

# ANALYSIS ON HUMANISTIC APPROACH IN WESTERN PSYCHOLOGY THROUGH ANTHROPOCENTRIC TEACHINGS IN BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY

Dr. W. K. D. Keerthirathne<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Humanistic psychologists who rejected "the second force"; and "the first force" in psychology introduced new approach called "the third force" in early 1960s and believed that both "the second force"; and "the first force" views have strong undercurrents of 'determinism (Hergenthan Henly, 2013). Instead of determinism Humanistic psychologists stressed more subjective factors such as self-image and self-evaluation. Hierarchy of needs, person centered therapy, unconditional positive regard, free will, self concept, self actualization, peak experiences, and fully functioning person are major other ideas and concepts that emerged as a result of humanistic movement. Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, Erik Erikson, Carl Jung, Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Melanie Klein, Harry Stack Sullivan are considered as the psychologists who nourished the first force in psychology. As behaviorism grew out of Ivan Pavlov's work with the conditioned reflex, and laid the foundations for academic psychology in the United States associated with the names of John B. Watson and B.F. Skinner, Abraham Maslow gave behaviorism the name "the second force". Buddhist teachings in *SuttaPitaka* are rich in anthropocentric teachings and the Buddha has also admired human capabilities in profound manner when compared contemporary religious leaders.

## Objective

This paper focuses on conducting an analysis on humanistic theory in western psychology through anthropocentric teachings in Buddhist psychology. And also it is expected to discuss similarities, differences and

---

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer, Pasdunrata National College of Education, Kalutara, Sri Lanka,  
Wkdk1974@yahoo.com

mutual integration that these two traditions have shared over a long period of time.

### **Methodology**

This research is based on primary sources and the secondary sources. Buddhist teachings in *Sutta Pita* have been examined as primary sources while western psychology books, relevant research papers and conference papers have been examined as the secondary sources. This type of research would be benefited by psychologists who direct modern psychology towards more critical and exploratory approach.

### **Discussions and Findings**

Humanistic psychology which emerged in the late 1950s as an answer to the limitations of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory and B.F. Skinner's Behaviorism emphasizes the study of whole person. Not only that, humanistic psychology looks at human behavior through the eyes of the observer, but also through the eyes of the person performing the behavior. To humanistic psychologists, there are five basic principles of humanistic psychology. They are: a) Human beings, as human, supersede the sum of their parts. They cannot be reduced to components, b) Human beings have their existence in a uniquely human context, as well as in a cosmic ecology, c) Human beings are aware and are aware of being aware - i.e., they are conscious. Human consciousness always includes an awareness of oneself in the context of other people, d) Human beings have the ability to make choices and therefore have responsibility, and e) Human beings are intentional, aim at goals, are aware that they cause future events, and seek meaning, value, and creativity.

Humanistic psychologists are less interested in treating psychology as a science as well as they stressed more subjective factors such as self-image, self-evaluation and the frame reference. Instead of determinism, the humanists stress free will, our ability to make voluntary choices (Maslow, 1968). As Maslow believed human needs can be arranged in a hierarchy.

Though, the Buddha did not discuss about human needs in hierarchical order like Maslow, completion of human needs is an essential factor when achieving the goal prescribed by the Buddha (KNI: 1). One who studies the learning process of the ascetic *Gotama* carefully, can see how he has been active in exploration the truth with voluntary choices and self actualization which goes beyond the Maslows needs theory (Maslow, 1968), (MNI: 160). With the enlightenment, the ascetic *Gotama* proved the world that the man is full of capabilities and he is in a position to achieve the expected goal either with or without the teachers guidance (Ibid). Rogers discussion to improve individuals self -concept by placing a constructive environment is also can be related with the above situation which is related with ascetic *Gotamas* effort to attain *Nibbana* (Santrock, 2006). Both the Buddha and humanistic psychologists discuss how free will is important in human progress. Teachings in *Suttas* such as *Kalama* (ANI: 188), *Veemansaka* (MNI: 744), *Mahaparinibbana* (DNII:72), *Attakara* (ANII: 23) and *Dhammapadaplayi* explain the way the Buddha admired free-will and voluntary choices when reaching inner peace and *Nibbana*. The Buddha gave freedom to his disciples to begin and continue any task until they reach the expected outcome. Cognitive psychology and humanistic psychology mainly consider cognitive abilities of human. According to psychologists following the findings of humanistic school, man is not a passive object, but he actively takes part in the learning teaching process. This view is very close to Buddhist educational psychology in which learner centered education is promoted. Buddhist psychology places man in the core of the theory and it is argued that man builds up knowledge by him/herself when he/she is helped by more knowledgeable others. The Buddha believed that the man is not under divine or any other power so success of their worldly and spiritual life should be made by themselves (DNII: 137). Man is unique and goal directed as humanistic psychology discusses. Humanistic psychologists believe that individuals are internally directed and motivated to fulfill their human potential. Though psycho analytics have discussed about instinctive forces humanistic

psychologists rejected those instinctive forces by arguing that they are irrational. The Buddha's view regarding instinctive forces is somewhat different from that of humanistic psychologists. According to Buddhism, there are both internal and external factors which motivate man when fulfilling human potentials. According to Buddhism, human beings seek meanings and provide values to actions they engage consciously. Anthropocentric teachings in Buddhism prove that the Buddha was a great humanistic psychologist and his teachings paved some kind of influence on the development of humanistic psychology which belongs to western traditions. These two traditions have mutual integration in their academic journey.

### **Conclusion**

Humanistic psychologists reject both "the second force"; and "the first force" in psychology since these two traditions have strong undercurrent of 'determinism'. Especially, Humanism rejects the assumptions of the behaviorist perspective which is characterized as deterministic, focused on reinforcement of stimulus-response behavior and heavily dependent on animal research. The psychoanalytic approach was rejected since it was also deterministic, with unconscious irrational and instinctive forces determining human thought and behavior. Humanistic psychologists who criticized "determinism" discussed more subjective factors such as self-image and self-evaluation as main features of humanistic psychology. Roger mainly emphasized how to improve individuals self-concept by placing a warm helpful constructive environment. Maslow discussed the importance of achieving individuals limitless potential. Both the Buddha and humanistic psychologists have shown the importance of free will in human progress. Both accept that human beings have their existence in a uniquely human context. Both concern that human consciousness always includes an awareness of oneself in the context of other people. Both accept that human beings are

intentional, aim at goals, are aware that they cause future events, and seek meaning, value, and creativity.

**Keywords:** Anthropocentric teachings, Buddhist psychology, Humanistic psychology and western psychology

### References

*Dīgha Nikāya* (DN)

*Majjhima Nikāya* (MN)

*Anguttara Nikāya* (AN)

Hergenhahn, B.R. (2005). *An introduction to the history of psychology*, Belmont: Wadsworth

Maslow, A.H. (1968). *Towards a psychology of being*, New York

Sanrock, John. W.(2006). *Educational psychology*, Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt, Ltd

McLeod Saul. (2017). *Psychology*, Retrieved September 9, 2017 from:<https://www.simplypsychology.org>