Holistic Living in Globalized World: An Indian Perspective

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Abstract

Globalization is a multidimensional phenomenon. The process is irreversible and we have to live through it. It does have several advantages, but at the same time it impacts individual's personal life, social relationships and world's ecosystem adversely. These challenges can be met through adopting tenets of holistic life prescribed in traditional Indian culture. In contrast to Western linear world view, the relational worldview in Indian culture sees life through harmonious relationships where healthy living is achieved by maintaining balance between the many interrelating factors in one's circle of life. The relational worldview model for holistic living can best be represented through three major factors that together must come into balance. These factors represent mind-body-spirit and their positive relationship with society and nature. Besides internal harmony in mind-body-spirit, ancient literature verbalizes of relational harmony with the ecology and society. It emphasizes on an understanding of the intrinsic interdependence of all beings. Social harmony in accordance with the percepts of dharma and karma are considered essential for a healthy and peaceful life journey towards self-realization. Every individual is considered as a biologically, psychologically and spiritually part of nature's nonpolluting, intelligent ways. The nature itself is a living system, and the psyche and body exists within this larger system. The paper presents Indian tradition of holistic living that has time tested concepts for the all round development of an individual with proper balance of the importance of self, the society and the nature. The concepts have survived since the vedic period because of their sheer practicality. They are still valid and in fact, more relevant in today's complexities of day-to-day life.

Globalization

According to Robertson (1992), globalization as a concept refers to consciousness intensification as a whole alongwith the compression of the world. Waters (2001) view globalization as a social process where limits of geography shrinks on social, economic, political and cultural arrangements and people act accordingly by becoming increasingly aware of this reality.

In globalized world, "material exchanges localize; political exchanges internationalize; symbolic exchanges globalize" (Waters, 2001, p. 20) and this global phenomena that extend across widely dispersed locations make people simultaneously access, share and experience

this phenomena around the world (Scholte, 1997). Arnett (2002) asserts that people are influenced worldwide by globalization as they develop "a bicultural identity that links their local identity with an identity linked to the global culture."

Complexities of Life in Globalized World

Contemporary sociologists are worried of the changing social conditions brought about by globalization. Risks, liquidity and individualization are three major processes that can potentially create a crisis for the world-system and change it in unforeseeable ways (Wallerstein, 2004). Globalization creates risks that concerns people from all different classes; for example, radioactivity, pollution, and even unemployment (Beck, 1992). Risks are not merely natural calamities such as floods, but many of them are man-made – a consequence of modernization. It is hard to measure risks because many involve a latency period. Toxins, antibiotics and genetically modified foods take years to show ill effects. The domain of risk is not limited to only environment or technology but extends to socio-economic conditions also. Financial crises of 2009 and the current events in Ukraine that is affecting energy prices world over are the testimony to this. In other words, risks are now global in nature and have become an integral part of our lives.

Liquidity means trans-boarder, trans-national flow of money, people, technology and ideas. In a globalized world where world is shrinking, borders of nations are becoming inconsequential. The strengthening of social relations worldwide link far-away localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa (Giddens, 1990). As Bauman (2000) puts it, "*mobility has turned into the paramount source of uncertainty for all* (p. 121). The modern nation-state, being territorial by definition, becomes equally powerless to control let alone shape the global flows. Liquidity and flow are not simply phenomena affecting the large-scale aspects of the social structure. They also have deep impacts on people's lives as social risks become all the more prevalent as states lose their ability to provide stable and secure living conditions.

Liquidity creates individualization. The individualization thesis of Beck (1992) says that this modernity phenomena among individuals (young middle class) is driving them increasingly towards freedom from the cultural constraints such as traditions, religions, and unconditional belief in the social structures of status, class, nuclear family and even the validity of science. **Individualization** means that individuals are left to deal with societal and systemic conditions as part of their own individual life-goals and members of society can no longer count on social safety nets or the welfare state to negotiate the impact of risks on their lives. Liquid modernity leaves them "free" to figure out solutions on their own**.** People therefore feel isolated and insecure. In families intergenerational gap is accelerating. There is social disconnect. As Sennett (1998) notes, "*this conflict between family and work*

poses some questions about adult experience itself. How can long-term goals be pursued in a short-term society? How can durable social relationships be sustained?"

Through individualization people have become self–centered, yet not self-caring. Individuals face imbalance in mind-body-spirit. In globalized world, individuation process in individuals is redefining their self-concept and image as they are exposed to different value systems and social settings different from traditional systems**.** People now look at life issues not from the perspective of religious or spiritual traditions or from some divine revelations but from ideas and experiences of life (Molloy 2002, 508). The confidence in religious, political and scientific authority is declining; yet at the same time individuals bring a growing mass desire for participation and self-expression, as was seen in Anna Hazare movement and recently concluded parliamentary election in India. In political participation, the emphasis is shifting from voting for traditional parties to more active and issue-specific forms of mass participation. But, individualization feeds them a sense of loss of self. Tamimi (2005) has pointed out how globalization resulted in inappropriate domination of the Western view of mental health as well as of economic approaches and how children's mental health may be adversely affected by a Western value system that promotes individualism, weakens social ties, and creates ambivalence towards family system.

Globalization has adversely affected the equitable distribution of natural resources and created environment problems. The world's resources are limited and threatened by pollution and increasing consumption patterns all over the world. Pollution does not respect national boundaries, but is rapidly spreading its effects from one country or region to another. We are all exposed to environmental degradation, but some more than others. The very future existence of some communities and nations is threatened by anticipated changes in sea levels due to melting of glaciers in foreseeable future due to global warming. Besides adverse effect on our eco system and depletion of natural resources, globalization has increased inequality. As Beck (1992, p. 35) puts it "wealth accumulates at the top, risks at the bottom." The global poor are exposed to more risks than the global wealthy. Additionally, the wealthy (in terms of income, power and education) have access to more information on how to avoid risks. In other words, under conditions of global uncertainty, information becomes itself a source of wealth that is unequally distributed. Recently Piketty (2014) has painted a very disturbing picture of growing inequality even in developed nations, i.e. US and Europe, due to Globalization.

But, globalization also involves a process of reflexivity, i.e., the growing awareness of living in a single global space (Monnier, n. d.). People are more and more aware that many phenomena that affect our lives have global ramifications. For instance, most of us are aware of the dangers of global climate change or the depletion of the ozone layer. The whole world is interconnected and environmental problems have global impact and people are realizing

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the fact that we all are sailing in the same boat. In other words, people of the world, irrespective of their differences, share a community of fate and that the promotion of narrow self-interest (such as the enormous consumption of natural resources by Western countries) is ultimately putting the entire planet at risk. In other words, to be globally reflexive means to integrate global elements into one's identity and work like global citizen as Gates Foundation working on African health issues.

It is indeed the nature of globalization that it is a work-in-progress rather than a completed product, and therefore it offers us opportunity to decide how to live happily and meaningfully in such conditions in ways that not only protects us from the unwanted effects of globalization, but also contributes to fight the sources of such ill effects (e.g., decay of eco-system, religious fundamentalism, wasteful use of natural resource, social exclusion, etc).

Relevance of Indian Tradition of Holistic Living in Contemporary World

People have been striving to answer "How to live holistically?" literally for thousands of years. This question is more pertinent in today's globalized world. However, the human functioning at the core level remains same and the principles of holistic living continue to be simplistic, despite complexities of external manifestations of life.

Any individual organism is best defined and understood by its relationships-- relationships with internal-self, relationship with other creatures, and its relationships to the environment. An individual thus operates at three levels:

1. Self (mind-body-spirit),
2. Interaction with others (family and society), and
3. Attitude and behavior towards the environment

In the discussion of holistic living discussion is generally around mind-body-spirit and importance of interaction of self with the external environment, i.e. society and nature is largely neglected. However, for a healthy living external environment should also be conducive. Holistic living in Indian tradition, as shown in Figure, promotes not only balance of mind-body-spirit, but also its positive interacting relationship with the external world including nature and society. Without this coherent relationship a sense of meaning of life will never come and happiness will be elusive.

Indian tradition of holistic living

Caring Mind-Body-Spirit

Self care refers to actions and attitudes which contribute to the maintenance of well-being and personal health and promote human development. If we want to feel truly alive and open to life's opportunities we need to look carefully at our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. Humans are bio-psycho-social-spiritual beings. Each aspect of functioning needs attention and care.

Body, mind and spirit are really just human labels that we use to try and make sense of the complexity of human wellbeing. Mind, body and spirit have interacting relationship. Research in neuroscience confirms that thoughts and feelings are indeed manifested physically. Emotions actually tie all three of these domains together as our thoughts stimulate deep beliefs and are expressed viscerally in the body (McCarthy, 2011). We may go wrong by trying to compartmentalize and address the physical aspects of health by ignoring any of the domains. The distinctions among the domains are somewhat blurred. Contemporary psychological interventions and practices such as biofeedback, relaxation therapies, and meditation clearly demonstrate the scientific base governing mind-body-spirit interactions (Emami and Binkley, 2010).

Indian literature always refers to health as constituted of mind-body-spirit. Ayurveda, the oldest form of healthcare in the world is emphatic that health is of paramount importance. A

healthy person, as defined in *Sushrut Samhita,* one of the primary works on Ayurveda, is "he whose *doshas* are in balance, appetite is good, all tissues of the body and all natural urges are functioning properly, and whose mind, body and spirit are cheerful."

Samdoshah samagnisch samdhatumalkriyah,
Prasannotmeendriyamanah swasth ityabhidhiyate

While the first line in the above *sloka* relates to physical parameters of the health, the second line clearly extends it to spiritual, philosophical and mental dimensions to define health. Health is not thought as just physical health. Physical health after all is reflection of the mental and spiritual health. We enjoy good health when we feel good not in bodily terms, but also in terms of our mind; in terms of our predisposition; in terms of our spirit.

In contemporary psychology mind-body-spirit is discussed in the context of integrated personality in which psycho-physical-spiritual aspects of personality are working in a harmonious and effective manner. In an integrated personality, mind and emotions, desire and determination, and all mental activities work in an organized way. Such integration implies moral soundness, purity and virtue of character as exemplified in sincerity, consistency, accountability and honesty. Ultimately, the ideal of integrity is wholeness (what has been called 'holiness', but intended here without any religious connotation).

Contemporary positive psychology lays emphasis on the "meaning of life' for enduring happiness. *Moksha* exactly does that in Indian cultural context. Spirituality moderates positive relationships with various measures of life satisfaction, psychosocial wellbeing, both physical and mental health, and is helpful in the quest for meaning and purpose in life. To sum up, the first step of holistic living is maintaining balance of mind-body-spirit. This is achieved through healthy life style, yoga and spiritual practices.

Individual and Society

People live and develop their potential in social groups. Throughout the late 20th century and into the 21st century, people have increasingly found themselves in a globalised world, with economic, social and cultural influences coming from many different sources. This process has challenged individual's social relationships and affected his well-being. A research report by Deiner and Seligman (2002) lays emphasis on the necessity of social relationships. They noted that very happy people had rich and satisfying relationship with the society. Social integration indicates how one feels belonging to the society. Non-integration or mal-adaption or isolation from society will result in feeling rejected. Social acceptance of others is counterpart to self-acceptance and reflects in good mental health (Ryff, 1989). In the society one should feel contributing to society. Social contribution is

one's self value (Keyes, 1998). It includes the belief that one is vital member of the society, with something of value to give to the world.

Cassell (1976) and Cobb (1976), building upon clinical, laboratory, and epidemiological evidence, directed attention to individuals whose social ties were limited and/ or noxious. Both noted that these people appeared to get sick more often than those with more rewarding interpersonal relationships and speculated that social deficiencies contribute to stress, that in turn, gets in the way of health maintenance. They described interpersonal provisions that offer the individual love, interest, liking, caring, and a willingness to help, if needed. Both noted that these provisions had the power to influence an individual's self-concept, attitudes, and behavior. Furthermore, empirical investigations of the benefit of social interest or altruism (*manav dharma*) suggest that they are associated with better life adjustment (*Zarski, Bubenzer, & West, 1982*), perceived meaningfulness of life (*Crandall et al,1984; Mozdzierz,1986)* and marital adjustment (*Markowski & Greenwood, 1984)*, and less hopelessness (*Miller, Denton, & Tobacyk 1986)* and depression. Social interest is theorized as "a feeling of community, an orientation to live cooperatively with others, and a lifestyle that values the common good above one's own interests and desires" (Guzick, Dorman, Groff, Altermatt, & Forsyth, 2004; p. 362). It has also been conceptualized as an active interest in the welfare of humankind, and identification and empathy with others (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

The Indian literature, too, emphasizes on interdependence and interrelatedness of man and society. Indian concept of *dharma*, includes all factors such as altruism, social integration and social acceptance that are considered the cornerstone of mental health and of harmonious living in the society. Kakar (1979) says, "In its social implication, *dharma* is an inherent force in human being which holds the individual and society together, or going one step further, the force which makes 'individual and society hold each other together'"(p. 6). According to Sudil (2005) *dharma* is a mode of life and attitude by which humankind and society move towards that wholesome growth and development, which enable them to reach the goal of human existence. Transgression of *dharma* is presumed to be the root cause of all social unrest and conflicts. The message of the Bhagavad Gita is that the creation struggling under the bondage of *adharma* longs for liberation through the re-establishment of *dharma* in the universe (Raghavchar, 1969). The Bhagavad Gita teaches: "The learned should act without any attachment to their work, with the desire 'to maintain the world order' (*lokasamgraham*, BG. 3.25). The process of establishing *dharma* has to be in terms of social, religious, political, ethical and historical action. The establishment of *dharma* is seen as the promotion of a just society where everyone experiences harmony, peace, liberation, and freedom. The social elements of *dharma* have been highlighted by Vatsyayana as:

- satya (truthfulness)
- dana (charity)
- daya (compassion)
- paritrana (succour of the distressed)
- paricarana (rendering detached service)
- pariyavachana (gentle talk)
- hitavachana (talking with good intention)
- aspriha (detachment) and
- sraddha (faith and devotion)

-(Buitenen, 1988).

Dharma as a social concept also focuses on political society and leadership (Sudil, 2005). The king or ruler should rule society, not according to his will, but according to the prescriptions of *raja-dharma*. *Dharma* is the source of all rights and duties, affecting both the ruler and the subjects. The ruler was known as *dharma pala*, the protector of *dharma*. In this way, *dharma* created a social solidarity between the ruler, the officials and the people. *Dharma*, in its true sense, remains second most important tenet of holistic living, without which one may face disconnect and isolation from the society. Indian idea that god resides in every man is thought as the solution of all modern day problems by Aerts et al. (1994). This very idea makes the whole humanity equal and just.

Individual and Nature

Humans are part of nature, not distinct or separate from it. Bookchin (2001) points out that within an ecosystem, there is no specie more important than another; instead relationships are mutualistic and interrelated. This interdependence and lack of hierarchy in nature provides a blueprint for a non-hierarchical human society. World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (2010) correctly proclaims "nature is not just a set of resources that can be exploited, modified, altered, privatized, commercialized and transformed without any consequences. Earth is the only home we have. The Earth does not belong to us; we belong to the Earth." Our ecosystem is not merely necessary for survival but also for a happy living.

At the sixty-fifth session of the UN General Assembly, in 2010, the UN Secretary-General submitted a report on how sustainable development approaches and initiatives have allowed communities to reconnect with the Earth. The report recognized that, "Around the world, ancient civilizations have a rich history of understanding the symbiotic connection between human beings and nature" (UN, 2010, para 17). It was a session devoted to 'Sustainable development: Harmony with Nature.' On the Indian tradition it noted, "The Vedic philosophy of India has always emphasized the human connection with nature. The

Mahabharata, Ramayana, Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Puranas and Smriti contain some of the earliest messages on ecological balance and the need for people's ethical treatment of nature. They emphasize harmony with nature and recognize that all natural elements hold divinity" (UN, 2010, para 21).

The Vedic traditions of Hinduism offer imagery that attests to the power of the natural world. Scholars of the Vedas have identified various texts and rituals that extol the earth (*bhu*), the atmosphere (*Bhuvah*), and sky (*sva*), as well as the goddess associated with the earth (*Prthvi*), and the gods associated with water, fire and heat (*Agni*) and wind (*Vayu*) (Razak and Sansui, 2010). The concept that the Earth is the supporter of all life and that human action should be careful not to destroy the balance is also a strong theme running through the Vedas. In the Atharva Veda, for instance, a hymn goes, "May that Mother Earth, like a Cosmic Cow, give us the thousand fold prosperity without any hesitation, without being outraged by our destructive actions."

Kautilya, the author of Arthshastra, entrusted the task of protecting forests and other natural resources with the king. He prescribed that appropriate plants should be grown to protect dry lands and pasturelands should be properly protected. Kautilya takes into consideration all aspects necessary for perfect harmony in dwelling places of the citizens. The king should protect different types of forests, water reservoirs and mines. Arthashastra (Kangle, 1986) says: "The king should protect the product-forests, elephant-forests, irrigation works and mines that were made in ancient times and should start new ones." Similarly in the Charak Samhita, destruction of forests is taken as destruction of the state, and reforestation an act of rebuilding the state and advancing its welfare. Protection of animals is considered a sacred duty.

Indian culture demands respect to nature for holistic living, irrespective of the era we are living. Contemporary psychosocial research confirms importance of nature for happy living. Humans need nature for psychological, emotional and spiritual needs (Frumkin, 2001; Wilson, 2001). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (1998) identifies environmental well-being as one of the seven key dimensions of well-being within holistic life style. Even seeing nature is considered important to people and is an effective means of relieving stress and improving well-being (Lewis, 1996).

Holistic Living means Harmony of Self with Society and Nature

We have seen that individuals, society and nature interact strongly. There is a three-way relationship among the individual, society, and the physical world. Indian culture emphasizes on the harmony among them. The relationship between humanity and nature often impacts on people-to-people relations and the relationship between individuals and

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the society. Man, society and nature interact in such a way that, as society develops, man tends to become less dependent on nature directly, while indirectly his dependence grows. If environment is seriously damaged, people's living conditions will worsen, and economic growth will outstrip the supply of resources and energy. Under such circumstances, social harmony is difficult to achieve.

Holistic living in this context will refer to "*all people living together peacefully without exploitation of one person by another, each able to reach his or her full human potential, in a society in which everyone has their basic material and nonmaterial needs satisfied, feels secure, safe, happy, and fulfilled as human being*"(Magdoff, 2012). In addition, the concept also implies harmony between people, the environment, and the other species we share the planet with. Each person need fully to understand, and act in such ways that indicate, that his well-being is embedded in nature and his social relations. They are his natural as well as conscious resources.

There is general erosion of ethics and values due to global individualization. To protect ourselves from such alienation, we need to become caring society in which a humanitarian spirit prevails over excessively materialistic values. We need to revive our spiritual, environmentally friendly culture and denounce materialism. This will provide a harmonious society with a favourable ethical climate. To meet these challenges and to save the humanity from further destruction we have to adopt our ancient way of balancing *kama*, *artha*, and *dharma*, i.e., work and earn but in lawful, socially beneficial way. Through a culture of *ahimsa*, *aparigrah* (non-possession), compassion, forgiveness, friendship, tolerance and equality, we can live peacefully and happily.

Indian tradition of holistic living in such circumstances seems to be as relevant today as was in *vedic* period. It calls for developing an integrated personality with a balance of body-mind-spirit, and a positive relationship with society and nature. The health of the body is of fundamental importance in life. The Swiss-born physician, Paracelsus, has very correctly said, "Health isn't everything, but without health everything is nothing." Yoga is one of the key Indian techniques for developing an integrated personality. Yoga in its original sense fulfills all requirements of mind-body-spirit. *Yama-niyama* of yoga practice makes enables one to have self-control over worldly desires, and other steps gradually lead him to bliss. Following principles of *karma* and *dharma,* and practicing yoga in daily life can make our life happy and peaceful journey.

Our conditions can be transformed by acting through *dharma* awareness. The world cannot be interpreted in terms of deterministic horizontal relationships. *Karmas* with *dharma* can change our future. *Swadharma* is to hold on to one's own path of action. *Sreyan sva-dharmo viguna*h (follow your own *dharma*, Gita III 35). Evil is essentially the refusal to move

toward the future. The ultimate meaning of *karma* must be identified with interconnectedness and interdependence. Everything is a network of multidimensional relationships that needs balancing and nurturing.

To summarize, a harmonious living is adoption of healthy self-caring, socially beneficial, yet simple eco-friendly life style through:

1) Self-regulation (*swadharma*) in health, consumption and relationships.
2) Contentment and self-sufficiency through few critical life needs: तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा, meaning enjoy things for renunciation; सन्तोषः परमो लाभ, meaning contentment is highest gain; संतोषातनुत्तमस्सुखलाभ, meaning as the result of contentment, one gains supreme happiness (Yoga Sutra 2.42).
3) Nurturing social relations and promote social equality in a sense of वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्.
4) Application of ecological approaches to day-to-day living.

And this we can start from this moment, because ''गते शोको न कर्तव्यो भविष्यं नैव चिंतयेत् । वर्तमानेन कालेन वर्तयंति विचक्षणा'', meaning "*One should not regret the past. One should not worry about the future. Wise men act by the present time*", and ''यत्क्रतुर्भवति तत्कर्म कुरुते । यत्कर्म कुरुते तदभिसंपद्यते'' meaning "*As your will is, so is your deed. As your deed is, so is your destiny.*"

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