

The Dynamic Unity of the Opposites: Haridas Chaudhuri's Integral Method and Higher Education

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Abstract: This article focuses on Haridas Chaudhuri's methodological principle known as *Integral Dialectics* and its related principle of the *dynamic unity of the opposites*, as an essential aspect of his unique model of integral education. Integral Dialectics is a methodological principle which is informed by the integral ontological principle asserting that human psyche and cosmological principles on the whole are interrelated and interdependent, and that holistic knowledge of reality presupposes a holistic and integrated psyche. Integral dialectics is a process of reconciliation of what appears to the mind as polarized conceptual opposites and engaging the totality of human experience, the whole spectrum of human consciousness, and educating the whole person beyond the dualistic rational methods of Western education.

Key Words: Haridas Chaudhuri; Integral Education; Integral Dialectics; Integral Philosophy.

Soon after Haridas Chaudhuri's death in 1975, members of the Cultural Integration Fellowship, the parent organization of CIIS, along with faculty and staff of the California Institute of Asian Studies (as CIIS was known then) edited a collection of essays that draws upon Dr. Chaudhuri's many recorded lectures. The collection, entitled *The Evolution of Integral Consciousness* (Chaudhuri, 1977), reflects the broad range of Dr. Chaudhuri's scholarship: it includes chapters on several academic disciplines including education, history, philosophy, psychology, and science. I will focus my attention on a chapter entitled "Methodology" because in it, Chaudhuri discusses his unique method and dialectic and how they inform his vision for, and design of an integral education. He explains in detail how the Indic principle of "the dynamic unity of the opposites," a concept contrary to Western logic, is an essential part of his unique model of integral education.

The chapter begins with Chaudhuri's expansive vision of integral education—an education inspired by Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga; an education rooted in the notion of an integral universe; and an education developed without precedent in the United States. Haridas

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Chaudhuri's integral education grew out of his deeply held practice of integral Yoga, as he claims:

Yoga ... literally means unity and control. It signifies the union of man with God, of the individual with the universal reality, of each with ALL of existence... But Yoga also means control, that is to say, appropriate self discipline. [Yoga] does not stand for any rigidly fixed rule, to which all should conform. ...The important thing is that every individual should have the opportunity of growing from the root of his own being, following the bent of his own nature, along the lines indicated by his own physical make-up towards the full flowering of his individuality as a unique creative centre of the cosmic whole. (Chaudhuri, 1965, pp. 21-22)

Dr. Chaudhuri integrates this framework into his philosophy of education. He states:

The more we understand the essential structure of the universe as a whole, the more we gain insight into the structure of man. The obverse is also true. The more we understand the essential structure of man, the more we gain insight into the unfathomable mystery of Being. (Chaudhuri, 1977, p.85)

Dr. Chaudhuri maintains that in the complexity of human nature, like in the complexity of the universe, we will discover the "dynamic unity of all opposites" (p. 85). He notes that the "The path leading to this insight [the dynamic unity of the opposites] may be described as integral thinking" (p. 85). For Dr. Chaudhuri, "The method of integral thinking represents a dynamic integration of the scientific, phenomenological and dialectical methods of the West and the self-analytical, psycho-integrative, non-dual value disciplines of the East" (P. 85). In this one comprehensive statement, he provides us with as concise a summary of his concept of integral education as any he or anyone has written.

In Chaudhuri's view, "Our knowledge and civilization began with the unity of all disciplines ... and that [original discipline of unity] was Philosophy" (p. 91). He points out that as scholars studied and created an increasingly wider range of knowledge, they greatly expanded the number and role of disciplines and sub-disciplines. He concludes that the growth of the disciplines has made us realize that we need to reduce their number through synthesis. He suggests: "Now again [as in the past] we are feeling the need for harmonizing all the fragments of knowledge into a comprehensive synthesis, which would be a very sophisticated kind of unity" (Chaudhuri, 1977, p. 91).

However, while designing an education that draws many disciplines together and offers a holistic view of knowledge, Chaudhuri recognizes that the disciplines are valuable if they are not excessive in number. He acknowledges that some academic disciplines, for example philosophy, history, and psychology, are needed to for us to have a substantial understanding of the whole of knowledge. He writes:

All disciplines of human knowledge are in essence organized systems of ideas or verbal propositions. They represent abstractions of thought from the concrete fullness of the real,

designed to fulfill some definite goal or purpose of life—whether intellectual, ethical, religious or political. (Chaudhuri, 1977, p.87)

Chaudhuri recognizes that higher education has moved beyond the point where one method can be applied effectively to all areas of human experience and to all disciplines, because each area and discipline requires its own method. Yet, he insists that no matter how well advanced an area or a discipline may be, it presents a limited and fragmented view of the whole. He maintains that no ideological scheme or discipline could mine “the multidimensional fullness of the universe” (p. 87). He contends:

There are some universal truths which from the standpoint of every discipline of knowledge can be conceptualized, can be expressed in terms of that particular discipline. The same truth can be translated into every discipline of knowledge... (Chaudhuri, 1977, pp. 90-91)

Thus, even though the disciplines have been separated, Chaudhuri acknowledges that they continue to remain interrelated. For example, he notes “...in the study of psychology, the behavior pattern of a human being dynamics can hardly be fully understood without reference to the conscious and unconscious motivation dynamics of man acting as an individual or as a group” (Chaudhuri, 1977, p.86).

Chaudhuri advances the idea that “Since a thought system is then essentially a map, to be distinguished from the territory of the real, it is unthinking confusion to equate it with reality itself” (p. 87). Here he draws on the core principle of the General Semantics Movement: “The map is not the territory.” In the *Epilogue to The Evolution of Integral Consciousness*, Dr. Chaudhuri (1977) cites the work of the founder of this movement, Alfred Korzybski (1879-1950) who in 1933 published a very influential book, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* in which, as the title suggests, he challenged Aristotelian logic and the foundations of Western thinking. Given the impact of this book (Korzybski, 1933) on Haridas Chaudhuri’s approach to knowledge, I will comment on it.

I was delighted to see this reference because early in my studies of linguistics, I was and continue to be impressed by Korzybski and the General Semanticists. Korzybski was born in Poland, educated at Warsaw University of Technology, and migrated to the US. He argued that we are confined by the structures of our language and thought, and we do not have direct access to reality—even though we often think so. We only have abstractions of reality. Typically, we confuse our perceptions (*the maps*) with reality (*the territories*). Moreover, our misperceptions regarding language and thinking mislead us regarding the nature of facts. In his first book, *Manhood of Humanity* (Korzybski, 1921), he explored his notion of the human being as the “time binder” species capable of passing on knowledge to future generations of the species; and in doing so, changing culture. Korzybski’s work became the basis for the General Semantics Movement, and following the publication of *Science and Sanity* (Korzybski, 1933) he lectured widely at universities throughout the US.

Korzybski and the General Semanticists taught a variety of techniques to help people realize how they misunderstand “facts” and confuse their perceptions with reality. For example, he

taught a technique he referred to as *indexing* in which we assign each individual a number in order to avoid generalizations about people (e.g. Mary 1, John 2, etc) and *dating* in which we identify each person by a date to remind us that people change from moment to moment. Korzybski was well received by many of Haridas Chaudhuri's contemporaries including Isaac Asimov, Gregory Bateson, William Burroughs, Kenneth Burke, Buckminster Fuller, Samuel I. Hayakawa, Robert A. Heinlein, Alvin Toffler, Alan Watts, and Benjamin Lee Whorf.

Chaudhuri (1977) believed that “the universe is the ground and the comprehensive unity of all thought systems without itself being a determinant system” (P. 87), and that this idea leads to a “non-dogmatic and non-doctrinaire attitude, to a genuine respect for opposite viewpoints and to a synoptic vision of the universe in its integral fullness”. He states that a “closed mind is the worse enemy of balanced growth” (p. 88) and that “True respect for others is born of the vision of truth in others” (p. 88).

He notes:

When we focus our love and devotion on one thing – one particular creed, country or conceptual system – as the only ultimate reality, our psychic energy becomes sharply polarized. Attachment and advocacy are bestowed upon the beloved object, the deity. The impulses of hostility and disgust are forcefully directed against any opposition, the menacing evil. Thus a love/hate syndrome develops within the psyche. It corresponds to the God/devil dichotomy in the outside world. (Chaudhuri, 1977, p. 89)

Chaudhuri connects integral thinking to his notion of the identity of the opposites:

Integral or non-dichotomous thinking rejects both the metaphysical as well as the theological interpretation of dichotomies of thought in absolute terms. Dualities are neither sharp divisions in reality nor irreconcilable opposites of value and disvalue... [but] in essence complementary half truths clamoring for reconciliation in unifying categories of comprehensive thinking. (Chaudhuri, 1977, p. 90)

Chaudhuri explains that connecting ideas with their opposites is important for advancing education because it brings ideas into sharper focus. He recognizes that the identity of the opposites, contrasts with basic assumptions of Western thinking, and that it is antithetical to Aristotle's Law of the *excluded middle* which holds that the opposites cannot allow for a middle, or any possibilities in-between. Chaudhuri strongly maintains that denying a middle ground between contradictories leads us to many dichotomies. He notes:

... in Eastern culture, which has been predominately mystical and spiritual, it is just the opposite – the doctrine of the middle path is emphasized. The discovery of that middle is the secret of synthesizing opposites. Everywhere in actual life we find that opposites meet, and there is always a middle ground which it is our task to discover, because that gives us the secret of balanced growth or integrated self-development. Also, this is the secret to attaining an integral vision of the total truth. (Chaudhuri, 1977, p.90)

The term *Dialectic* has its origins in ancient Greek rhetoric, and it traditionally refers to a method of reasoning and/or discussion. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Kant (1724-1804) used the term to refer to discourse dealing with apparent contradictions, Hegel (1770-1831) referred to *thesis* and *antithesis* merging into *synthesis*, and Karl Marx (1818-1883) referred to the contradictions in politics and history due to material needs. Chaudhuri (1977) defines *integral dialectics* as “a methodological postulate of the integral world view. It is also the most essential technique of integral self-actualization or the full flowering of the human potential (p. 92).

Drawing on Hegel’s work, Chaudhuri (1977) maintains that “The human mind’s quest for truth is the movement of consciousness from the dynamic tension between opposites (thesis and antithesis) toward more and more inclusive synthesis embracing the wholeness of Being” (p. 93). He cites the extensive pioneering work of Hegel and Marx in Western philosophy to develop dialectical idealism and dialectical materialism respectively. However, he concludes that both dialectical methods are limited because they are exclusively grounded in Western rationalism with its bias on dualistic logical thinking.

Chaudhuri (1977) proposes an integral dialectics that includes more than logic as it begins “with the indivisible totality of human experience, with the whole spectrum of human consciousness, of which sensory experience and intuitive apprehension of the whole are two inseparable poles” (pp. 99-100). Alluding to Marx, Chaudhuri (1977), argues that...

No matter to what extent the economic and political structure of a society be drastically overhauled, until and unless there is a real transformation of inner consciousness – a genuine change of heart, as Gandhi would say, exploitation and injustice can hardly be eliminated from society. (p. 95)

Chaudhuri (1977) insists on a more holistic view that “Human problems are of a psychological, ethical, and intellectual nature as well as economic and political” (P. 95).

He advances that “Integral Dialectics focuses on the most fundamental dualities of life and reality –matter and mind, nature and spirit, world and God, the phenomenal and the transcendental, etc.” (p. 95). For him, “The essence of Integral Dialectics consists in reconciling such polarities into the kind of comprehensive unity of which they are seemingly conflicting, but really complementary self-expression” (p. 96). Such ideas are unprecedented in the history of U.S. higher education.

In the final part of the chapter, Chaudhuri offers an illustration of his integral dialectics by focusing on the philosophical search for truth and the spiritual quest of self perfection. In making his case for unifying the opposites, he was very aware of the complexity of the task. It is a very heavy lift in Western higher education; but at the same time, he clearly recognizes that U.S. and European colleges and universities need to integrate ancient Eastern wisdom into their contemporary models of education.

The many advances in knowledge resulting from the empirical method of the 17th century Scientific Movement, the Age of Enlightenment, certainly attests to the value of a dualistic model of education. Nonetheless, the fact that it has dominated higher education to the point that

it has discouraged, if not dismissed, the consideration of any alternative model has limited the capacity of Western higher education. I fully agree with Robert Bellah's (2006) description of the defenders of dualism whom he refers to as *enlightenment fundamentalists*, and his complaint that they have prevented free and open inquiry into the nature of knowledge. Consequently, it has been and continues to be extremely difficult in US higher education for a university to have academic credibility and maintain institutional accreditation while challenging the dualistic educational paradigm of the academy.

We should be grateful to our regional accrediting body, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) for accrediting CIIS for the past 45 years despite CIIS' non-conventional acceptance of non-dualistic ways of knowing. Given the resistance in American higher to non-dualistic studies, it is remarkable that CIIS not only has survived, but that it is thriving with increasing appeal to more and more students. In fact, I am convinced that CIIS succeeds today precisely because it advances a non-dualistic model of education, or what we could refer to as *Post-Enlightenment Higher Education*. CIIS faculty and students consistently indicate that it is our alternative educational model that attracts and retains them. Moreover, our integral model of study and practice as promoted by our faculty, students, and alumni are contributing to an emerging receptivity in the U.S. to *Post-Enlightenment Higher Education*.

Dr. Chaudhuri insightfully saw half a century ago what many are beginning to realize today: namely, that higher education needs to embrace integral thinking and education. He passionately believed that "... only when we shall experience this transition from the dualistic... thinking to the non-dualistic way of seeing everything, can the ideal human society or the global society be founded." (Chaudhuri, 1977, p.82)

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