Pittu D. Laungani

# Understanding Cross-Cultural Psychology

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## Eastern and Western Perspectives

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# Contents

**To my wife Ann**

There are hundreds of wonderful stories in *The Mahabharata*, the great Indian Epic. There is one I believe you will appreciate. It concerns Princess Savitri who is in love with Satyavan, son of an old hermit. She is keen to marry him but the sages and the seers have prophesied that Satyavan is a doomed man, destined to die in a year. She disregards the prophecies and marries Satyavan, who is unaware of the prophecy.

On the dreaded day Savitri accompanies her husband into the woods. While chopping wood with his hatchet, he swoons and calls his wife as he falls. As she supports him she sees in the distance Lord Yama – the God of Death. He has come to collect Satyavan's soul. She pleads with Lord Yama to spare her husband's life. What is written cannot be undone, he says to her and bids her to return home and perform the funeral rites. She refuses and follows him. She is prepared to follow him to the ends of the earth. Yama, pleased with her steadfast devotion, grants her a boon, which restores her husband's life.

Seventeen years ago, the Consultants in the hospital told you that I had but a *few days to survive*. For 17 years you have fought with the Grim Reaper, propped me up, and have kept me alive. I owe these 17 years (and hopefully a few more may follow) of my life to your love and ceaseless efforts.

Pittu

**To Lana Starmac, Roy Moodley, and OISE**

By the time one reaches the ripe old age of eight or nine, reality replaces fantasy. One stops believing in Santa Claus. Not so in my case. Let me explain why. I have never had any connections with Toronto University, other than a friendly encounter with Professor Roy Moodley whom I met at the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Conference in London in 2004.

A month or two later he wrote to me, asking me if he could suggest my name as a nominee for the Lifetime Achievement Award, which the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), Toronto University, offered to distinguished academics from around the world. I thought it was some kind of a joke (or a covert research project) and decided to go along with it, not unduly worried about making a fool of myself.

But I was wrong. A few months later I received a letter from Professor Moodley and Professor Lana Stermac that the University of Toronto, after due consideration by their academic committee, had decided to offer me the award. Who says Santa Claus does not exist!

It gives me great pleasure to dedicate this book to Professor Lana Stermac and Professor Roy Moodley and to OISE, Toronto University, for their kindness and generosity in electing to present me with the Lifetime Achievement Award. I shall cherish fond and endearing memories of my visit to Toronto, their kindness, care, and concern, and the lavish hospitality accorded.

Pittu Laungani
London, England
6 May 2006


**Bahadur Shah 'Zafar' Last Mughal Emperor 1775–1862**

The last descendent of Tamerlane to sit on the throne. The British had conquered almost all of India and in about 1857 had banished Zafar to Burma where he died remembering the motherland to his last breath. The following poem was written by Bahadur Shah Zafar as his epitaph.

**Urdu**

लगता नहीं है जी मेरा उजड़े दयार में
किस की वनी है आलम-ए-ना-पायेदार में ।

कह दो इन हसरतों से कहीं और जा वसें
इतनी जगह कहां है दिल-ए-दारादार में ।

उम्र-ए-दराज़ मांग के लाये थे चार दिन
दो आरज़ू में कट गये, दो इंतज़ार में।

है कितन वदनसीव ज़फ़र दफ़्न के लिये
दो गज़ ज़मीन भी न मिली कू-ए-यार में।

**English translation**

*My heart is not happy,*
*In this barren land*
*Who has ever felt fulfilled*
*In this temporary world*

*Please tell my emotions*
*to go away somewhere else*
*there is not enough room for*
*them in my sad heart*

*I had requested for a long life*
*a life of four days*
*Two were spent in praying*
*and two were spent in waiting*

*How unlucky Zafar is!*
*For his burial*
*he couldn't get even two yards*
*of earth in his beloved country.*

# Foreword: Understanding Cross-Cultural Psychology

Professor Uwe P. Gielen

Why does a Chinese patient complain about her liver when she is trying to cope with a difficult family situation? (For the Chinese, the liver is the traditional seat of anger and the patient may be somatizing her psychological tensions.) Why do some English women and men feel uncomfortable in an Indian railway station? (Nobody is queuing up, and too many locals are invading their invisible but psychologically powerful personal spaces.) What does a Japanese businessman really mean when he says that he 'will try his best'? (He may merely wish to consult with his group to find out how seriously your business proposal should be taken.)

In the olden days one probably would have consulted an anthropologist to solicit scientifically plausible answers to such queries. But during the last 35 years a newcomer has emerged on the map of scientific disciplines ready to entertain these and similar questions: cross-cultural psychology. And my friend, Professor Pittu Laungani, is just the right person to introduce you to this cocky but fascinating scientific interloper.

It may be useful to trace briefly the history of psychology in order to understand better why cross-cultural psychology is so much needed in this age of globalization. The birth of academic psychology is traditionally dated back to 1879 when German scholar, Wilhelm Wundt, established the world's first fully fledged psychological laboratory in Leipzig. Although Wundt's laboratory and his conception of experimental psychology soon exerted a worldwide influence, he did insist that there are two quite distinct strands of psychology: physiological-experimental psychology and *völkerpsychologie* [psychology of peoples]. The latter meant to him a kind of cultural psychology that focuses on language, myth, cultural customs, and the ethos of various peoples.

But alas, whereas Wundt's experimental psychology was instrumental in creating modern academic psychology, his cultural psychology soon sank from view and

left few traces in the world of science. The long-term outcome of this one-sided historical development has been the emergence of a scientific psychology that, while aiming at universal generalizations, in truth incorporates deeply entrenched (though often invisible) Western biases. Our developmental, personality, social, clinical, and counselling psychologies, for instance, are suffused with individualistic assumptions and values that feel natural and right to most liberal Americans and Western Europeans but that would be experienced as odd, off-center, and even immoral by the more collectivistic inhabitants of traditional sub-Saharan African villages. In this context, the Canadian psychiatrist Raymond Prince has described with charming modesty how his earlier attempts in the late 1950s to psychoanalyse African patients or to practise open-ended Rogerian interview methods with them frequently met with failure (Prince, 2004). From a cross-cultural point of view, however, such failures should not occasion surprise since both Freudian psychoanalysis and Rogerian theories of self-actualization are deeply rooted in modern secular and individualistic conceptions of human nature that diverge sharply from traditional African spiritual values, cosmologies, and self-conceptions.

Psychology, it appears, must become a much more *culture-inclusive* science if it is to be of value to those that have been socialized outside the confines of the Western world – and that means the large majority of humankind. As our author makes crystal clear in the following pages, the quest for a more culture-inclusive and culture-comparative psychology readily leads to both scientific and moral questions that can cut deeply. A science can only be valid if its theories and methods are appropriate for the topics and populations under investigation. For the cross-cultural psychologist that means an increased emphasis upon indigenous conceptions of human nature, spirituality, motivation, and human or supernatural causation, new methods suited to the investigation of illiterate and semi-literate populations, a concern for non-verbal, often barely noticeable and cross-culturally confusing signals, a special focus on groups such as immigrants, refugees, bilingual persons, culture-brokers living between several worlds, and many other new issues, topics, and populations that until now have tended to remain at the margins of mainstream psychology. In addition, cross-cultural psychologists have found it necessary to introduce new moral considerations into the field of psychology, in part because comparisons between culture-specific behavioural patterns, thoughts, and feelings are so easily distorted by a researcher's ethnocentric preconceptions and biases. If nothing else the cross-cultural psychologist must be possessed of a special sensitivity for cultural nuances and underlying values that may well be at variance with his or her own preferences and understandings. Also needed is an ability to put one's self into the shoes of others while knowing fully well that such attempts are always constrained by human limitations and non-conscious but pervasive cultural assumptions.

As will soon become clear, Professor Pittu Laungani makes an excellent guide for introducing the non-specialist reader to some of the main perspectives and questions prevailing in the field of cross-cultural psychology. Born into a large well-off family in Bombay (now Mumbai), he immigrated to England as a young man. There he received his doctoral degree under the watchful eyes of his highly productive if controversial mentor, Hans Juergen Eysenck. Subsequently he became a counselling psychologist and expert on death and bereavement as well as a playwright who playfully put Hamlet on the Freudian couch (Laungani, 1997a) and also had him treated by Carl Rogers for his 'psychological problems'. As a playwright, he has a special eye for telling detail, irony, trenchant juxtaposition and dramatic cadence that make his book a joy to read. His bicultural experiences can be felt throughout this volume since they provide him with a special vantage point from which to arrive at cross-cultural comparisons between East and West. And should you wish to gain a more personal perspective on his background and become familiar with his reflections on being an immigrant, consult Dr William West's interview with him in the August 2004 issue of the *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*. This interview can also be found in my web-based book, *Conversations with International Psychologists*.

Let me add a few words about the author's position in the realm of cross-cultural psychology. This form of psychology, although barely 35 years old as an established discipline with a definite identity, can already boast of a considerable variety of theoretical approaches and methodologies. For instance, among the members of the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology, one frequently encounters a positivistic conception of science emphasizing the value of socio-cultural analysis in terms of specific variables and quantifiable responses, together with some attempts to order cultures on various dimensions such as Hofstede's (1991, 2001) 'famous five'. Our author, however, is travelling down a different scientific path by introducing his own conceptual scheme to elucidate his trans-cultural comparisons. Furthermore, he tends to favour detailed or 'thick' comparisons of various cultural patterns, an approach that makes the field come alive to the novice seeking a vivid introduction to some of its intricacies. Throughout, his concern is with the intertwining of cultural meanings and feelings, thoughts and behaviours. His approach is at times closer the qualitative, emic (culture-specific) concerns of cultural psychology than the outlook of traditional, quantitative, etic (universalizing) cross-cultural psychology. This is also evident in his latest book, *Asian Perspectives in Counselling and Psychotherapy* (2004a).

In this context, one may wonder what Wundt would have said about the resurrection of cultural psychology after its long sleep. To be sure, Laungani's cultural psychology is dressed up in much more modern and well-cut clothes than Wundt's old-fashioned, long-winded, and rather poorly dressed version. After all, cultural psychology has come a long way since the early 1900s!

During the last few decades, academic psychologists have increasingly left their ivory towers in order to apply their insights to problems of practical importance. This is certainly true for cross-cultural counselling psychologist such as Laungani, who knows that in today's 'global village' cultural misunderstandings and tensions can have serious and even deadly consequences. Immigrant patients may feel misunderstood by their doctors and nurses and consequently withhold vital information from them, Spanish air traffic controllers encounter difficulties when trying to understand Japanese pilots attempting to provide crucial flight path information in English, Chinese and other Asian immigrant college students frequently outperform European-origin students in the United States, Navaho medicine men and African 'witch doctors' are asked to work together with modern allopathic doctors to better serve indigenous clients, English spectators to a soccer game make monkey noises whenever a black player touches the ball, President Bush is ordering American troops to occupy Iraq in order to fight what he conveniently labels 'evil', and a thousand other, sometimes positive, sometimes troublesome, and sometimes deadly cross-cultural encounters are taking place daily around the globe. We all need to understand such situations better in order to make the world a more liveable place for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren. Professor Laungani's lively book is certain to make a valuable contribution towards achieving this difficult yet fundamental goal!

Uwe P. Gielen
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St Francis College, New York City

# Acknowlegements

It is to my ancestors that I must first offer my worship. To worship one's ancestors is a hallowed custom in most non-Western cultures: India, Malaysia, China, Japan, and several other African, Caribbean, and South American countries. I would be failing in my moral duty were I to ignore my ancestors. As the very term implies, my ancestors are all dead; several have been dead for over three, if not four thousand years. But that is immaterial. In fact I find it easier to converse with the dead than with the living.

The dead have more time at their disposal – in fact an eternity – than the living. Besides, the dead have transcended all their personal, private concerns. But their thoughts, their words, their philosophies, their poetry, their discourses, and their wisdom remain. They await us and are ever ready to guide us and offer us the comfort of their knowledge, their nobility, and their wisdom. It is to the dead that one often turns and from whom one learns – as I have done in the process of writing this book.

Sadly, the contributions of the dead are hardly ever formally acknowledged in print – other than a quote here and a quote there, followed by references at the end of the book. To mention the names of all those wise sages from whose words and ideas I have benefited would involve compiling an extensive bibliography! But that could turn out to be a dangerous ploy; one could easily miss an important name or add an unintended one. What matters is not that one refers to Buddha or Plato, Homer or Herodotus, Socrates or Gandhi, Aristotle or Aquinas, Confucius or Mahavira, Aurelius or Ashoka, Seneca or Cicero, Jesus or Krishna, Dante or Milton, Shakespeare or Sophocles, Mohammad or Moses, Galileo or Newton, Kant or Hume, Freud or William James, Tolstoy or Tagore, Darwin or Russell – what matters is their individual and combined wisdom, which all these and many, many such persons have left behind for posterity. They may not, in the modern sense of the word, be referred to as psychologists; their vision, their concerns, and their depth of understanding transcended the narrow boundaries into which modern disciplines have to a certain extent been straitjacketed. They have left behind a legacy whose value we have still not been able to assess accurately; perhaps we never will.

It is to all those people that I humbly acknowledge my irredeemable debts. They have taught me to think, to feel, and to experience a sense of wonder – even awe. They have taught me to perceive the world from perspectives which I had never dreamed possible. Such people never die. They are always available when one's soul yearns for them.

It is fitting that Seneca in his essay, *On the Shortness of Life,* has the last word on this subject: '*Since nature allows us to enter into a partnership with every age, why not turn from this brief and transient spell of time and give ourselves wholeheartedly to the past, which is limitless and eternal and can be shared with better men than we?'*

It is to the living that I must now turn. I have been extremely fortunate in having friends, colleagues, and associates who each in their own ways have helped me with the writing of the book – clarifying my ideas, separating wheat from chaff, offering invaluable suggestions, restructuring the text where relevant – not a stone has been left unturned. Even Job – the epitome of patience – would have envied them their patience! I feel humbled and over-awed by their care, concern, and their kindness. If from time to time they did resent my intrusions into their own busy lives, they kept their displeasures to themselves. All I can do is to acknowledge with deep gratitude and humility their unstinting help and their best wishes. Although the book is mine, all the following persons have played a dominant role in its production. They are:

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# Introduction

A book with a difference! That is what Michael Carmichael, Editor at Sage Publications, calls it. After reading the first four chapters he was convinced that this book was going to be *very, very* different from several other books in cross-cultural psychology whose publications he has been involved with over the years. Some differences can be embarrassing and painful and are best avoided. Others can be exhilarating and pleasurable – that was how Michael chose to see it.

Convinced that it would 'break new ground', Michael encouraged me to continue to express myself in what he regarded was a free-flowing, personalized, conversational, critical, confrontational style, sprinkled with literary metaphors, quotes, and 'emotionally charged' vignettes.

The question that you might ask here – and you would be well within your rights to do so – is *why* I have elected to steer away from the conventional 'third-person-singular-style' and write an *academic* book in a personalized manner. After all, you will be investing several hours of your busy and precious time, not counting the money you (might) have spent on it, and you would wish to ensure that your time was well spent. An explanation is in order.

In the past it was not uncommon for academics of most disciplines to write in the first person singular. Some of the world's greatest books in philosophy, religion, medicine, cosmology, politics – right from the ancient Greeks and the Romans to the present day – have been written in the first person singular. Imagine the impact those books have had on the growth and development of Western civilization and on the minds of people over the centuries. Consider the writings of Pythagoras, Cicero, Seneca, Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, St Augustine, St Aquinas, Epicures, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Bacon, Locke, Berkeley, Spinoza – to name a few chosen at random – and one is as though mesmerized by the profound wisdom accompanying their brilliantly crafted words. Plato of course went a step further, scaling Olympian heights! He wrote his great philosophical works in the form of plays. Reading Plato is like seeing a great drama unfold before one's eyes. His philosophical works, as we know, are still read and reread and argued over even today. One may question Plato's formulations, as indeed many have done, including Popper (1966); one may take serious issue with his *Republic,* or any of his other plays, but it is difficult not to be moved by the radiant beauty of his words and ideas. Many of the great works in science too during the Enlightenment period were written in the first person singular. Even the most abstract issues – ontological, teleological, cosmological, epistemological – were articulated in the first person singular.

Books are human creations. And like human beings each book has a life of its own. Unlike human birth, the gestation period for creating a book may vary from just a few months, or even a few weeks in some cases (for example, B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two,* Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle)* to several long, untiring years (for example, Tolstoy's *War and Peace;* Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov,* Dante's *Divine Comedy).* But despite one's attachment to one's own creation, there are no guarantees how long one's creation will survive. Sadly, most books die a premature death, on occasions even *before* the author's death, leaving hardly a trace of their very existence. Others may survive for a few years, but it is only the really exceptional ones that outlive their creators by several centuries, even attaining a state of immortality. But regardless of how long a book lives, it is not unusual for their authors to form deep attachments to what they have brought into the world.

Within the field of psychology too, until about the beginning of the twentieth century, and even later, many scholarly works were written in the first person singular. Freud, one of the most prolific writers, wrote most if not all his books in

the first person singular. So did Carl Jung, William James, Charles Darwin, and several other American and European scholars. If for instance, you were to browse through William James's *Varieties of Religious Experiences*, you would be amazed not only by its scholarship but also by its incredibly beautiful, lucid, and powerful style of expression. Admirers of William James, for instance will tell you that he wrote with the dash and panache of a novelist, with dialogues, conversation pieces, reminisces sprinkled lavishly throughout the book. (His brother Henry James, on the other hand, one is told, wrote his novels with the staid dullness of many a modern day cross-cultural psychologist!)

In choosing to write in the first person singular, I have tried to follow in the footsteps of the older and wiser writers of past generations and centuries. And I shall continue to do so. Luckily, we live in an age where I am unlikely to be found guilty of heresy. My editor friend Michael and his associate Claire assure me that neither the dark instruments of torture nor the fiery stake awaits me – a cold shoulder perhaps, a vitriolic review, a hastily withdrawn invitation to an international conference, a rejection slip for a submitted research paper, is the worst I can expect from the academic fraternity after the book's publication. Since there is nothing heretical (or salacious) in my book, I shall of course never enjoy the notoriety of seeing my book go up into flames. It was, you might recall, Girolamo Savonarola, a vicious, infamous Dominican dictator and reformer, during the Medici era in Florence, who ordered the burning of all books that were considered immoral, his actions being referred to as *'The Bonfire of Vanities'*. But you might recall that Savonarola himself met with the same fate, and in so doing achieved the martyrdom that was his due. Divine justice, one might choose to call it.

I have found that the use of the first person singular makes it easier to establish a relationship with the reader. I find it comforting to write in the first person singular, and have always done so. It allows me to express my own observations and ideas, my own feelings and emotions, my doubts and misgivings and my own confusions and conundrums with greater freedom and naturalness. And since I write as I would talk, say to a friend, a colleague, an associate, or a student, I feel that the reader comes to see it in a similar way, too. It is of course possible – even likely – that you may disagree, dislike or take exception to what I say, and *how* I say it. But that is a risk I am not afraid to take.

But old order, as Tennyson pointed out several years ago, changeth, yielding place to new. Not many academics, particularly in the field of psychology, choose to express themselves in the first person singular. From time to time some do use the occasional 'I', but that 'I' is merely a convenient form of expression, not the internal 'I' which William James referred to in his writings.

Let us consider the reasons for such a change. Why have psychologists given up the practice (if not the art) of writing in the first person singular? There is among contemporary psychologists and other social scientists an unvoiced belief more

honoured in its observance than in its breach that rational, objective, and (seemingly) scientific writing needs to be distant, dispassionate, impersonal, and even rather dull. Not surprisingly, most academics working in this field tend to adopt a third-person singular style of writing.

Second, in writing as they do, they are keen to ensure that each important statement is corroborated with relevant empirically derived research references. Empiricism is the god to which Western psychologists in particular pay obeisance. But empiricism has its own shortcomings. If you consider a telephone directory you will note that it is a precise, faultless, empirical product. It is perfect. Yet sadly, other than listing names and addresses of subscribers, it tells us nothing of any great value. (In any case, you'd never be able to locate the number of a person whose name and address you could not remember!)

Third, the psychologists seem reluctant, even rather coy to express their own doubts and dilemmas, their own confusions and uncertainties in their writings. It would seem that they are unwilling to 'stick their neck out' by making unverified and uncorroborated statements. One cannot but feel that the authors of such books choose to hide behind an iron curtain, disseminating their 'sanitized' views in a monotonous voice, booming out of a pre-recorded hi-fi system! This form of writing to me seems soulless. (Given that the concept of 'soul' has been ruthlessly excised from the vocabulary of contemporary Western psychology, it is not inappropriate to refer to their writings as soulless.)

Apart from a brief biographical sketch of the author (and perhaps his or her picture) printed on the dustcover of the book, the reader does not get to see the author as a real person but as a disembodied voice transposed into words and sentences. The reader learns little of the author – in terms of what he or she *really* believes, thinks and feels about the subject matter.

To venture into the area of cross-cultural psychology is like sailing through uncharted oceans. It requires the courage and the single-minded determination and tenacity of Christopher Columbus. One can never predict what one might encounter! Imagine the problems: ethical, social, religious, economic, familial, gender-related, health-related, linguistic, and so on, that one is bound to encounter. Even the hardiest, the most learned and erudite scholar could fall into unseen traps. The field of cross-cultural psychology (including, to a large extent, counselling and psychotherapy) is by no means as clear or as precise as, say, Euclid's geometry, or the theorems of Pythagoras. Theories formulated in the West – like cheap wine – *do not* always travel well into non-Western cultures. In fact, there is hardly a theory in cross-cultural psychology – notwithstanding the grandiose claims of their proponents – that is cast in stone.

Let us take one illustrative example. Western psychologists, in their attempts to distinguish between Western and Eastern cultures in terms of their major value systems, have formulated several bi-polar concepts, such as *individualism* and *collectivism*, the first of which (individualism) applies to Western cultures, and the

latter (collectivism) to Eastern cultures (Triandis, 1994). I am wary of the manner in which Western psychologists use the terms 'individualism' and 'collectivism' when referring to people from Western and Eastern cultures respectively. There are other terms too, such as 'horizontality' and 'verticality', 'closed' and 'open', 'rigid' and 'flexible', which are used. I tend to be sceptical at best and disbelieving at worst at the use of such terms when describing differences between Western and Eastern cultures. The labels are by no means value-free; they are refined versions of old stereotypes: Western societies are individualistic, Western societies are horizontal, western societies are open, Western societies are flexible, Western societies are rational and Western societies are secular. None of these attributes apply to non-Western societies, which are communalistic, vertical, hierarchical, rigid, religious and superstitious.

So much has been written by so many on the ideas surrounding individualism and collectivism that it has virtually been elevated to the status of an inviolable law – almost akin to Einstein's $E=mc^2$. No doubt there is some truth in the above formulations; empirical evidence supports the idea that Westerners to a large measure operate on an individualistic model, and people from Eastern cultures, particularly from the Middle East, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, on a communalistic (but not necessarily on a collectivist) basis in their day-to-day lives. A careful analysis of the philosophical and religious value systems related to the law of karma among the Hindus in India demonstrates very clearly and succinctly the notion of individualism. *Collectivism (or communalism) has no part whatever to play in the law of karma, which is fiercely individualistic in its orientation.* Each individual is responsible for his or her own karma, and is fully aware that whether the fruits of his actions in his next birth turn out to be sweet, sour, or poisonous is directly related to the nature of his or her moral actions. Since the very psyche of Indians (Hindus and Buddhists) is built around the law of karma (and of the Muslims around the will of Allah), it is astonishing, not to say naïve, that Western psychologists should have failed to consider its importance. For Western psychologists to admit to the *individualistic* nature related to the law of karma (of which no Hindu is unaware) would bring into serious question the validity of their formulated theories. Such embarrassments are best ignored. And the theory will remain intact for a while – but only for a while.

At any rate, most if not all theories, particularly in the human sciences, sooner or later come under the hammer. To use consumer jargon, all theories have a 'sell-by date'. Like living organisms, theories are born, survive (or thrive) for a while, and then die, and as Popper (1972), Thomas Kuhn (1970), Lakatos and Musgrave (1970), and several other eminent philosophers of science and epistemologists have pointed out, are replaced by other theories of increasing truth content, but none ever reaching a state of eternal, timeless perfection. Given the impermanent nature of theories, it is incumbent upon the author(s) – *they have an indisputable*

*moral obligation to their readers* – to come clean about the confusions and contradictions surrounding their work lest the readers take away an unwarranted, if not false impression.

To take the reader into one's confidence, to come clean, to spell out the uncertain nature of their formulations, is not easy. Academic reputations are hardly ever built upon premises of doubt; Descartes perhaps with his famous dictum *(cogito ergo sum)* was the only exception. An author might not wish to be seen as a person who doubts, who is uncertain, who is undecided on certain important issues in the book. Would a reader trust an author who doubts? Isn't the author supposed to know best? But these are species arguments, false rationalizations, which protect the author from criticisms and condemnations. And writing in the third person singular keeps the author even further away from the reader. Should the author wish to establish a 'relationship' with the reader, the use of the first person singular is perhaps a good way to forge such a relationship. But the modern convention of writing in the third person singular remains.

The vast majority of books on cross-cultural psychology and other closely related areas, such as cultural diversity, multiculturalism, counselling, psychotherapy, racism, and so on, are written by Westerners from America, Canada, and several other European countries, including England, Germany, France, Holland, Italy, Greece, and a few Eastern European countries. Most of them are written in the third person singular. It is not hard to understand why. Cross-cultural psychology, to a large extent, is the handmaiden of mainstream Western psychology (Boring, 1929/1950; Leahey, 1997). In the later part of the nineteenth century, many psychologists were keen to turn psychology into a scientific discipline. There were exciting discoveries being made in evolutionary theory, physiology, biology, statistics, and neuro-physiology. Psychologists in the West, and particularly in America and in Britain, and to a certain extent in Europe, undertook precise, quantifiable, scientific research, and by so doing, hoped to discover laws of human behaviour, which would have universal applicability and would be used in promoting human welfare (Miller, 1969).

In their eagerness to turn psychology into a science, they espoused the natural science paradigm (Barnes, 1979), and Western psychology came to be defined as the science of human and animal behaviour. They were convinced that the laws of the natural sciences would apply not only to the American people but also to the rest of the world. Concepts such as purpose, consciousness, awareness, mind, self, identity, morality – concepts which give meaning and substance to our lives – were seen as being redundant. They were abandoned. Metaphysical abstractions were thrown overboard. They also discarded fundamental religious, existential, spiritual, and such other human concerns from their scientific vocabularies. These terms were replaced by concepts such as positivism, operationism, empiricism, environmentalism, materialism, secularism, radicalism (a la Skinner) behaviourism, scientism, and a few other-isms, such as humanism, individualism, and cognitivism.

Barring a few exceptions, the general trend was toward constructing sophisticated experimental, psychometric research designs, which were then subjected to complex multivariate statistical analyses. Several eminent psychologists have argued stridently against such a rigid scientific approach and have even shown that the use of the natural science model in psychological research often lacks 'ecological validity'. Their criticisms have fallen on deaf ears. Sigmund Koch, the great American psychologist, remarked that he would 'prefer a defective understanding of something of value over a safely defended description of something trite' (in Robinson, 2001: 420). William James too, refused to accept a psychology that won 'system' at the price of reality itself (Robinson, 2001).

The proper study of human beings and human nature necessitates our having a wider, a more comprehensive view of what one means by humanity and what it means to be human. This involves our accepting the premise that we all live our lives at two inter-related levels – the outer level (that is the overt, behavioural level) and the inner level. In other words, there is the 'outer' self, or the social self, and the 'inner' self, or the private self. To concentrate on only the outer level – the social self – is to study human beings in one dimension, referred to by Herbert Marcuse as the 'one-dimensional man'. It would therefore be essential to take the 'inner' person – the metaphysical and spiritual, the private and non-observable– and the 'outer', or 'observable' person as a whole and *not separate them as appears to be the case at present.* The two – the inner and the outer – enjoy a symbiotic relationship, an issue which we shall discuss in the book.

In historical terms, cross-cultural psychology is a fledgling discipline. Until about the 1950s, Western psychologists, particularly in America and to a lesser extent in other European countries, were 'culturally myopic'. The acquired cultural myopia was due largely to the fact that Western psychologists in general, and American psychologists in particular, chose not to see the vital role that each culture in its own unique way played in the development of the human psyche. Not just on the development of the human psyche, but equally importantly on the economic productivity, political, social, artistic, aesthetic, and moral development of the culture.

The impression that still lingers is that cross-cultural psychology is as is defined by Western psychologists. The world is as *they* see it. They believe too that the rest of the people in the world also see the world as they see it – through Western spectacles. In other words, they propose what Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen (1992) refer to as 'an absolutist position', which assumes that 'human phenomena are basically the same [qualitatively] in all cultures: honesty is honesty, and depression is depression, no matter where one observes it' (p. 1103). That, as many contemporary cultural anthropologists – particularly those espousing a cultural relativistic stance – would point out, is utter nonsense (Shweder, 1991b, 2000; Grondona, 2000).

Until about 20 years ago, cross-cultural psychology in the Third-world countries (which, incidentally were referred to as *Turd World Countries* by some executives

in the United Nations, as Shiva Naipaul pointed out to his brother, V. S. Naipaul) was a misconceived 'clone' of American psychology. But luckily, the situation has begun to change. Indigenous psychologies have made an appearance. Problems that seem relevant to Eastern cultures, problems with which people can identify – problems of poverty, caste, education, literacy, health and illness, family patterns, marriage, dowry, death and after-life, and so on, are taken on board. Even the methods of investigation do not always follow the natural science model, as is the case with American psychology. However, there is a danger in the Eastern cultures wanting to go it alone. The research methods used by Western psychologists are robust and are capable of displaying trends and probabilistic relationships; they ought to be used, modified certainly, but not abandoned.

Before we have a brief look at the chapters and the manner in which they are organized in the book, there four points that need to be made:

1 The book, it needs to be stressed, is not an applied text or a training manual, or a DIY kit. It offers little guidance as to what you might do, how you might behave in a given situation, how you might relate to people in different cultures, under different conditions should you at some stage decide on an extended trip to another culture. The book allows you to 'enter' into the world of peoples of other cultures and see it from *their* own unique perspectives. It offers you an understanding, an insight into the lifestyles of people of cultures different from yours: the manner in which they think, make choices, informed judgements – concerning religion, morality, ethics, social and familial life, and marital, sexual, intellectual, financial, and other matters.
2 The title, *Cross-Cultural Psychology,* would suggest that the book delves into a variety of cultures, dotted around the world. That is not entirely the case. The book focuses largely on India and on Western societies, England, and America. Although other Eastern cultures are brought into the book from time to time, the main emphasis is on India. The reason for this is not hard to follow. India, if it needs to be stressed, is a truly multi-cultural society. On the one hand India has a formal, written Constitution, a common politico-legal system and the rule of law. India is also the largest democratic country in the world, with the present population hovering at around 1.1 billion, which is more than 16 times the population of Britain, and around 4 times the population of the United States. The fact that 1.1 billion people live within the physical geographical boundaries of India is its greatest unifying force. On the other hand, the country consists of different religious groups that have lived in India for centuries; they consist of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Catholics, Parsees, Jews, Bahai's, Buddhists, Jains, Europeans, and a multiplicity of tribal and other minority groups (Nepalese, Tibetans) dotted around the country. India is by no means a monolingual country; over 35 languages, not counting the hundreds of dialects, are spoken in India. People from the far northerly

states of India are fair-skinned, whereas those from the southern states, such as Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala, tend to be dark-skinned. Despite the fact that about 78 per cent of the population in India consists of Hindus, they are divided not only by their caste structure, but also by their linguistic, culinary, dietary, social, familial, religious beliefs, and other traditional customs and practices. Even the levels of education and literacy, poverty and affluence, patterns of childrearing, health and illness, position of women, patterns of worship, vary from one region to another, even from one village to another.

Given the heterogeneity of India in terms of its people, languages, climate, religious practices, dietary practices, patterns of socialization, occupations, and so on, India is best seen as a gargantuan multicultural society.

3 I believe that for cross-cultural psychology to become a strong, robust, and vibrant discipline it is important to find bi-cultural psychologists for such collaborative work. Roland (1988) regards bi-cultural psychologists as those who are born and brought up in one culture (Western or non-Western) and at a later stage in their life have emigrated to another culture. Bi-cultural psychologists, because of their familiarity and intimacy with Western and non-Western cultures and their ability to speak and understand different languages and customs, are in an ideal position to undertake collaborative work. They are better able to understand and evaluate different patterns of beliefs and behaviours than those cross-cultural psychologists who have had little or no experience of having lived in different cultures. The case of Sir James Fraser, who wrote the 12 volumes of *The Golden Bough* (1932/1954), comes to mind. *The Golden Bough* was a study in magic, superstitions, rites and rituals, and religious practices across all societies in the world. When asked if he had visited all the societies about which he had written the twelve volumes, he shrugged his shoulders and was reported to have boasted with undisguised arrogance, *'Good God, no!'* He had never met nor indeed visited any of the lands of the people of whom he wrote (Beattie, 1964). It is clear that his analyses of societies were based largely on the available writings of colonial administrators, missionaries, historians, and the like, which of course were based on their own preconceptions and stereotypes.

One might see this as an exceptional case of prejudice. However, one finds a similar theme in James Mill's (a great utilitarian philosopher) writings in his book, *History of British India* (1817), which ran into 10 volumes. In one of the volumes he mentions that a person 'may obtain more knowledge of India in one year in his closet in England, than he could obtain during the course of the longest life, by the use of his eyes and ears in India' (quoted in Khilnani, 1997: 158).

In this context it would be fascinating, not to say extremely informative, to find out how many of the Western cross-cultural psychologists from America,

England, and other European countries make it their business to stay for extensive periods in the counties in which they are interested. How many of them feel it necessary to learn their languages, their customs, their rites and the rituals, their belief patterns, their social behaviours, their arts, music, and literature in the course of their work? My own guess is that most Western cross-cultural psychologists come to depend upon the local collaborators for their research enterprizes. The local collaborators are only too happy to oblige because of the cachet involved with working with Western academics, getting their papers published in prestigious Western journals, obtaining research grants and/or research postings. It saddens me to admit that many academics in India, despite nearly 60 years of independence, have still not been able to discard their imperialist yoke.

Yet, the situation is so different when Western academics from time to time come to non-Western cultures for conferences. About five years ago, I attended the SARC Conference (South Asia Regional Conference) held in Bombay (now Mumbai) in 2001. It attracted several well-known and prestigious cross-cultural psychologists from America, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, and other countries. It came as no surprise to me (and to other Indian delegates) to learn that hardly any one of the foreign delegates spoke or had any fluency with any of the Indian languages. There were a few cross-cultural psychologists from the West who did speak several Indian languages, but like me, they were bi-cultural psychologists who had emigrated to the West several years ago. The saving-grace for Western psychologists lies in the fact that English is the lingua franca at most international conferences and therefore it is not incumbent upon them to learn any foreign languages.

In India, conferences generally start with a prayer. After all the delegates are seated, a group of devotees appears. A silver oil lamp is lit. A hymn is sung in Sanskrit. It is an invocation to the gods, to 'bless' the conference, ensuring its success. It is a very touching and moving ceremony. The Western delegates, I noticed, were quite bemused and even rather embarrassed by the spectacle.

Sitting with a few of them at the luncheon table, the conversation became even more interesting and animated. One of the Indian delegates was expounding the story of the great Indian epic, *The Ramayana*. He explained how Rama (one of the Indian Gods) had to solicit the help of monkeys to rescue his wife Sita, who had been kidnapped by Ravana, the demon king of Sri Lanka. At this the Western delegates laughed. 'Fancy that! Monkeys helping Gods!' When the laughter subsided, the Indian delegate asked them in the gentlest possible way how they, as hard-nosed scientific psychologists, would care to explain 'immaculate conception'. Was it an immaculate conception or just an immaculate *misconception?* Lunch ended in silence.

4 This brings me to my final issue, namely, the important role of religion in the day-to-day lives of people in India and in other Eastern cultures. Most Western psychologists appear to shy away from considering the role of religion in people's lives. Paradoxically, this neglect is nowhere more evident than in cross-cultural psychology, counselling and psychotherapy. Despite the fact that several counsellors and psychotherapists, both in America and in Britain, are themselves religious-minded people, even regular churchgoers, they avoid talking about religion in their professional work with their clients. Counselling and psychotherapy have almost come to be equated with general medicine, in which religion has no part to play in the treatment of a client. To ignore the role of religion in their professional work and yet be religious in their private lives must create considerable cognitive dissonance among them. But leaving that aside, the point to remember is that the vast majority of people in non-Western cultures do not lead their lives on the basis of a secularist philosophy. Religion is ingrained into their psyche from birth. For the Muslims, life is ordained and predetermined by the will of Allah, for the Buddhists and the Hindus, life revolves round prayer, devotion, *bhakti,* renunciation and the law of karma. The ideas underlying secularism and their attendant beliefs have yet to find favour among people in non-Western cultures. To ignore or dismiss all these major religious considerations because of their lesser importance in western society is hardly likely to lead to a genuine understanding of cross-cultural psychology.

Let us now look at the chapters in the book. The book contains 10 chapters in all. The first five chapters deal with conceptual and theoretical issues, the final five chapters deal with descriptive and applied issues.

### *Chapter 1*

Examines the multiple meanings assigned to the term 'culture'. It is not an easy word to come to terms with. To some, culture may mean referring to a person of impeccable manners and good breeding: a person who is well behaved, polite, educated, considerate, and caring – in Victorian terms, *'a gentleman',* or *'a lady'*. Biologists, microbiologists, biochemists, medical researchers, forensic scientists, and others in allied professions entertain a completely different notion of culture. Cultures are what are collected from humans and animals and examined and analysed in laboratories. Academic disciplines, such anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, economics, political science, journalism, and so forth, on the other hand, have formulated their own conceptions of culture. At a popular level the word 'culture' is used (many would say abused) in such a way as to make it virtually incomprehensible: one hears of the culture of violence, the culture of greed, minority culture, racist culture, primitive culture, feminist culture, celebrity

culture, gay and lesbian culture, underclass culture, culture of complaint, and so on. To make matters worse, a prefix is often added to the term culture, which then leads to a 'sub-culture' of violence, greed, racism, underclass, and so on. Several years ago, T. S. Eliot (1948) pointed out that this process of fragmentation is likely to lead to the disintegration of the culture. Attention is then focused on understanding cultural stereotypes surrounding the concept. The chapter then offers meaningful explanations of the term culture from a psychological perspective.

### *Chapter 2*

Considers the nature and the rationale of cross-cultural psychology. It argues that cross-cultural psychology is genuinely concerned with understanding human diversity in all its forms, and about discovering behaviours, which are 'universal' or culturally invariant, and those that are influenced by cultural factors. Are we the same the world over? Do we all share certain common psychological, biological, and behavioural characteristics with others? Is there a common humanity that we all share regardless of our cultural backgrounds? Or are we each a product of our own culture, and in many ways different from one another? The chapter examines many of the conflicting and complementary views on this subject. The chapter also examines two issues of great concern to psychologists, politicians, social scientists, economists and governments all over the world: globalization and multicultualism, or cultural diversity. The potential impact of globalization and multiculturalism is unpredictable at present. The chapter ends with an examination of the role that indigenous psychologies have started to play in this field and what light they might throw on the above issues.

### *Chapter 3*

Is easily the most important chapter of the book. Each culture devises its own internally consistent sets of rules. To understand a given pattern of behaviour in another culture, it is necessary to understand the system of rules and the assumptions which guide the private and social behaviours of people in that culture. The chapter presents a theoretical model, which explains similarities and differences between Eastern cultures and Western cultures in terms of their major values systems. Several testable hypotheses have been deduced from the proposed model.

### *Chapter 4*

Is concerned with the role of ethics in research, particularly in cross-cultural settings. One does not need to be told that all our meaningful relationships with others have an underlying ethical basis. That is taken as being axiomatic. We all, as the German philosopher Kant pointed out a few hundred years ago, need to relate to other human beings as *ends in themselves* and not as means to an