sikh Gurus, to reach *Dhur*, the abode of the *Akal Purakh*, for union with the primal (Singh, 2005). This requires awakening through *gyan* or knowledge and the emphasis is on intuitive knowledge. The knowledge about the natural laws of the world was revealed by Guru Nanak from *Dhur ki Bani* (word of *Dhur*), as experienced from time to time. This revelation of knowledge through the *bani* or words, the *sabd*, is known as *Gurbani* (Dhaliwal, 2009) and was compiled by the other Sikh gurus formally in the Holy Scripture, *Aad Guru Granth*

Sahib. Guru Nanak recognized the significance of word or *sabd* and enshrined it in the basic concepts, the *Mul Mantra—Ek-Oamkar—*the sound at the creation of the cosmos (Chahal, 2010).

Guru Nanak questioned the basic principle of the creation as espoused in the Brahmanical school (Table 1) as there cannot be two realities—Shiva and Shakti, or *Purusha* and Maya (*Prakriti*). There are numerous gods and goddesses in Hinduism but Sikhs believe in the eternal *Akal Purakh*. Guru Nanak speaks about the steps in the spiritual path as the five *Khandas* or regions: *Dharam* (righteous action) *Khand, Gyan* (knowledge) *Khand, Saram* (spiritual effort) *Khand, Karam* (grace) *Khand, and Sach or Dhur* (truth) *Khand.*

Table 1. Differences between two schools on some basic concepts

Nanakian School	Brahmanical School
1. One creator— *Akal Purakh*	*Purusha* and *Prakriti* (*Maya*)
2. Process of individuation, the *haumai*	Many processes are involved
3. The manifest world is real	The manifest is an illusion
4. Sense of optimism, *chardi kala*	Sense of duality
5. Union with the Absolute by *Naam Simaran*	Many ways to achieve liberation or *Moksha*

Some spiritual traditions in India share the ethos of pleasing the Supreme, to seek His proximity by ascending through states of consciousness. The important aspect of such traditions that was prevalent during the time of Guru Nanak, the *Bhakti* movement, was the arousal of primal emotions which psychologists identify as love, attachment, affection, joy, and yearning. In folklore, the *santas* of *bhakti* cult were not only spiritual leaders but were popular poets, writers, singers, and dancers. They had the skill to stir the minds of the ordinary household with ideas of connectedness, characterized by extreme form of egalitarianism and depth, and used local dialects to communicate their ideas. The yearning of the individual soul for the divine soul was, for example, imbibed through a romantic image of man-woman union. The Aad Guru Granth

Sahib has nearly 1,000 sayings of various *santas* from the *bhakti* sect from different parts of India (Chatterjee, 2009). The arousal of primal human emotions (see Friedman, 2002) through music and the art of using popular language (rhetoric) are important ways to facilitate transcendence. These are alternative ways for self-catharsis and it is for psychotherapists to adapt them to suit their clinical conditions.

Sikh Gurus present the holistic image of a person as the one who is engaged in pursuit of knowledge, the one who is compassionate to fellow beings, and the one who is optimistic in performing actions. Sikhism sprang from the compassionate hearts of *santas.* About 500 years ago, Sikh gurus inspired their followers to ascend the states of consciousness for inner transformation, and to work for outer transformation through direct action, which was a unique way for self-empowerment. The transcendence of Bhagat Puran Singh is an example. The three major contributions from the Sikh tradition to psychotherapy include the *emic* approach, the paradigm of *guru-chela,* and the ideal of mental health as *sahaj.* The basic tenet of Maslow (1943), the founder of transpersonal psychology, that one is born with a need to seek love, is just as fundamental to a Sikh who follows the natural way of life to seek union with the transcendent.

Bhagat Puran Singh, *a case study*

This is a case of sheer change in a young person after imbibing the spirit of Sikhism and therefore, various aspects of his life have significance for transpersonal psychology. His was a complete (*pooran*) transformation, according to his mother, and for others Bhagat Puran Singh's life is an open book (Anand, 2001). The change in Bhagat Puran Singh was the ascendance in the consciousness through *sewa* or service (Singh & Sekhon, 2001). His hands were always ready to embrace those who approached him for help. Consequently, he always ran short of resources, which were replenished through alms or *bhiksha*, the ancient mode of the livelihood of the Indian saints. In the latter part of his life, the donors grew in number, and the amount donated was substantial.

The life of Bhagat Puran Singh (1904-1992) is an example where the affectional system matures in a very intricate way (Anand, 2001). Though the affectional system of a person has biological basis (Bowlby, 1958), the fertile soil for the maturation of these social systems is equally essential. Bhagat Puran Singh recalls "My mother gave me more love than any mother can give her son." (Singh & Sekhon, 2001; p. 152). A revealing part of Bhagat Puran Singh's life was his role as a mother of Piara, a crippled child, which he adopted at a Gurdwara in Lahore, Pakistan, before the 1947 partition of India. For over 60 years, the social bond between Bhagat Puran Singh and Piara never became weak; rather it grew to accommodate more children and adults desperate for care from fellow beings. The maternal love that Bhagat Puran Singh received and which blossomed in his heart and later flowered as Pingalwara, a home for handicapped, is the thesis of Anand's (2001) biography *His Sacred Burden,* on this legendary Sikh. Pingalwara is located at Amritsar, a city where the Golden Temple, the abode of Sikhism shines.

Bhagat Puran Singh had a vision of future, creating change through mind and matter. There are two examples, the first is the belief, following Guru Nanak, that the *sabd* or Naam has a power to change a person from within. As a man of action who had bitter experiences of material life, Bhagat Puran Singh soon found that people needed prompting about the message of the Gurus, and other things. As the media had its own priorities, he installed a small press inside Pingalwara to disseminate relevant material through the print word to make people aware of the concept. The leaflets and books published by Bhagat Puran Singh were distributed free of cost. The volume on *Japji* by Singh (n. d.) is an example.

The second aspect of his vision was to create environmental consciousness among people. A chapter *The Transcendent Spirit* in Singh and Sekhon (2001) reveals the untold story of Bhagat Puran Singh's concern for the denudation of the forests in the Himalayas as early as 1928 and to make people aware of such ecological hazards became his spiritual mission. Bhagat Puran Singh would pursue people to plant '*trivenies*', as his

mother Mehtab Kaur did. These included three kinds of trees such as *neem*, *pipal* and *badh* that still stand in his village in Rajewal, Punjab, to provide shade and shelter.

Contributions of Sikh faith to psychotherapy

The *emic* (culture-specific) approach has been perseveringly favored by psychiatrist Hoch (1961; 1977) and psychoanalyst Kakar (1982; 2009). Although Kakar stands alone as the explorer of the richness of transpersonal experiences in the Indian landscape, after making these leaps, he felt that the psychoanalytically informed ego retrieves him into its fold, only to serve the libidinal impulses. This conflict between "libidinal" and "spiritual" is amply clear in the chapter on *The path of saints* (Kakar, 1982) where he infrequently refers to the Sikh tradition, while his main focus is on Radha Soamis, who may have diverged from Sikhism in the nineteenth century. The spiritual element caters to "*the urge to transcend a self-conscious selfhood*" (p. 119). According to him, two paradigms—the psychoanalytic and the spiritual (transpersonal)—are in conflict over the implicit model of man and the concept of reality. Once, Kakar felt "*a mild state of "altered consciousness," pervaded with a feeling of oneness and affection*" (p. 130) while sitting among the followers of the Radha Soamis, for him, it was a social facilitation effect.

If the West is opening doors to eastern traditions of healing (Moss, 2001), it is upto them to decide how they use it. The interaction between Sikhism and transpersonal psychology would facilitate *emic* approach in mental health to resolve the human crisis. Interestingly, this has been pursued since long by a psychiatrist, Jaswant Singh Neki, who comes from the Sikh tradition (Neki, 1975, 1977, 1984). From the analysis of *haumai* in the Nanakian philosophy, Neki (2002) arrives at a very interesting conclusion that has implications in the area of psychotherapy. Neki contends that the western psychologists lay emphasis on strengthening of ego, which is consolidation of the boundaries of the individual for selfish interests. On the other hand, eastern thinkers conclude that *haumai* has no substantial existence, yet causes suffering. They searched

Table 2. Aspects of *ahamkar* in four schools of thought

Aspects of *ahamkar*	Schools of thought			
	Psychoanalysis (Psychology) (Kakar, 1982; 2009)	Nanakian (Sikhism) (Neki, 2002)	Sufi (Sufism) (Shirazi, 2011)	Vedanta (Hinduism) (Salagame, 2011)
1. Conceptual	Ego	Ahamkar	Nafs	Ahamkara
2. Nature	Psychological	Consciousness	Variable	Consciousness
3. Connotation	Positive	Negative	Negative	Negative
4. Origin	Libido	Haumai	Will	Abhiman
5. Perception	Individuality	False identity	False identity	False identity
6. Dissolution	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

ways to dissolve the *haumai* by living life where a person follows the natural laws or the *sahaj* way of life. In this process, the guru is the guide to help him to take shelter in the *Naam* by which the source of maladies vanishes. It becomes the basis of therapy, to get rid of the illusion of permanence in the false identity. In the model of *guru-chela* (Neki, 1973), the western dyad of the therapist and the client, finds a sound basis, as the guru shows the path of transcendence from a state of illusion.

Although in Sikhism, scholars mention that ego is equivalent to *haumai* of the Nanakian Philosophy and has a negative connotation, Salagame's (2011) distinction between *ahamkar* and *aham-padarth* is important. This has particular significance for understanding *haumai* in Nanakian doctrine, the process of creation of the cosmos which give rise to *ahamkar* (ego). Thus *ahamkar*, on the one hand, has similarity with ego, but on the other hand, it has affinity with the self or *atman*. In this way, it is related to the process of self-realization as emphasized in transpersonal psychology. The space does not allow making further commentary on this process. In the context of Sufism and psychoanalysis; a comparative chart should suffice (Table 2).

Thus, we see that ego is a false identity in the Eastern traditions and leads to sorrow, whereas in the Western psychology ego is an important aspect of personality development. This issue is further related to the concept of dependence (Neki, 1977) which is perceived negatively in the West, but in India, dependence is a natural process in the social system.

Sensual and affectional traits are important aspects of personality in theory, practice, and social life. Sikhism has different perspectives on these aspects of a person which show affinity to Bowlby's (1958) conceptualization of attachment system rather than the psychoanalytic approach (Neki, 1984). However, at the same time, Sikh gurus made marriage a spiritual pursuit (Chatterjee, 2009) unlike the Hindu yogis preaching celibacy. In a scathing attack on the lofty teachings of the yogis and the Brahmins, Singh (1928/2002), like Guru Nanak, argues that the Hindu ascetics denounced woman to transcend sex, whereas the Guru transcends sex through sex. Similarly, Ray (2003) emphatically states that Guru Nanak never accepted the idea of Sahajyani Buddhists about the sexual union between the male and female principle, the image of *mithuna*. For him, the *sahaj* way of life was not mystic but the mundane was full of primal human emotions. In *mithuna,* there was fear of promiscuous sexual practices. These Tantric practices have even attracted medical scientists (see Khalsa, 2004) in recent years.

For awakening the power of Naam (*Sabd*), the guru-*chela* relationship is essential. The result is not only an ecstatic experience (*surat dhun*) but the greater knowledge from inside (Gill, 2004). The process involves the reciting of the name of God (*Naam*) accompanied by melodious vibrations (*dhun*) under the supervision of guru, so as to achieve altered states of consciousness by the recipient. On the one hand, the process appears similar to the *shaman*, who has been doing so since the last 30,000 years or so (Winkelman, 2004). On the other hand, it has affinity with the

practices familiar to the Buddha (Obeyesekere, 2004) and to Sri Ramakrishna (Nikhilananda, 1928/2008). Such a depth of the effects of word is entirely missing in psychotherapy. The *Jap of the Naam*, that involves reciting the name of the Absolute, while performing worldly chores, according to the *hukam* of the Divine, is *sahaj* (Singh, n. d.). Life, then, becomes a journey towards the Absolute, and such a person remains in *chardi kala*, with a sense of high optimism, enjoying serving others, undergoes transformation, and attains the *Surat*, a higher state of consciousness.

There are other concepts in Sikhism which can be meaningfully adapted to understand the psychotherapeutic relationship in the cultural context in general, and to enrich the scope of transpersonal psychology (Krippner, 2001) in particular. One such concept is *sahaj* (Manocha, 2003), which redefines the ideal of mental health as a state that transcends all states of consciousness. It is effortless, innate, and is a state where the ego is a nonentity (Neki, 1975). After all, there are more than 23 million Sikhs spread all over the world, and in addition perhaps even greater number of Punjabi Hindus, who may need cultural specific psychotherapeutic attention.

Summary

There is an essential similarity between a guru and a psychoanalyst, when the dialogue is taking place in particular cultural context which brings the spiritual (religious) element inside the clinic. Both of them have the burden of solving the problems that trouble people. The spiritual element in the guru and the knowledge of the therapist is tested every time they face a person seeking solution to a problem. Only a few touch the floor of reality (pure consciousness), and some rare ones transcend to farther reaches of consciousness. Among them, we have to find those who excel in both aspects. Among the psychoanalysts, it was C. G. Jung, and our contemporary psychologist, John Crook (2009), who pursued this line till recently. In the spiritual traditions, perhaps the concepts and ideas of Guru Nanak in Sikhism, not only precede Jung; in addition, for the Guru, the physical world was a reality unlike the Vedantins and the Buddhists. Following this thesis, a *guru-chela* paradigm has been conceived to facilitate the psychiatric process in Indian context.

On similar lines, we find that there are at least two broad transpersonal realms in Sikhism as revealed to Guru Nanak. The first transpersonal realm involves the process of creation of the phenomenal world, the *haumai* or the process of individuation or involution. At the same time, the ways of transcending from this physical world constitute another kind of transpersonal realm, the *Naam Simran*. Essentially, it means taking shelter in the name of the supreme, *Wahe Guru* and the evolution with a sense of optimism. A person who is in *chardi kala* is in an ascending state of consciousness. It is characterized by high spirit, high self-esteem, joy in corporeal service, and so on. However, during chanting, it is accompanied by music and a person becomes highly aroused and goes into an altered state of consciousness, towards union with the Akal Purakh.

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