

Themenzentrierte Interaktion

theme-centered interaction



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Thomas Abraham

TCI in India : An Indian's response to its relevance – an analysis of the concept and its application

TCI for the first time in its history, entered India in 1992 through Mrs Mary Anne Kuebel. How does TCI respond to Indian culture and vice versa? This paper is an attempt at co-relating the two.

TCI is basically humanistic psychology. While its universality is unquestionable, it is rewarding to prepare a concordance between TCI and every new culture it enters into. The author has selected ten aspects of Indian culture and he looks at them with his newly acquired TCI spectacles. This is only a beginning. Dialogue needs to continue.

TCI is about life and its promotion. In fact all systems of thought, all religions and all positive social movements have aimed at this. Jesus Christ said: "I came so that you may have life, and have it in abundance." Hinduism proclaimed: "Let wisdom come to us from all quarters." Islam says: "There are several unopened gifts which we got from Allah, lying unopened even now." Opening of each gift is improving our life.

I need gifts from above and from others if I want to improve my life. This is an area of interplay of autonomy and interdependence. What can be said about individuals can be said about cultures also. Each culture has its intrinsic genius evolved over thousands of years. At the same time cultures are open entities – influencing and being influenced by others. Mahatma Gandhi said: "I want to keep the windows and doors of mind open. Let winds of ideas from all over the world blow through me. But I refuse to be blow off my feet by any."

In all the statements quoted above, it is possible to see two dimensions. Jesus did not want to replace anyone's life with his. He came so that *you* may have *your* life, and have it in abundance. It is upto us to receive the wisdom and grow with it. It is upto us to open the gift that god has given us. Gandhi said that there is a distinctness about being Indian. At the same time he knew that this distinct Indian culture can be further promoted and enriched by interaction with all positive thoughts emanating from anywhere in



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the world. This is precisely what Ruth Cohn pointed out. Every human being is psychically and biologically distinct. At the same time there is a universality that unites all human beings in the vast ocean of humanity. I can confidently say that there is no other C Thomas Abraham in the whole world. At the same time I can also say that I am a human being like any one else in the world population of 650 crores.

We say that TCI is a system, not merely a methodology. That means, TCI has a holistic perspective which will help us to understand and interpret the human phenomenon. The purpose of this paper is to see how the Indian culture, particularly its core which can be called Indian spirituality, corresponds with the TCI system of thought. A major limitation of this exercise is that Indian culture and Indian spirituality do not easily lend itself to analysis and labeling. It contains multiplicities and complexities, depths and heights, which a layman like me cannot presume to be competent to interpret. It is good to remember that we are talking about the way of life and the collective unconscious of a sub-continent (which goes beyond the borders of India) comprising of about a quarter of the world population, developed over the past six to seven thousand years.

But, even with these frightening limitations, an enquiry of this nature needs to be initiated. The reason is that it will help Indians to understand the Indian phenomenon better, while it will help the TCI-ers to understand TCI better. When I wanted to introduce TCI to the academic system in Mahatma Gandhi University I was confronted with a number of questions which I had difficulty in answering despite the fact that I had always the advantage of consulting Mary Anne Kuebel who introduced TCI to me. One of my earlier Vice Chancellors, Dr. A. Sukumaran, advised me: "We need to study TCI in greater detail. Let us try to adapt TCI to Indian situation rather than adopt it". I think there is a lot of wisdom in his statement.

Before presenting the points of co-relation between TCI and Indian wisdom as I perceive them, let me make a statement of my hypothesis which, in Sanskrit, is *ekam sat, vipra vadanthi*, meaning "the truth is one, wise men present it in different ways". This means that the differences are often at the surface level, at the level of non essentials and locational specifics. Deep down there is unity because ultimately there is only one Truth. That is why it is still possible to dream of "One world".

In this paper my attempt is to take up ten ideas which are close to my heart in my journey through life and to examine them from the angle of Indian wisdom, and the TCI perspective. Though this tri-focal approach – namely my life experience set against Indian wisdom and TCI perspectives – underlies all the reflections given here, no attempt has been made to make the structure rigid.

1. Is there a place for God in the TCI World-view?

In India, all workshops and seminars (like all activities of significance) start with prayer. It may be a prayer song or a silent prayer.

This is because God is at the centre of all realities as Indians perceive them. For us there cannot be a world view without God. Where is God's place in the TCI system? Ruth has not assigned a position for God in the manner in which she has assigned positions for I, We, It and Globe in the TCI symbol. The implication is that God permeates the whole system, for those who believe in Him. For others, there are the values which underlie all interactions. According to Ancient Indian wisdom, the entire universe (*Viswa*) is constituted of five primary elements (*prapancha*), and is always on the move (*jagat*). The power which animates the *Viswa* is *Isa* or God. That is to say, the indwelling power in me and you and the whole universe is the same *Isa*. The word *Isa* is derived from the Sanskrit root *is* which means *to control*. Thus *Isa* is the invisible and changeless indwelling reality which controls everything that is changeful. *Isavasya Upanishad* says "God permeates everything that is here, everything that is changeful in the world of changes" (*Isavasyamidam sarvam, yat kimcha jagatyam jagat*). "I", "WE", "IT" and "GLOBE" are embedded in *Isa* or God. Every thing *is* and *happens* in Him. Therefore, if we are to expand the geometrical symbol of TCI to include *Isa* also, then *Isa*'s place would be at the top point of a pyramid where I, We, It and Globe meet. God's abode is always thought to be high, up in heaven, not down on the plains. "I", "WE", "IT" and the GLOBE are related to, and are part of the GOD/SUPREME POWER. We can visualize the model of a pyramid which floats in a transparent globe, with the god-point at the top which even we hold it.

Isavasya Upanishad says
"God permeates every-
thing that is here, every-
thing that is changeful in
the world of changes"

2. Who am I and where am I in the TCI model?

If you were to ask me who I am, I would begin to say my name is Thomas, I am son of Abraham, I am a native of Kerala, I work in Mahatma Gandhi University, etc. But actually, these are all details of my relation to someone, something or somewhere. But who am I? I think it is important for me to understand that. When I look at myself in various life situations, I recognize that I am a knower (*Jnata*), a doer (*karta*) and an experiencer/enjoyer (*Bhokta*). As a knower, I know (or ought to know) that I am part of nature and that I am changing with nature, which is itself always changing. Let us look at the following dialogue between an Indian Guru¹ and his disciple.

Guru: Is everything around you a part of you?

Disciple: No, it is not part of me.

¹Swami Muni Narayana Prasad, Basic Lessons on India's Wisdom, p. 4.

G: Is everything around you a part of nature?

D: Yes.

G: Are you a part of nature?

D: Yes, surely.

G: That means you and everything around you form part of nature. It is as if we are watching the flow of a river by sitting on the riverbank. The truth is that we, ourselves, are also part of that flow. The changing universe is in an eternal flux. That means 'I' is part of *jagat*, the GLOBE. WE also is part of the GLOBE. And this globe is willed by GOD and is part of GOD, the Supreme power.

Now let us look at the symbol of the pyramid in the globe. We see the Indian wisdom as stated by Swami Muni Narayana Prasad perfectly fits in with the TCI vision as stated by Ruth Cohn. To know myself is to know GOD and the GLOBE. I am in God and God is in me. Self-realization thus becomes God-realization. Self *actualisation* becomes GOD *actualisation*.

Ruth Cohn in 'Peepholes' wrote: "After many months of futile search, I dreamt of an equilateral pyramid. After awaking, I interpreted the dream as follows: An equilateral pyramid has four basic angles. . . . They are interrelated, and my hypothesis is that they should be treated equally"². Ruth goes on to say that in order to be able to visualize the four elements clearly, she "*changed the four balanced points into an equilateral triangle within a many-layered sphere.*" (Italics mine)

In the discussions that have taken place in several of the TCI workshops in India it has become clear that the original equilateral pyramid within a many-layered sphere (globe) as visualized by Ruth is more acceptable to Indians than the simplified version. However there is no need to re-place the triangle with the pyramid in the classroom because the triangle is easier to handle while teaching dynamic balancing. But to stop with the flat triangle is to deny the system its depths and heights and comprehensiveness.

3. Un-learning before learning

In one of the Upanishads³ there is the story of Athreyan who joined a *Gurukula* (the ashram or home of a Guru) to learn *Vaidyasastra*, i.e. the science of medicine. Even after several months, the Guru had not taught a single syllable of *Vaidyasastra*. All this while, the boy was made to do various activities in and around the ashram. Eventually, very reverentially, the aspiring medical student asked the Guru "Pardon me, Guru. When are you going to start medical science lessons?"

The Guru replied "Have patience. There is no meaning in starting the *vaidyasastra* unless and until you are thorough with *dhar-*

**„An equilateral pyramid
has four basic angles.
They are interrelated, and
my hypothesis is that they
should be treated equally“**

² Mary Anne Kuebel, *Living Learning*,
p. 73.

³ Kathopanishad

masastra". (*Dharmasastra* deals with relationships and the duties accompanying them.)

The Guru's advice, in TCI language, means that TASK or "IT" can be meaningfully undertaken only when one is in good rhythm with himself ('I'), the community (WE), the environment (GLOBE) and God Almighty. A person with a disturbed state of mind will not be able to learn. A person with strong pre-occupations and involvements also will not be able to learn. Athreyans' strong motivation to learn medical science is something which will make him a model student in a modern medical college. But Guru feared that this kind of 'over'-enthusiasm will only make him a doctor without medical ethics. *Vaidyasastra* has to be flavoured with *Dharmasastra*. It is a matter of *balance*.

Now let us listen to Ruth. "In schools, universities and other educational institutions" (unlike in *Gurukulas*), "IT is emphasized at the expense of I and WE".⁴

What has been happening in the case of Athreyan is a process of being purified, prepared to receive lessons in medical science from his Guru. The process of purification is the process of unlearning. The *pathram* (the recipient) has to be in a position of *suddhi* (ie., clean enough), to be able to receive what is offered.

Indians, before entering a temple to have a *darshan* (vision) of God, perform *suddhi* by taking a ritual dip in the temple tank. Christians in India, before they enter the Church, remove their footwear. "Take out your footwear because the place where you are standing is holy". (Bible). Muslims wash their feet and face before entering the mosque. According to TCI, disturbances and strong involvements have to be handled before serious work can be done. The above mentioned rituals symbolize the psychological cleansing for a new learning-experience of communion with God.

Chairpersonship and Dharma

To be my own chairperson in TCI means to balance my needs against the "givens" of the situation, in order to find optimum level of fulfillment in my interactions. I need to be aware of my needs and, simultaneously, be sensitive to other people's needs and the demands of the globe. In a group I need to respect others, their chairpersonship and our common task. Chairpersonship is a matter of awareness initially, then a decision-making followed by action.

As an Indian I had some initial difficulties with this concept. But when my doubts were clarified, I was able to relate it to the golden rule which is common to all religions. Chairpersonship is not self-assertion against other people's interests and needs. Let us see what Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity have got to say in this regard.

"The Guru's advice, in TCI language, means that TASK or 'IT' can be meaningfully undertaken only when one is in good rhythm with himself"

⁴ Peepholas, *Ibid*, p.73

In *Mahabharata* (5:1517) it is said: "This is the sum of *Dharma*: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you." This is the parallel of the golden rule of Christianity, which says "In every thing, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and prophets." (Mathew 7; 12) In Buddhism, the rule is "Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful" (The Buddha, *Uadana-Varge* 5.18). The exercise of chairpersonship along with the value of compassion leads to the exercise of these golden rules, "Where the I's and WE discover the maximum possible autonomy while fully accepting their interdependence as a reality".

**"do not do to others
what would cause pain
if done to you"**

5. The Shanthi mantra and TCI

The Indian mantras usually end with the word '*Shanthi*' repeated thrice. *Shanti* stands for peace resulting from harmony, rhythm or balance. The first incantation of *shanthi* prays that I may be at peace with myself, i.e. free from 'disturbance'. The second incantation prays that 'I' may be reconciled (be in harmony) with WE, as well as with IT which is the common focus of our attention, and with GLOBE which is within me and outside me. The third incantation prays that I may be at peace with God Almighty. "May my self, my interactions and all my endeavors be acceptable to God". This is the meaning of *shanti, shanti, shanti*.

6. "I - We" relationship: the Indian way

Indians greet each other saying '*Namasthe*' or '*Namaskar*', that means "I pay my respects to you". This becomes meaningful when we are aware of the spark of divine dwelling within the person whom we greet. These greetings are traditionally accompanied by a bowing of the head. (*Nama* means *to bow to*.) We ought to bow our head only before divinity or when we see divinity as embodied in somebody⁵.

The *Advaita* system of Indian philosophy advocated by *Sankara*, teaches the doctrine of non-duality. '*Aham Brahmasmi*' and '*Tatvamasi*' - I am Brahman and that thou art - are classical articulations of *Advaita* philosophy. When we realize that there is a spark of the divine dwelling within every human being, we are bound to respect ourselves and each other.

I was thrilled when I got this realization. When I see and greet another person I am not seeing him as just another person. I see him as another expression of divinity in this globe. This view fits in very well with the pyramid. When we say "Good morning" we only wish "May this morning be good for you". But when we say "Namasthe" we say "I see God in you and I bow to Him". "Good bye" is more Indian in this respect, because it means "God be with you".

⁵ "TCI's Affinity with Indian Tradition",
Fr. Kuriakose Mampilly in *Mary Anne*:
Living Learning, p. 54.

7. Pure Potentiality

According to Indian wisdom the source of all creation is *Pure Consciousness*. This is also described as *Pure Potentiality*. This is difficult to define, but it is possible to conceive it as a vast expanse of creative potential anxious to express itself. It is also possible to conceive it as God almighty the creator of the Universe. "In the beginning, there was neither existence nor non-existence. All this world was unmanifest energy". (Hymn of Creation, *The Rig Veda*).⁶

For me this concept is an inspiring one and helps me to invest the 'task' (it) of TCI with a deeper meaning. I can visualize the unmanifest energy as a huge amoeba-like nebulous malleable entity. It flows into what ever it wishes to fill. It flows into me to make my "I" or self. Therefore He is in me. He flows into the "We", that is why I bow to Him in others. All TASKs are, ideally, manifestation of the unmanifest, pure energy. All TASKs therefore contain divine creativity. Whatever I do can be made as beautiful as a poem, an instance of creative self-expression. It is upto *me* to make it so. It is also possible for *me* to make it a mere instance of mechanical drudgery or even a negative act of evil intent.

In the first batch of our Diploma in TCI we had an engineer by name Thomaskutty Mathew as participant. He brought in Einstein's equation $E=mc^2$ to explain the concept mentioned above. He says that 'E' is the un-manifest energy. 'E' which is ever craving for self-expression manifests itself as mass (m) and velocity of light(c). Human beings, i.e., 'I's and WE represent mass (m). All activities, (TASKs), represent velocity (c). Without mass and velocity, E cannot express itself. Creation of this universe by GOD is an act of self-actualization on HIS part. We are the 'm' through which God (E) expresses Himself.

**"Good bye" is more
Indian in this respect,
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"God be with you"**

8. Judge not: Hold Your Interpretations to Yourself as long as possible

When I was young I had a problem with the statement of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount which says: "Judge not, lest thou should be judged."⁷ I grew up as an angry young man with a lot of indignation against social inequalities and vulgar display of affluence. When I came across certain behaviours, I felt, it was my God-given responsibility to be prophetic and to criticize. And, every act of criticism was an act of judgement.

Later, with age, I began to realize that judgement is not easy. I did not want to be judged because I felt my judges might not have all the facts which would enable them to pass a fair judgement on me. This must be the case with others also, therefore I should not judge others.

⁶ Cf. "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God... All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (John: 1: 1, 1:3.)

⁷ Mathew 7:1.

When I was introduced to the auxiliary rule which says “hold back your interpretations to yourself as long as possible”, I was impressed by the phrase “as long as possible”, because Ruth did not want to be categorical and go against her own dictum. Then, as part of Diploma in TCI, I read Deepak Chopra’s book “Seven Spiritual Laws of Success” where he relates the Law of Non-judgement and the Law of Defenselessness to the concept of Pure Potentiality.

One way to experience the field of pure potentiality, says Chopra, is through the practice of non-judgement. In judgement what happens is the constant evaluation of things as right or wrong, good or bad. When I indulge in the habit of constantly analyzing, evaluating, classifying and labeling, I create a lot of turbulence in my internal dialogue. This turbulence constricts the flow of energy between me and the field of pure potentiality. When I decide not to pronounce judgements I cease to have a case to argue or defend. Chairpersonship means that I be aware of myself, other selves, our common TASKS and givens. On the basis of this awareness I have to decide what to do, and how to do it. This awareness is not judgemental. It is only a value-based mechanism for self regulation.

Refraining from judgement also amounts to accepting the uniqueness of each individual and his/her situation. It also means that judgement should come from the domain of the SUPREME who is omnipresent and omniscient.

This dictum is closely related to the *Law of Defenselessness*,⁸ wherein we relinquish the need to convince and persuade others to our point of view. If we just relinquish the need to defend our point of view, we will in that relinquishment, gain access to enormous amounts of energy that has been previously wasted. The law of defenselessness means accepting things as they are. I know that every problem is an opportunity in disguise, and this alertness to opportunity allows me to take this moment and transform it into a greater benefit. Problems are either stumbling blocks or stepping stones. The choice is mine. I use my Chairpersonship.

TCI discourages generalization. It insists on speaking for myself. It suggests that interpretations are to be delayed as long as possible. All these auxiliary rules are related to each other: all are against the judgmental attitude. In TCI workshops on several occasions I have gone through situations where it is necessary to distinguish between “facts” and “interpretations”.

9. Nishkama Karma: Do your TASK with detachment

Human beings cannot refrain from action (*Karma*), just as God *cannot but* create. But we have to do our Karma with a sense of detachment, even as God our creator keeps detachment.

⁸ Seven Spiritual Laws of Success, Deepak Chopra.

The doctrine of detachment in Indian philosophy says that in order to acquire anything, we have to relinquish our attachment to it. This does not mean that we give up the intention or the desire to perform and achieve. No. We only give up our attachment to the *result*. We have to play the game without watching the score board.

This is a very powerful thing to do. When we are able to relinquish our attachment to the result, combining *intention* with *detachment* at the same time, we will have what we desire.

Attachment is based on fear and insecurity, interprets Deepak Chopra. The need for security is based on not knowing the true self. People are constantly seeking security, but in fact seeking security is actually a very ephemeral thing. Even attachment to money is a sign of insecurity.

My usual attitude towards the result of something which I have done is that it belongs to me, and that I want to enjoy it. That means I become bound to it. I also feel responsible for it. It is natural for a doer to get attached to what he does or achieves. This is what is to be understood as attachment to one's action (karma bandhan). All our worries arise from our attachment to our actions and the resultant sense of responsibility. *Nishkama Karma* is the way to free ourselves from this bandhan or bondage. "Set thy heart upon thy work, but never on its reward. Work not for a reward; but never cease to do thy work" (Bhatvatgita). This means we must give up the sense of being the doer. Where can we give it away? The answer is we can give it away to where it belongs, i.e. to God/Supreme Power.

But the sense of being the doer is so strong in us, that it requires much mental effort to give it up. This deliberate giving up of the ownership of actions and their results is what is symbolized by 'homams' (havens) or ritual sacrifice. In the homam, the fire represents the creativity of the totality of nature. In that fire of generality we offer what we strongly consider as ours. During the Old Testament times wealth meant the number of cattle one possessed. People were attached to this possession. The sacrifice of a goat meant the ritual sacrifice of one's *attachment* to his possessions.


In TCI language, my TASK orientation is an expression of *attachment*. In my interaction with my Self and with WE, and the GLOBE also there can be attachment. These attachments will stand in the way of my becoming a channel of pure potentiality. I should be able to allow myself and those around me the freedom to be as they are. I should not rigidly impose my idea of how things should be. I should not force solutions on problems. I should participate in everything with detached involvement. This is the paradox of life. This is dynamic balancing, too.

"The doctrine of detachment in Indian philosophy says that in order to acquire anything, we have to relinquish our attachment to it"

10. We are uniquely endowed psycho-biological entities.

In TCI language each human being is a psycho-biological entity, and simultaneously part of the universe. This means that each human psyche is distinct, as distinct as his/her biological identity. The universe and the power that animates it is *Paramatma* in the Indian system. Pure potentiality is another name for *Paramatma*. The unique individual self of the human being is the *Jeevatma* which in its own unique manner articulates the pure potentiality of the *Paramatma*. This is a spiritual interpretation of the TCI axiom.

TCI helps us in our search for meaningful relations in life and effectiveness in whatever we do. It is an inclusive system which can grow in meaningfulness and relevance through co-relation with other systems of thought. The Indian thought, with its predominant spiritual orientation can make profound contributions to make in the interpretation of the conceptual base of TCI.

TCI has great relevance in India, conceptually and applicationally. We are in the process of discovering them and adapting them to life in India. 

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