

Book Review

Updesh Kumar & Manas Kumar Mandal (2015). *Understanding Suicide Terrorism : Psychosocial Dynamics*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, Pages: 300, Price: ₹. 995.00 (Hardcover), SBN: 978-93-515-0034-6

Terrorism in some form or other is as old as human community. Suicide terrorism has also been one among the arena of strategies for terrorist activities. However, given modern technologies and visibility through media exposure, it has reached terrifying proportion in terms of frequency and damage. Suicide terrorism entails a violent terrorist attack purporting to do pervasive damage and loss of life, where the perpetrator also expects to die. This strategy, often used by the weaker party in an unequal battle, violates the fundamental condition of the living world, the desire to live. Its comprehension and management becomes challenging as it seems that fear of death, the major instrument of counteracting opposition, is already rendered defunct. Therefore, such actions cause unprecedented confusion and helplessness, owing to both its unpredictability and intensity of motive.

The book edited by Dr. Updesh Kumar and Prof. Manas Kumar Mandal is a highly significant contribution to understanding this phenomenon, a difficult feat successfully completed. A befitting foreword has been offered by eminent suicide terrorism researcher Professor Ariel Merari of Tel Aviv University. The book contains two sections under which twelve articles by renowned experts across the globe are organized. The first part is titled 'Suicide terrorism: A phenomenon' and the second part is 'Suicide terrorism: A process'. The first one focuses on the perspectives and conceptual understanding of suicide terrorism. The second part approaches terrorism as a dynamic process from a personal-social-political-ideological points of view; it covers organizational, psychiatric and socio-political dimensions facilitating development of suicide terrorism, and also suggests tentative ways to counter this deadly and baffling phenomenon. Needless to say, the two sections are not compartmentalized.

In the first introductory essay, Swati Mukherjee, Updesh Kumar and Manas Kumar Mandal provides a general overview of suicide terrorism from historical, psychological, neurobiological, social and organizational perspectives. At the end of the information rich discussion, it introduces a discourse as to whether being prepared to die and suicide are the same, and ends with an acknowledgement of the eternally unanswered question. In the second essay, Luis de la Corte Ibáñez discusses the complex psychosocial perspective of suicide terrorism in terms of social construction of suicide bombers, issues of social identity, ideology of radicalism and culture of martyrdom. The evolutionary psychological perspective of suicide terrorism has been discussed by James R. Liddle and Todd K. Shackelford, while its communicative perspective conceptualizing suicide terrorism as a social noise has been discussed by Jonathan Matusitz. Mark Dechesne delineates the unique characteristics of a new style of terrorism exemplified in the 2008 Mumbai attack. In the sixth and final essay of the first section, Riaz Hassn examines the connotation of suicide bombing as a homicidal killing or a weapon of war?

The second section of the book starts with exploring the psychology of suicide terrorism by Jerrold M. Post and his colleagues. In this essay, he discusses suicide terrorism in Islamic context with reference to social psychological dynamics of moral disengagement. The psychological value of militant jihadi ideology of martyrdom has been scrutinized by Anne Speckhard. The distinction between psychiatrically suicidal patients and suicide bombers and the role of psychologists and psychiatrists are dealt with in the next two essays by Bruce Bongar and his colleagues and Uri Kugel and colleagues. The next chapter by Edna Erez and Anat Berko taps a significant humanitarian concern --- the use and abuse of children

in terrorism and suicide bombing. The final chapter by Major General Dushyant Singh is on deterring suicide terrorism. This reflects the thoughts of a veteran Indian army officer about the possibilities of managing this quickly rising phenomenon.

While each chapter of the book contributes something new to the understanding of suicide terrorism, there are some recurrent themes running across a number of articles. One significant enigma for lay people is that is this act of self sacrifice, for example by volunteering as a human bomb, shares the same psychological mechanism with other forms of suicide? Since psychiatric problems are often associated with suicide, are these volunteers suffering from psychiatric illness? This issue has been addressed by many authors in different context (for example, Chapter 1, Chapter 9). The general conclusion is that psychiatric illness in a medical sense is not to be found among the suicide terrorists; indeed suicide terrorism is different in nature from other cases of suicide. The usual causes like family dysfunction, depression etc. are often absent in such cases. Suicide is viewed in this context as self sacrifice for greater good, without melancholy and with enthusiasm. Research evinces that there are important differences in terms of motivation, emotion and action; indeed suicide terrorism is more of a group action than an individual action (Chapter 2). Despite this, it would be of interest to psychologists to learn how the potential bomber often passes through a phase of heightened euphoria and irrationally enhanced self esteem mimicking a dissociated, hypo-manic or substance induced euphoric phase (Chapter 8). Indeed, one of the most enlightening themes of this book is the attempt to explore how people overcome the two greatest resistances of human existence: to die and to kill.

The term 'altruistic suicide', first introduced by Emile Durkheim in 1857 has appeared time and again in this book. In altruistic suicide, a person strongly believes that his or her death would result in the betterment of the community. The culture of martyrdom thus becomes the breeding ground of suicide terrorism. Suicide terrorism is, indeed, a multidimensional phenomenon, pervading all interfaces between the person and the culture. Understandably, this culture is not a static one; it changes its support for diverse terrorist strategies including suicide terrorism as a function of its containing milieu, for example, conflicting ethos, frustration, torture from the state, implementation of counter-terrorist strategies etc. Apart from these, suicide terrorism is also a communication; it takes into account the huge gap between the terrorists and their victims, often civilians (Chapter 4). Since in almost all cultures, martyrdom has a positive valence, suicide terrorism simultaneously arouses the fear and the awe by virtue of a man willing to throw away his life while killing many.

During the discussion of culture, religion has of course been taken into account, as a large portion of terrorism of all sorts, and suicide terrorism in particular has been supported in the name of religion. This issue has been scrutinized from different perspectives. While the evolutionary psychology of religion has been discussed in Chapter 3, another interesting perspective has been provided by demonstrating how the proscriptions of the religious text has been reinterpreted and reframed to justify terrorism in general and suicidal terrorism in particular (Chapter 7). Use of religion as a motivator to prospective suicide bombers has been discussed in a complex psychological context in Chapter 8. Here martyrdom supported by religion has been viewed as a solace for prolonged experience of trauma and personal loss.

Suicide terrorism, being understood as altruistic in nature by the volunteers, assumes the seemingly non-preventable dimension. However, the state responds to suicide terrorism in various ways, including finding ways to deter it, even if with partial success. The role of the military psychologist and psychiatrist in recruitment and training of the Special Force has been discussed in detail in Chapter 10. The Chapter 12 elaborates pragmatic strategies that attempt to minimize the impact of suicide terrorism by deterring its occurrence through military vigilance as well as by making its impact less visible.

The book has an unputdownable quality as it gradually unfolds the different facets of suicide terrorism. However, the reading would have been facilitated if a summary /abstract would have preceded each article. I also wish there had been at least one essay focusing on the post trauma responses, assimilation and resilience of victims after witnessing a suicide terrorist attack, especially because some clues of its deterrence may be found among such phenomena. Another significant aspect that could have been given the status of a separate article is the use of mass media -- video and audios that work toward drawing public attention to its strength, and also to recruit volunteers. The last essay of the volume has special significance, as deterrence of suicide terrorism is a question eternally lurking inside our mind. Finally, after finishing reading the book, notwithstanding the fact that the very first essay has asserted that the question remains unanswered, I seem to wish for an integrated critical discourse by the worthy editors about the implications and projections derived from our understanding of suicide terrorism in India and in the world. The integration may not be about a final solution for suicidal terrorism, but may offer a spotlight on the gain in psychological knowledge: how the different contradictory vis-à-vis mutually supportive perspectives and perceptions by the terrorists, victims and experts lead us to a tortuous journey to human emotion, thought and action.

However, these small feelings of lack emerge because of the strength of the book; It is so enriching that it makes us crave for more. I would recommend this book as an essential one in any collection of literature in the domain of understanding the dynamics of violence of a very special type.

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Akbar Husain & Sabira Khan (2014). *Applied Spirituality. Theory, Research and Practice*. Global Vision Publishing House, Pages: 275, Price: ₹ 1200 (Hardcover), ISBN: 978-81-8220-632-8

The book "*Applied Spirituality. Theory, Research and Practice*" by acclaimed authors Akbar Husain and Sabira Khan reflect current trends in present-day world psychology and focuses on the important subject of spirituality.

The book has 275 pages including the extensive list of current specialist literature which includes a respectable number of relevant titles.

The authors have divided their book into eleven main chapters, in which they give a clear and colorful picture of key themes of spiritual psychology. With ease and great erudition the text creatively integrates the topics of spirituality and religion, spiritual well-being and spiritual intelligence and counseling, and introduces the techniques of spiritual training and healing. The book presents the broad range of latest findings not only of international origin but also growing number of Indian research on spirituality and its applications in the workplace, business and ethics, and even in sports.

Readers will find the book very informative and easy to read. Without any doubts, it is an excellent and valuable resource for students, scholars, educators, laypersons and anyone who want to integrate the findings on positive outcomes of spirituality into his or her personal or professional life.

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Malavika Kapur (2016). *Psychological Perspectives on Childcare in Indian Indigenous Health Systems*. New Delhi: Springer India, Pages: 275, Price: \$ 129 (Hardcover), ISBN 978-81-322-2427-3

Indigenous practices in health care system have emerged as a major focus of research interest in the last few decades by the medical researchers. Indeed, the very world views as well as approaches to health, life and spirit are different between pre- and post-Hippocrates era. The traditional and indigenous practices all over the world had been closely related to religious and spiritual practices, and are known to be holistic and pluralistic in comparison especially to the post-enlightenment scientific study of body and its ailments. Particularly, Indian traditional systems of medicine and health care were highly developed, diversified, and contained knowledge that might have efficacy and relevance in contemporary world. Prof. Malavika Kapur has taken up the challenging but as yet neglected task of reviewing, from a developmental psychological perspective, the Indian traditional healing systems with special emphasis on child care and development.

Professor Malavika Kapur had always focused her research attention on developmental aspects of human life, and have commented extensively on mental health of children. Her sensitivity in this regard is reflected in her choice of domains in the present treatise as well. The book is divided in 5 parts. The first four parts are exclusively devoted to the indigenous systems of medicine in India, focusing on Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Tibetan respectively. Part I provides a general description of all four systems, and the Ayurveda has been discussed in detail in terms of its key constructs. Separate chapters deal with the developmental approach in Ayurveda, neonatal care, common and serious disorders of childhood and their treatment. Part II illustrates the Unani system of medicine (Atlib), Part III describes the Siddha medicine prevalent in South India, and Part IV the Tibetan medicine. All systems are depicted with details of basic principles, developmental approach to child care and common disorders and their treatment. Part V is a summary of all systems, cross system comparison and implications for theory, practice and research. Each chapter is followed by references consulted for that chapter.

The organization of the book is comprehensive, and the lucidity of writing is highly commendable. The esoteric language of traditional medicinal practices embedded in religious scriptures is difficult to decipher and communicate to the modern reader; Prof. Kapur has accomplished it seamlessly. In the introductory part, she has confessed clearly about the difficulties and lacuna of such communication, especially for the inability to read all texts in original language and thereby depending on translation. Notwithstanding this limitation, the entire publication reflects the painstaking and exhaustive efforts of the author to collect and disseminate as much information on the indigenous Indian medical systems as possible. The tabular presentation of some important points increases readability of the book. I would like to mention, among many others, the tables on different plants used in different systems, and the author's efforts to provide the Hindi and English names for the plants. Such summarizations indicate the meticulousness and concentrated efforts of the author to offer the reader a good and easy read from an entanglement of scattered material.

Some unique features of the book include an attempt on the part of the author to connect to modern practices whenever possible, or to interpret the indigenous practices in terms of modern terminology. Her commitment to scientific objectivity in this regard is appreciable; she has, nowhere, over interpreted or over generalized to glorify either traditional or modern medicine, remaining silent on dubious issues, but clearly elucidating where a comparison can be drawn. Her approach is pragmatic, and the book contains some useful headings like 'Fast acting drugs in Ayurveda' (pp. 25-26), 'Time of administration of drugs' (pp.26-27) in Ayurveda, 'Care of the newborn infant' (pp. 100-102) in Unani system, 'Embryology' (p124-125) in Siddha medicine, 'Signs of death' (p. 165-166) in Tibetan medicine etc. Some topics are of interest, perhaps not only in their medicinal aspect, but in reflecting the process of thought about gender, age, relationship with spiritual world, etc. One example is 'Description of the *Paruvams* for male and female children' (pp. 125-127). The essence of Tibetan medicine is reflected through paintings

of allegorical trees; the plates in the book allows us to contemplate on the holistic approach to life as depicted through interdependent branching of tree. On the whole, the details of the four system not only enables the reader to have information on the systems, but also stimulates to think of the social and cultural context of indigenous medicinal systems, vis-à-vis the philosophy of modern medicine.

The last section of the book (Part V) calls for special mention. In the first few chapters the 'gleanings' from each system are summarized, thus recapitulating and integrating the details of each. The chapter on 'Reflections on childcare across systems' shows the similarities and differences across systems. In the final chapter on 'Implications for theory, practice and research', the possibility of integrating knowledge from both indigenous and modern systems of child health care are considered, with due contextualization and concern for paradigm shift along with new methodologies to be contemplated for fruitful research. The last section kept me engaged for long, as there were many subtle suggestions as to mind-body relationship, construct of temperament, fresh look at gender and age, and of course, viability of cultural values.

The book is undoubtedly a significant addition to our available literature on indigenous health system, and has the potential to serve as an important reference book in all future work in this tradition. However, nitpicking the lapses and lacunas, I would first of all point out some of the oversights in copy editing. Some spellings, especially of Sanskrit words in Roman script are different in two places, for example, *heena* in p.20 and *hina* in p. 23. Similarly *Chikitsa* in p. 24 has been written as *Cikitsa* in p. 29 (Cikitsa-sthana). Besides, a few contradictions in content remain as well. For example, in p. 7, *Shalakyta tantra* is translated as Ophthalmology and ENT; in p. 24 *Shalakyta* has been understood as surgery. These are however, negligible issues, and the interested reader may make most of the corrections by oneself. A major drawback, on the other hand, is the omission of a subject index; I feel this was essential for this book.

Despite these limitations, the author must be congratulated for her elaborate yet objective presentation of the challenging content. This book is a must read for all interested in the indigenous approach to physical and mental health of children. It is also a marker in contemplating new research methodology, as it is likely to stimulate probe in the integration of cultural and traditional healing with modern approaches to health care.

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Updesh Kumar (2014). *Suicidal Behavior: Underlying Dynamics*. UK & New York: Routledge, Pages: 270, Price: \$ 170 (Hardcover), ISBN 978-1-138-79381-1

Suicide has emerged as a major concern for sociologists, mental health professionals and policy makers as suicide claims approximately 1 million lives per year (WHO, 2013). It has been identified as one of the three leading causes of death, particularly among young adults. The phenomenon of suicide is a complex problem with multiple facets ranging from suicidal ideation, to fatal and non-fatal forms of self-harming acts understanding which warrants a re-look at how it's conceptualized. Therefore in this regard, this volume offers a comprehensive perspective on suicide and attempts to understand the interplay of individual factors and societal forces.

'*Suicidal Behavior: Underlying Dynamics*' has been divided into two sections, section one includes chapters that delve into theoretical underpinnings for conceptual understanding while the chapters in section two shed light on research evidence, future directions for research and assessment techniques. The volume comprises of 16 chapters which have been authored by eminent scholars across the world thus enhancing the scope of this volume and bringing forth various cultural perspectives. It further

amalgamates psycho-socio-cultural aspects of suicide thereby filling up existing gaps in this subject matter.

Chapter 1 provides a rich backdrop for understanding suicide with the information on various definitions, theoretical perspectives (bio-psychosocial) and the role of several agencies in suicide prevention and interventions. In chapter 2, the authors have highlighted the role of genetics in inheriting suicidal behaviors, ideations etc by referring to family, adoption and twin studies. Moreover, studies on genetic-environment interaction that reinstates specific combinations of genes and environmental factors that influence suicidal threshold have been highlighted. Taking a step forward in understanding the etiology of suicide, chapter 3 deliberates on various personality factors that are linked to different facets of suicide. In this regard, the Big five and Big three in order to identify vulnerabilities for suicide have been discussed. The relevance of temperament, self-esteem and personality disorders for understanding the linkage with suicide has also been emphasized. The authors also provide directions for future studies, dedicated in ascertaining very specific traits that are crucial in order to understand suicidal behavior. In chapter 4, the author discusses the link between emotional dysregulation and suicidality. Borrowing concepts from the Interpersonal-Psychological theory of suicidal behavior, the author distinguishes between desire for suicide and the capacity to commit suicide. The chapter also highlights the significance of DBT, emotional regulation group therapy as effective psychosocial approaches for emotional regulation and stress tolerance.

With aggression and impulsivity emerging as important dimensions of personality influencing attempted and completed suicide, the following chapter brings forth the debate in the whether the two constructs are distinct or overlapping. Empirical evidence as presented by the author, on aggression and impulsivity having a direct, indirect, causal and proximate role with suicidality, independently or in conjunction highlights a strong argument. Chapter 6 outlines the link between psychosocial stress and suicidal behavior. Factors like excessive mortality, shortened life expectancy, increased life-threatening risky behavior and suicidality surface as some of the major indicators of psychosocial stress prevalent across various ethnicities. In order to understand the dynamics of suicide from a different standpoint, the next chapter discusses the concept of psychological pain, social adversities and their link with suicidal behavior. In the following chapter, the authors deliberated upon another complex issue of suicide clustering and contagion, discussing the methodological and epidemiological issues along with the associated risk factors and the role of media. They also suggest in brief, the role of public health providers, media and other agencies for prevention and intervention planning.

The latter section of the book emphasizes upon research evidence based assessment and evaluation perspectives with regard to societal and cultural differences and the need for resources to tackle incidence of suicidal behavior. This segment begins with a chapter on marginalized group of LGBT youth that is vulnerable to suicide risk as a result of psychosocial stressors like peer victimization, nature of familial relationships etc and the various measures that health care professionals can take to combat these issues with collaborative efforts of one's social support. In chapter 10, empirical evidence elaborated the associated factors of suicidal behavior with spatial and temporal variations. The findings emphasized upon the geographic and seasonal variations in relation with suicide. Illustrating the variation in suicidal behavior, the next chapter outlines risk factors which differ for civilian and US military personnel and also other culture related discriminating and contributing factors from the lens of Fluid Vulnerability Theory which gives direction for assessment of risk levels. The authors also propose phase wise intervention strategies which are based on principles of CBT, thereby giving a holistic overview to the chapter. The next chapter elucidates on alcohol dependence as the single strongest precursors to suicide, with drinking patterns and cultural influences emerging as important factors for alcohol-suicide association.

Following this, chapter 13 discusses suicidal behavior in the context of the most potent force influencing mindsets in today's time-Media. The authors discuss how selective media reporting results in creation of culture specific as well as shared beliefs vis-a-vis suicidality. The authors suggest media representation as an important resource in understanding the social context and the norms of suicide at an individual and collective level.

Chapter 14 and 15 sheds light on significance of formal risk assessment and cultural diversity across suicide assessment. Reinforcing the importance of suicide risk assessment with regard to cultural identity of groups and individuals, the chapters also suggest factors that act as powerful agencies in restraining individuals from attempting suicide. The final chapter discusses the finer nuances of ethical and legal concerns in suicidal assessment and prevention and highlight the ramifications of how a society perceives the act of suicide with particular reference to the Indian context. The chapter sums up by suggesting a need for development of a legal and ethical framework for effective management of cases of suicide.

This volume is a comprehensive text of conceptual and theoretical frameworks, causal factors, assessment, and prevention strategies in the area of suicide. This book contributes immensely to the existing body of literature on suicidal behavior and is a resource for any reader because of the various viewpoints it introduces in every chapter alongside the rich gamut of supporting research evidence. Moreover, the cross-cultural vantage point provides a holistic understanding of this complex phenomenon of suicidality and suggests avenues for future research endeavors. A highly recommended book for researchers, health care professionals, policy makers and alike.

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