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Haridas Chaudhuri's Contributions to Integral Psychology

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This article provides a summary of Haridas Chaudhuri's contributions to the field of integral psychology. First an outline and a brief discussion of his *principal tenets* and *triadic principle* of integral psychology are presented, followed by a review of Chaudhuri's critical reflections on some aspects of early transpersonal psychology. The article concludes with a reflection on recent trends in the field of transpersonal psychology and its evolution toward a whole person orientation compatible with integral psychology.

Keywords: Haridas Chaudhuri, Integral psychology, transpersonal psychology

The intricate relationship between psychological and spiritual development had already been contemplated well before the beginnings of American transpersonal psychology in the mid-1960s. Some three decades earlier in Europe, Carl G. Jung (1875–1961) and Roberto Assagioli (1888–1974), who were both trained in the scientific tradition as physicians and were early founders of depth psychology, expanded the boundaries of Freudian psychoanalysis by including the transpersonal dimensions of the human experience in their systems of psychology and psychotherapy.

In India, Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950), who referred to yoga as “nothing but practical psychology,” developed integral yoga mainly in the last few decades of his life. Indra Sen (1903–1994), a prominent Indian psychologist, coined the term *Integral psychology* with Sri Aurobindo's consent and developed workshops and classes in what may be called *integral yoga psychology*. Sen (1960, 1986) extracted and placed the psychological essence of Sri Aurobindo's metaphysical and yogic framework in the foreground of his work, which was also informed by Western depth psychology and traditional Indian psychologies to create the first systematic approach to integral psychology.

Haridas Chaudhuri (1913–1975), who focused his doctoral dissertation on Sri Aurobindo's

integral philosophy in the 1940s, became the main exponent of integral yoga and philosophy in the United States in the early 1950s and onward. According to Paul Herman (personal communication, n.d.), who was asked by Chaudhuri in the early 1970s to create the first integral/transpersonal psychotherapy training program in the world, Chaudhuri had suspected that much of the spiritual dilemmas and issues that he was consulted about were in fact psychological issues in disguise. With this insight, as well as his own personal knowledge and experience of psychology and spirituality, he affirmed that there is a profound relationship between psychology and spirituality and that spiritual growth and transformation is inseparable from psychological development.

Chaudhuri devoted much of his efforts in the last few years of his life to developing his own creative approach to integral psychology. A short version of his unfinished work in this area was later published as a chapter titled “psychology” in the posthumously published work, *The Evolution of Integral Consciousness* (Chaudhuri, 1977). The present article includes an outline of Chaudhuri's *principal tenets* and the *triadic principle* of Integral psychology presented in Chaudhuri (1977) which was based on an earlier unpublished monograph written in the early 1970s (Chaudhuri, n.d.). It will also review Chaudhuri's early critique of

transpersonal psychology and examine how his integral psychology anticipated and addressed some of the issues that challenged the field of transpersonal psychology in later decades. In conclusion, this paper will argue that the field of transpersonal psychology has evolved toward a whole person framework as well as integral themes and insights and that the two fields might converge in the coming decades.

Chaudhuri's Approach to Integral Psychology

In an unpublished paper developed in the early 1970s, Chaudhuri (n.d.) laid out the basic framework for his own independent approach to Integral psychology in which he outlined about a dozen "principal tenets" that defined the general parameters of his formulation. Some of these principles share much with the essential assumptions of existential/phenomenological and humanistic/transpersonal psychologies of the 1960s and 1970s; others are resonant with principles of yoga psychology and integral yoga. The "triadic principle" of uniqueness, relatedness and transcendence is resonant with the three modes of the Self (Individual, Universal/Cosmic, Transcendent) that form one of the pillars of Sri Aurobindo's (1992) integral psychology.

Chaudhuri's Principal Tenets of Integral Psychology

Chaudhuri's approach to integral psychology is not primarily concerned with extrapolation of psychological insights from Sri Aurobindo's overall teachings. Instead, it directly applies an integrative methodology to the domain of psychological knowledge in order to construct a system of psychology that is phenomenologically oriented in its epistemological outlook, and that holds psychospiritual development and transformation, as well as integration toward wholeness, as its central objective.

In his effort to outline the basic concepts of integral psychology with a minimum of metaphysical assumptions, Chaudhuri (n.d.) proposed a number of "principal tenets" that form the basis for his approach to integral psychology. The following is a brief list of selected principal tenets:

- *The wholeness of personality:* The human being is an onto-psycho-somatic continuum, or a spirit-mind-body unity which in the ultimate analysis, is an indivisible whole.
- *Different levels of consciousness:* Consciousness is the basic structure of the psyche. Thus the various states below the waking consciousness, as well as higher meditative states are worthy of investigation as valid dimensions of the total human experience.
- *Importance of all phases and areas of experience:* Not only is it important to make direct empirical observations of human experience, it is imperative that all areas of human experience be included in the process of inquiry. Not only wakeful, conscious experiences, but also dreams and deep sleep stages, altered states of consciousness, and creative imagination are important areas of research in integral psychology. Beside ordinary states of consciousness, pathological, paranormal, and peak experiences must be considered.
- *Need for personal integration:* A full experience of wholeness presupposes the full integration of the diversified components and aspects of human personality. To this end it is essential to appreciate the role of understanding the self, because it is "only by following the inner light of one's own self that the human psyche can be comprehended in its fullness" (Chaudhuri, n.d., p. 24).
- *The concept of integral self-realization:* Integral psychology holds that integral self-realization is the profoundest potential for the human being. This achievement requires a thorough integration and harmonization of the personal, the social and the transcendental; and of the existential and the ontological dimensions of existence.
- *The doctrine of transformation:* In integral psychology the doctrine of transformation replaces the kind of transcendence which results from withdrawal from, or negation of, the world. The lower spheres of conscious-

ness (instincts, drives, etc.) are not escaped from or suppressed, but are transformed into desirable qualities. Psychological transformation is achieved through a process of purification and psycho-ethical discipline.

- *The doctrine of ontomotivation*: “In the course of self-development ego drives are ultimately transcended and action becomes a spontaneous outpouring of the creative joy of union with Being as the ultimate ground of one’s own existence” (Chaudhuri, n.d., p. 3).
- *The methodology of integral experientialism*: Integral psychology is comprehensive in its survey of human experience. Critical, experiential investigation and evaluation is encouraged in studying a vast range of states of consciousness and modes and phases of experience. External observations as well as introspective approaches are equally valued in this methodology.

The Triadic Principle of Integral Psychology

While the above foundational principles are useful in understanding the overall parameters, scope and vision of Chaudhuri’s integral psychology, his triadic principle of *uniqueness, relatedness, and transcendence* provide another set of guidelines for understanding the overall process of psychospiritual development, transformation and integration. Uniqueness, relatedness and transcendence correspond to the three domains of *personal, interpersonal* and *transpersonal* psychological inquiry and approximately parallel Sri Aurobindo’s three modes of the Self: Individual, Universal (cosmic) and Transcendent (eternal). According to Chaudhuri (1977):

Broadly speaking, there are three inseparable aspects of human personality: uniqueness, or individuality, universality or relatedness, and transcendence. In different schools of philosophy we find that there has been a tendency to over-emphasize one aspect or another. It has not occurred to many people that all these are very essential and interrelated aspects of our being. (p. 74)

The uniqueness principle may be best understood in terms of two ancient yogic principles of *Swabhava* and *Swadharma*. *Swabhava*, the unique state of an individual, refers to the fact that each individual human being is the resultant of a unique set of qualities and characteristics that are not replicable in their exact configuration. Indeed no two objects or events are exactly the same in nature. Just as no two leaves of a tree or no two snowflakes are the same despite similarities, no two human beings can ever be identical in the exact configuration of genetic and physiological makeup, temperament, personality traits, cultural and historical conditions, context of personal experience and potential for spiritual development. In this author’s view, the more one understands this profoundly meaningful reality the harder it becomes to employ rational psychological categories and typologies—including pathological categories and classifications.

Swadharma implies that there is a unique path of development, growth and unfoldment for each individual which must be understood in terms of that person’s unique *swabhava*. Unlike some forms of perennial psychology, integral psychology is sensitive to issues of individuality and the path of individual psychological growth and psychospiritual embodiment and evolution. It is important to note here that most traditional spiritual disciplines, especially those of the East, have de-emphasized the individual dimensions of personal consciousness or equated it with an illusory vision of reality. Individuality has often been associated with self-centeredness, egocentrism or selfishness, which are the antithesis of the basic tenet of selflessness advocated in spiritual practice.

In this author’s analysis, misunderstanding of the uniqueness principle results in various forms of narcissistic traits and, in some cases, narcissistic personality disorders. Narcissistic individuals are likely to believe in their own uniqueness (specialness), but would not grant others such a privilege. Narcissism is indeed a strong impediment to any kind of real psychological and spiritual growth.

Integral psychology promotes the idea of a balanced and healthy ego development and affirms

the role of sound ego-development in the initial stages of psychospiritual growth. But the self must first be understood as the *principle of embodiment*. According to Sri Aurobindo the ego is only a temporary formation in the outer nature, required during the early stages of individualization. The real center of embodied individuality is the soul (the Psychic Being) which resides deep in the center of a human being behind the heart. This Psychic Being is seen as a delegate of Atman (the transcendent Self which remains immutably beyond manifestation) in matter. This is quite different from the common definitions of the terms ego and self as defined technically within various schools of Western psychology.

As important as individuality may be, it is not possible to understand the human being in terms of individuality alone. Relatedness or the interpersonal dimension—the relationship with all other beings, the earth and the physical universe—is of equal importance in the triadic formulation. Obviously human beings are contextualized within numerous holonically organized systems such as families, cultures, societies, nations and ultimately the earth and the entire cosmos. Integral psychology holds the assumption that individuals are microcosmic expressions of the greater macrocosm with infinite potential for spiritual realization. Just as an individual needs to maintain harmonious intrapsychic dynamics, she or he needs to also maintain balance and harmony with others and with nature. In this writer's understanding of Integral psychology based on Chaudhuri's framework and current western psychology, unhealthy and lopsided growth in the interpersonal realm is likely to lead to enmeshment, co-dependency, and borderline personality traits and disorders.

In integral psychology the human being is understood in terms of both the embodied-historical (temporal) and the transcendental, formless/timeless (non-temporal) dimensions. Hitherto Western psychology has been concerned only with the historical dimension of the human being which includes: a) the genetic/biological/neurological characteristics or the physical-vital aspects, b) the emotional aspects, and c) the mental aspects of human existence. In short, Western

psychology until the present has been concerned with what may be referred to as the body-mind configuration, or outer/surface personality.

However, the transcendental (non-temporal) dimension is of equal importance in Chaudhuri's integral psychology which recognizes the importance of the urge toward transcendence and wholeness. Historically the notion of transcendence has been the cornerstone of Eastern psychologies and Western mysticism. Being so, the terminology often characteristic of these systems has been categorically unacceptable to mainstream Western psychology. On the other hand, traditional mysticism has had little or no concern with the conventional psychological growth and development of the human being. Integral psychology recognizes and emphasizes both of these areas without neglecting either of them.

According to Chaudhuri (1977):

The essential significance of transcendence is that man in his inmost being is a child of immortality, an imperishable spark of the infinite. . . . As a mode of manifestation of being, his ultimate goal is union with that ground of existence, transcending all other limitations. (p. 76)

The notion of transcendence, however, could be misleading if taken in an ultimate or absolute sense. In an article titled "Psychology: Humanistic and Transpersonal", Chaudhuri (1975) critiqued one of the early assumptions of transpersonal psychology—the notion of ultimate states—and that transpersonal psychology was concerned with recognition and realization of ultimate states.

Chaudhuri did not believe in characterization of mystical experiences in terms of ultimate states. Such characterization, he believed, creates the "dichotomy of the ultimate and the preparatory, the transcendental and the phenomenal, . . . the dichotomy of the lower self and the higher self, the flesh and the spirit, relative knowledge and absolute knowledge, conditioned existence and unconditioned perfection" (Chaudhuri, 1975, p. 9). This problem arises when the principle of transcendence is treated in isolation from the principles of uniqueness and relatedness.

Chaudhuri's Critique of Early Transpersonal Psychology

In the early issues of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* (JTP) it was stated that transpersonal psychology is concerned with "meta-needs, ultimate values, unitive consciousness, peak experiences, ecstasy, mystical experience, B values, essence, bliss, awe, wonder, self-actualization, ultimate meaning, transcendence of the self, spirit" among other related concepts in its statement of purpose (e.g., JTP, 1969, p. i). In his critique of transpersonal psychology, in the early years of its emergence and differentiation from humanistic psychology, Chaudhuri (1975) wrote:

It has been suggested that transpersonal psychology goes beyond the ideals of "self-actualization," "being human," or "being fully human." It ventures forth into the transhuman level of truly transpersonal experiences. But are not transpersonal experiences still a specific mode of *human* experience, existentially continuous even though qualitatively different? Don't they represent a higher dimension of personal experience of the individual human being? (p. 7)

Here the emphasis seems to be on the fact that the transpersonal dimension is only one of the three modes of self-consciousness suggested by Sri Aurobindo and Haridas Chaudhuri (i.e., individual, relational/universal, cosmic/transcendent). In their eagerness to go beyond the traditional ego-centered domain of Western psychology and embrace mystical and spiritual experiences, early transpersonal psychologists may have unwittingly overlooked the importance of the personal and interpersonal dimensions of the self in a larger, more holistic vision of psychology.

Perhaps part of the problem is the phrase "transpersonal"; what was likely meant by "meta-needs, ultimate values, unitive consciousness, peak experiences, ecstasy, mystical experience, B values, essence, bliss, awe, wonder, self-actualization, ultimate meaning, transcendence of the self, spirit..." (JTP, 1969, p. i) was trans-egoic realms and experiences. However, trans-egoic experiences could only be psychological or spiritual states of

consciousness experienced for a certain duration in time, whether induced by meditative techniques, entheogens, spontaneously or otherwise. Chaudhuri's Integral psychology certainly foresaw the necessity of integration of such experiences into the personal and social realms of existence in order for them to have any lasting or transformative effects. Moreover, a tendency for transcendence of egocentric consciousness without proper somatic grounding, or emotional transformation is likely to result in spiritual bypassing, a problem that came to the attention of transpersonal psychology much later, in the mid-1980s.

Chaudhuri (1975) was concerned that "under the aegis of transpersonal psychology an unconscious revival may occur of the metaphysical transcendentalism and static ultimatism of the orient's medieval mysticism" (p. 8), in that "instead of dissipating the illusions which lie at the root of so much neurotic behavior, medieval mysticism tended to encourage and perpetuate the neurotic urge of the human psyche for some ultimate condition of blissful but illusory self-realization" (p. 8).

As stated earlier, Chaudhuri's (n.d.) doctrine of transformation replaces the kind of transcendence which results from withdrawal from, or negation of, the world. The lower spheres of consciousness (instincts, drives, etc.) are not escaped from or suppressed, but are transformed into desirable qualities. Chaudhuri's doctrine of transformation is inspired by Sri Aurobindo, who wrote about three types of transformation (Psychic, Spiritual, Supramental) in integral yoga in *The Life Divine* (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, pp. 889–918). Transformation refers to transformation of consciousness, which results in transformation of personality: mind, emotions, and eventually the body; and is intimately connected with other tenets such as *personal integration, integral self-realization* and *ontomotivation*.

The Problem of Spiritual Bypassing

Chaudhuri's integral psychology anticipated the dilemma of spiritual bypassing, later introduced in the literature of transpersonal psychology (Welwood, 1984). This tendency, especially common among individuals with schizoid

personality traits, is characterized by a wish to transcend the somatic and affective dimensions through suppression or denial of the body and emotions in order to attain transcendental states of consciousness. It is true that mystical *experiences* attained in this fashion may have their proper place in the process of psychospiritual development. But when taken to an extreme, asceticism and denial of the physical-vital energies problematically become the goal of spiritual practice.

In traditional spiritual practices awakening the metaphysical instincts has often been done at the expense of suppressing the biological instincts—a process referred to as spiritual bypassing. The body and its associated needs and desires are often regarded as impure and an obstacle to spiritual attainment. This could be rooted in a belief that life on Earth and in the body is a form of banishment from heavenly realms. In other instances, this could be a result of an overly masculinized attitude which holds a fear of the body and the senses and privileges transcendent consciousness over embodied existence. In such views the body is deemed subject to pain, decay and eventual death and thus ultimately unreliable and undesirable. This tendency has been called spiritual bypassing which implies bypassing of embodied physical and related vital and emotional challenges through suppression of them in order to attain higher or transcendent spiritual consciousness.

Integral psychology maintains that before attempting to reach higher transcendental states through spiritual bypassing, one must first properly deal with issues of psychological growth and development, as well as with pathological tendencies and development of a relatively healthy ego and personality. Transcendence, in integral psychology, is replaced by the notion of psychospiritual transformation. The soul (Psychic Being) plays an important role in the process of psychic transformation in integral yoga and psychology. Transcendence of the ego is merely the first step in search of transpersonal experiences which generally involve experience of psychocentric consciousness in some individuals and cosmocentric consciousness in others. The next step involves the transformation of mental/cognitive, emotional/affective, and physical/

behavioral dimensions of personality. Without these steps the supramental transformation in integral yoga is not possible.

The Evolution of Transpersonal Psychology Toward a Whole Person Perspective

The origins of transpersonal psychology—which is often referred to as the fourth wave in the history of psychology—can be traced back to Carl Jung's analytical psychology and Roberto Assagioli's psychosynthesis in Europe in the 1930s. In the United States it emerged from humanistic psychology about three decades later in the 1960s. Both Jung and Assagioli, whose careers spanned the empirical/scientific as well as depth psychologies (the first two waves) and in their later works naturally embraced the humanistic and transpersonal dimensions (third and fourth waves), were keenly interested in healing, integration, and wholeness—that is, Jung's *individuation* and Assagioli's *psychosynthesis*. In this way they were quite compatible with integral psychology's emphasis on these same central issues of healing, transformation, integration and wholeness. Moreover, both Jung and Assagioli considered the soul (i.e., Self, Higher/Transpersonal Self) as the cardinal instrument for integration of the total psyche. This is strikingly parallel to Integral Psychology's notion of *psychic transformation*, or the transformation of personality using the soul/psyche as the catalyst. In all three systems it is acknowledged that egocentric consciousness has specific psychological functions as well as certain limitations and is incapable of integrating the whole person.

A review of the themes and trends in the history of American transpersonal psychology shows that over the course of several decades there has been a gradual evolution towards these same whole person themes. Caplan, Hartelius, and Rardin (2003), who mention a number of earlier studies reviewing published definitions of transpersonal psychology and reflections on the field, presented dozens of contemporary viewpoints from various scholars in the field. A few years later in *Transpersonal Psychology: Defining the Past, Divining the Future*, Hartelius, Caplan & Rardin's (2007) analysis of the last four decades revealed that:

the major subject areas of the field can be summed up in three themes: beyond-ego psychology, integrative/holistic psychology, and psychology of transformation. Theme frequency analysis reveals that early emphasis on alternative states of consciousness has moderated into a broader approach to human transcendence, wholeness, and transformation. This expanded definition of transpersonal psychology suggests the field has much in common with integral psychology. (p. 1)

The emergence of a whole person psychology is an exciting development for the field of psychology, perhaps leading toward the evolution of a fifth wave in the history of psychology. Inspired by Chaudhuri's approach to psychology, the current author defined this new integral psychology as a:

psychological system concerned with exploring and understanding the totality of the human phenomenon. . . . a framework that not only addresses the behavioral, affective and cognitive domains of the human experience within a singular system, but is concerned with the relationship among the above-mentioned domains in the context of human spiritual development. . . . a system that, at its breadth, covers the entire body-mind-psyche-spirit spectrum, while at its depth dimension, encompasses the previously explored unconscious and the conscious dimensions of the psyche, as well as the supra-conscious dimension traditionally excluded from psychological inquiry. (Shirazi, 2001, p. 1)

Haridas Chaudhuri was not a practicing psychologist. He was trained as a philosopher in India in the 1930s and 40s and was well conversed in Indian traditional yogas, philosophy and classics, as well as both classic and contemporary Western philosophy and depth psychology. The topics on which he lectured ranged from yoga and mysticism, to education, psychology and philosophy among many other topics. Chaudhuri's knowledge of Integral yoga and philosophy qualified him for personal approval by Sri Aurobindo to become the main ambassador of integral yoga in the United States during the last 25 years of his life. He

continued to study the most important literature and dialogued with key personalities of his time and had numerous spiritual experiences that informed his outlook throughout his life. His insights into the nature of human psychospiritual development and transformation were based on his own lived experiences and spiritual accomplishments.

Chaudhuri focused much of his attention in the last few years of his life on integral psychology and wrote extensively on related topics such as yoga psychology, integral psychotherapy and integral self-realization. His untimely passing in 1975 interrupted his work in these areas and a number of his related articles remain unpublished; thus, Haridas Chaudhuri was not an influential figure in the development of transpersonal psychology. Nevertheless, his timeless insights into the nature of human psyche and spirit and his well-informed formulation of a whole-person approach to psychology were inspired by the same evolutionary spirit that is beginning to manifest, as he had foreseen, at the dawn of the 21st century. The same evolutionary spirit and momentum is no doubt guiding and informing numerous other figures in integral and transpersonal psychology whether or not they were aware of Chaudhuri's key contributions to a new integral or whole-person orientation to human self-exploration and self-knowledge.

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