

XV. Modern Thought and the First Three Chakras of Indian Psychology

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According to Indian Psychology chakras are energy centers of the subtle mental body. They are composed of subtle matter that possesses the primary qualities of both thought and extension. The seven fundamental chakras are the centers of psychic energy in the subtle body, which make contact with the physical body. They control the physical body and determine the way a person thinks, feels and acts. Subtle energy flows through the nerves (nadis) of the subtle body, which are conjoined with the physical nerves. From the anatomical standpoint the chakras correspond to the nerve junctions located on the cerebra-spinal axis, which are responsible for various physiological and psychological functions. Each of the seven chakras is located in the subtle body near the point where the physical nerves come together, to form the important centers of the nervous system. While the physical nerve plexus are located outside of the spinal aperture, the chakras are located within the inner channel of the spinal cord. The chakras were identified with the various plexuses by Major B. D. Basu of the Indian Medical service in 1889. There are thousands of chakras in the human body, which reduce to thirty important chakras and seven primary ones. They exist only in a living body and not in a corpse, since the subtle body departs from the physical body at the moment of death. All mental and physiological disorders have an organic basis in subtle matter and are caused by an under or over vibration of subtle energy.¹

For Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) all types of psychic energy are transformations of sexual energy. Psychic energy is quantifiable, is capable of accumulation and discharge, can be fused with another type of psychic energy, and in a closed system it adheres to the

principle of the conservation of energy.² Carl Jung (1875-1961) stressed that psychic energy: possesses quantity and mass, can be transformed from one type of psychic energy to another, and can be converted into physical energy. A quantum of energy is equal to the number of constellations, frequency and intensity of the reaction, and the intensity of the effect. Psychic energy is the dynamic phenomena of the psyche working through the forces or states of instinct, willing, desiring, attention, and the capacity for work. Sexuality is a variant of a more primal, undifferentiated form of psychic energy or life force. Each type of drive is a specific type of energy. Libido is the neutral life energy of the human psyche “which is able to communicate itself to any field of activity whatsoever, be it power, hunger, hatred, sexuality, or religion, without ever being a specific instinct.”³ Libido is the driving force that sustains all human endeavors, from the lowest biological to the highest spiritual level. It may be directed toward external objects or toward the self. In a closed system it follows the principle of the conservation of psychic energy and entropy.⁴

Muladhara Behavioral Patterns

According to a consensus of authors, the muladhara which is the first chakra is located in the subtle body at the base of the spinal column. It is midway between the anus and the genitals, and is associated with the sacro-coccygeal plexuses according to many, and the pelvic plexus according to a few. Muladhara consciousness is tamasic in nature, and is related to solid matter, the sense of smell and to the physical body (annamaya-kosha, sthula sharira), the sheath formed and nurtured by food.⁵

In its positive aspect, muladhara consciousness is concerned with the self-preservation and survival of the physical body, meeting physiological needs like hunger and thirst, and coping with life threatening situations. Without an innate desire to preserve the physical body, people would be short lived. According to the ethical

system of Aristotle the ideal is the golden means, and the two primary vices are excess and deficiency. Negatively, if the rudimentary instinct for survival is excessive and dominates over all other motivations, the person may be obsessed with a fear of dying and be dominated by a number of similar phobias. When faced with a perilous situation the person is apt to be overcome with fear and flee from the difficulty.⁶

If the desire for self-preservation is deficient, it is apt to result in what Sigmund Freud called the death instinct (Thanatos). Driven by this instinct the person seeks to destroy, differentiate, separate and dissolve things, resulting in a regression to the inorganic level of existence. Thanatos takes on two basic forms, internal self-destruction against oneself and external destructiveness in opposition to others. Regressive aspects of the death instinct are characterized by seeking less differentiated and less organized forms of life terminating at a zero energy level. It is a basic principle of inertia that strives to destroy and undo things, with the final outcome being reached in the unconscious inorganic state. The person seeks to destroy their vital unities and return to a lifeless, disordered, disintegrated, immobile, incoherent and powerless state.⁷ Freud found support for the death instinct in Fechner's (1801-87) principle of constancy, which describes the reduction of tension to the lowest possible level in order to alleviate discomfort. According to Freud's interpretation of Fechner's principle, mental activity is employed to reduce tension induced by instinctual or external excitation, to a constant low level (the pleasure principle) or to the zero level (the death instinct).⁸ A retrogressive tendency to return to an original inorganic state is caused by the repetition compulsion. It is a return to an earlier and more primitive state, a yearning for the past, which serves as a regulating mechanism that reduces anxiety.⁹ Freud also mentioned E. Hering, who pointed out that in a living substance, two vital processes are continually in conflict with each other. One seeks to construct and assimilate and the other to destroy and dissimulate. The former aspires to create

greater unities, to prolong and develop life, and the latter is expressed through destructive and aggressive behavior.¹⁰ Similarly, in the physical and chemical metabolic process, anabolism builds tissue through resynthesis while catabolism breaks the tissue down undergoing degradation. Will to die represents a retreat from reality, an escape mechanism that surfaces when a person is confronted with an unpleasant or a threatening situation. It is an irrational pattern of psycho-behavioral responses undertaken in an attempt to avoid or lessen anxiety, frustration and stress in order to maintain equanimity and self-respect.

(We cannot say Wilber said the following exactly) Ken Wilber articulated that the death instinct is the impulse to involve, to retrogress to a lower tier on the evolutionary scheme and finally to the level of insentient matter. Being self-destructive it is the tamasic will to inertia, unconsciousness, impotence, disintegration, disorder, undifferentiation, immobility, incoherence, indecision and oblivion. These characteristics are found in drug addiction, alcoholism, suicide, severe depression and psychoses. They seek to escape from the daily struggles of life, from despair, guilt, anxiety and pain; to depart from the conscious level; and to enter into the subconsciousness state at the instinctive level. Vertical life is ascent to higher and wider integration; horizontal life refers to the preservation of what has already been achieved; and vertical death is a regression to lower levels of consciousness and too self-dissolution. This is a process of negative transformation; what had previously been created is now destroyed. This process may be an attempt to return to the blissful ignorance of the infant state, where the self of the child, and the physical environment are not distinguished. Otto Rank (1884-1939) considered the desire to regress to the original inanimate life, as a desire to return to the serenity and security of the womb.¹¹

Svadhithana Behavioral Patterns

The svadhisthana chakra is located in the subtle body at the root of the genitals and is associated with the endocrine gland known as the gonads. According to various authors it is connected with the sacral, prostatic or the hypogastric plexus. It is related to liquid matter and the sense of taste and is a combination of the gunas of tamas and rajas. This level of consciousness is identified with the vital body (pranamaya-kosha), which controls the life forces found in plants, animals and humans.¹²

Svadhisthana consciousness is identified with kama, which is the desire to experience emotions derived from sensual pleasure. There is a dominance of the pleasure principle characterized by a desire for delicious food, aesthetic enjoyments, sexual objects and physical comfort. A great deal of time and money is spent in pursuing material objects in order to gain sensory gratification. For many people, these pleasures bring happiness and make life worth living. As a biological instinct this urge also serves the necessary function of stimulating reproduction, which is necessary for the survival of the species.¹³

Freud observed that a young child between the ages of three and five or six passes through the phallic stage, where they show an interest in pleasurable feelings that are associated with the genitals. Genitals become the primary erogenous zone during the phallic stage of psychosexual development. At his stage there is a narcissistic self-centered gratification involving only a single person. After puberty the adolescent passes through

the genital stage characterized by sexual preoccupation. Later When the desire is fully integrated, psychosexual urges are expressed in activity with the opposite sex hopefully developing into altruism, friendship and mature levels of loving.¹⁴

Freud considered the two basic components of the life instinct to be self-preservation which is related to the reality principle and the sex drive that is associated with the pleasure principle. Its other functions include; the perpetuation of the species, pursuit of pleasure, love of self and others, and psychological and social unity. The libido, the sexual energy, is without restraint and operates on the bases of the pleasure-pain principle, since it strives for the immediate gratification of internal sensual needs. Its goal is to gain pleasure and to avoid pain. Primary process is an unconscious mental activity governed by the pleasure principle, dominated by instinctual drives and consists primarily of wishes and fantasies. In the primary process, psychic energy is free or mobile and flows unhindered toward discharge in the quickest and most direct fashion. The id is the amoral, unconscious, irrational reservoir of sexual energy, the seat of all instincts, which promote primitive habit formations. It is controlled by pleasure principle, striving to achieve satisfaction of primitive and irrational instinctual needs.¹⁵

In its negative manifestation an excessive interest in sensual enjoyment, can lead to a hedonistic life and an over identity with the material body. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) emphasized that if sensual desires are excessive, they may gain control over the rational aspects of the personality. "The sexual impulse is therefore the most complete manifestation of the will-to-live," which is responsible for the perpetuation of the species.¹⁶ The universal will to live unfolds as animal instincts and human desires, cravings, passions and egoism. Consequently, human behavior is not determined by conscious acts of choice or by reason, but by the internal unconscious forces of human desires. People justify their actions by rationalizing and are often unaware of their real motives, since their intellect is under the control of the human desires.¹⁷ A

deficiency of sensual attractions can lead to a feeling of aversion for material objects. These people may remain fixated at the muladhara level and experience depression, boredom and cynicism. People suffering from anhedonia are unable to experience pleasure from sensual objects or the normal enjoyments of life.¹⁸

Manipura Behavioral Patterns

The manipura is located in the subtle body near the naval and is related to the adrenal gland. Various writers have associated it with the solar, lumbar, and the epigastric plexuses. It is identified with luminous matter and energy and the sense of sight. The manipura corresponds with the sheath of the mind (manomaya-kosha), which is endowed with the active rajasic determinate faculty of will, desires and power characteristic of animals and humans. It may also be related to the highest aspect of the subtle body, the intellectual sheath (vijnanamaya-kosha), which is found only in humans. To function properly, the subtle body requires the mental food of ideas, culture and morality.¹⁹

As an unfoldment of third center consciousness there is a will to prana, the innate desire to express various types of energy. Prana is objectified through practical, intellectual, aesthetic, mystical, social, humanitarian, athletic, heroic and other forms of activity. It is expressed through the will, intellect, emotion and action. Self-respect, wealth, power, honor and popularity are some of its goals.²⁰ It includes artha which is the economic life goal of striving for wealth and material prosperity. Though the will to prana or power is primarily rajasic in nature, it may be expressed tamasicly as cruelty or self-destruction; rajasicly as acquisitiveness, ambition, physical strength, heroism; or sattvicly as spirituality, goodness, altruism, higher knowledge, and love.

Manipura desires are psychological and social rather than physiological and are acquired during the course of the life process. They include some of the needs listed by Karen Horney (1885-

1952) that are the striving for: power, affection, approval, prestige, personal admiration, achievement, self-sufficiency and independence. Henry Murray's (1854-1934) list of secondary needs also falls into this class. They consist of the drives to attain achievement, recognition, dominance, aggression, exhibition, construction, and affiliation. There is also a need for knowledge, happiness, self-esteem, acquisition, and to be a moral person.²¹

According to Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), the primary drive, is not the will to live, but to discharge force and to manifest power. Will to power goes far beyond self-perpetuation, since "a living thing wants above all to discharge its force: 'preservation' is only a consequence of this."²² "It is possible to trace all its drives to the will to power; likewise all functions of organic life to this one source."²³ People through the expression of their will, seek to dominate and control others and to grow in size and strength. Both we and the world are nothing but the will to power, the fundamental underlying drive of which all other drives are special cases. Always striving for a greater magnitude of power, it is the ultimate, all-inclusive principle that embodies the whole of reality, as a dynamic force in a process of continual becoming. Organic life is more complex and diverse and has a greater aptitude to assimilate and control than the inorganic, yet both are objectifications of the same will to power. It is more than a psychological process, because it is metaphysically the immanent principle, the innermost essence of a man's being and the world. Since will and power constitute an indivisible unity, it is the essential nature of power itself, not separate from it. There is no distinction between actor and action; we are the will to power and its effects. Will to power is the self-affirmation of a universal driving dynamics that all life processes. The sole underlying cause of all human activity and beliefs, is the inner dispositional drive for power. People differ in behavior, beliefs and values, because they differ in the quantity and quality of the internal power they possess. The force of life-affirmation seeks to control and manipulate the environment, to experience competency

and effectiveness as an end in-itself.²⁴ There are three components of the will to power: 1) resistance: the capacity to preserve oneself from internal disintegration or external control; 2) self-mastery: to transform oneself and develop skill and competency in performing life activities and 3) dominance: to extend one's influence over others. All forms of activity produce pleasure, because they bring about a feeling of overcoming obstacles, of mastery and of enhanced power. "The innermost essence of being is will to power . . . pleasure is every increase of power, displeasure every feeling of not being able to resist or dominate."²⁵ A person's worth is determined by the quantity and quality of power that they unfold, and the strength of their will. In great men a large amount of force and power is accumulated resulting in the ability to produce intended effects and to accomplish difficult tasks. A strong will is unified around a single goal, transforms stimuli by assimilating them, seeks risks and is aggressive.²⁶

Freud taught that reality principle operates to achieve instinctual satisfaction, by regulating behavior in accordance with the demands of the external world. Behavior is acquired and learned, and immediate gratification is denied or postponed in order to gain pleasure or avoid pain in the future. In the secondary process psychic energy is bound, checked and controlled in its movement toward discharge. Satisfaction is postponed in accord with the conditions imposed by the external world, seeking out the optimum path to attain its goal. Reasoning, logic and problem-solving are used in an adaptive manner, which is characteristic of the preconscious and conscious mind rather than the unconscious mind.²⁷

Alfred Adler (1870-1937) asserted that the principle psychological motive force is not Freud's libido, but the universal striving for superiority, which results from overcompensating for a feeling of inferiority developed in childhood. Adler differed from Nietzsche in believing that striving for superiority is the basic innate drive of human action and the competitive will to power and domination is only one of its manifestations. The need for superiority

is caused by an overcompensation for a feeling of inferiority developed in childhood.²⁸ As a proper life goal, a person should strive to be worthwhile and useful, contributing to the common welfare and taking an interest in other people. When social interest is developed there is a marked improvement in intelligence, self-respect, courage, optimism, happiness and a feeling of purpose. Neurotics, people who commit suicide and social misfits, are often self-centered and generally lack a social interest. Altruistic social interest should be expanded beyond immediate friends and the family, to all of humanity. The true aspirations of a person should be to: work for the welfare of others; develop social relationships with friends and relatives; feel love for others; and to follow moral-ethical practices.²⁹

In the manipura's negative excessive form, narcissism may develop where there is a feeling of excessive pride and self-importance, self-absorption, and the exploitation of other people. Schopenhauer affirmed that the will to power motivates a person to acquire or control as much as possible and to annihilate everything that conflicts with their egocentric personal interest. "He therefore seeks only his own well-being and is completely indifferent to that of all others."³⁰ The will is destructive; one will is in conflict with another, each attempting to claim its own superiority at the cost of the other. A destructive person affirms the will to live and power in himself, but denies it in others. He uses others to benefit his own will and tries to destroy them if they oppose his aspirations.³¹ Unfortunately, Friedrich Nietzsche formulation of the will to power is far too restrictive, since he concentrates primarily on its aggressive and antagonistic manifestations. He taught that the superman is the ideal person, who attains his aims not through self-denial, but by affirming life by asserting the will to power. The superman is a man of self-mastery who is aggressive, self-assertive and ego centered, a conqueror who strives to overcome all obstacles. His primary motivation is to overpower and control others and thereby to grow in size and strength. The force of life-affirmation which gives

meaning to human existence, seeks to control and manipulate the environment, allowing a person to experience competency and effectiveness as an end in-itself.³²

People who are deficient in manipura characteristics are apt to be fixated at the muladhara level being lethargic, or in the svadhisthana region being overly sensual in nature. There is a human tendency to project the opposite behavioral characteristics resulting in the polarities of existence. For example, first chakra consciousness actualizes as both a life and death drive, and second chakra consciousness both as attraction and aversion to sense objects. When consciousness is expressed through the third chakra it can objectify as optimism or pessimism, success or failure, dominance or submission, and superiority or inferiority. Some of these polarities are discussed by Alfred Adler and Erik Erikson (1902-94).³³ The second member of the polarity is often a reaction to the stress and frustration of not being able to attain these goals. There may be a defense reaction of retreatism, whereby the individual rejects the culturally defined goals of success and the institutionalized means of attaining them. Schopenhauer provides an example of the pessimism that can develop when the goals of the will to power are not attained. For him, human life is a meaningless struggle for existence. The exercise of power results in an unceasing activity of the will, which is never satisfied, and is incapable of attaining final satisfaction.³⁴

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