

Prof. Girishwar Misra

Former Vice Chancellor, MGAHV, Wardha

&

Former Professor & Head, Psychology Department, Delhi University, Delhi

Bio

Prof. Girishwar Misra served as professor of psychology at the University of Delhi, for two decades. He also served as vice chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha. His research is focused on social, developmental, health, and cultural psychology. He has published articles on these topics, many in top-tier peer-reviewed journals such as *American Psychologist*, *International Journal of Psychology*, *Psychology and Developing Societies*, and *International Journal of Behavioral Development*. He has served as the President of National Academy of Psychology (NAOP), India, and edited the journal *Psychological Studies* (Springer) for 16 years. He was Fulbright Senior Scholar at Swarthmore college and Michigan University, An Arbor. He is a recipient of Jawaharlal Nehru National Award by the Government of Madhya Pradesh, National Fellowship of Indian council of Social Science Research, Fellowship of the NAOP, India, Fulbright Nehru Fellowship, and S.C. Mitra Memorial Award by Asiatic Society. His recent work includes *Psychosocial Interventions of Health and well-being* (Springer 2018) and *Surveys and Explorations in Psychology* (Oxford 2019).

Keynote address on:

**Toward A Culturally Rooted Science of Flourishing:
Some Insights From Indian Perspectives**

Abstract

The presentation would explore the intricate concepts of happiness, well-being, and flourishing, especially in youth and cultural contexts. Happiness is viewed as a fleeting, subjective feeling, while well-being encompasses broader life satisfaction across various domains. Flourishing is considered the highest state of human functioning, characterized by purpose and community contributions. The cognitive functions related to attention, emotional regulation, compassion, creativity, and resilience are vital to flourishing, with mindfulness playing a crucial role in enhancing emotional regulation. Brain regions such as the prefrontal cortex help us manage stress and maintain balance. Practices like mindfulness strengthen these circuits, allowing young people to bounce back from challenges. Neuroscience shows that empathy and compassion activate areas like the insula and anterior cingulate cortex. These brain processes make relationships a key ingredient of flourishing. The default mode network supports imagination and reflection. When youth engage in creative activities—art, music, problem-solving—they activate pathways that foster meaning and joy. Research in positive neuroscience highlights how gratitude, optimism, and hope are linked to healthy brain activity. Flourishing is not just the absence of illness but the presence of these positive states.

The cultural contexts significantly shape the understanding and pursuit of flourishing. Culture determines how flourishing is defined, pursued, and experienced. Thus, Western cultures often emphasize individual achievement and autonomy. In contrast, Eastern traditions, including Indian thought, emphasize harmony, community, and spiritual growth. The Indian perspectives are diverse and offer several insights. Vedic traditions consider flourishing as Ananda (bliss) and the balance of body, mind, and spirit. The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes flourishing through dharma (duty), equanimity, and purposeful action. Buddhist and Jain traditions ask for pursuing flourishing through compassion, mindfulness, and non-violence. Concepts such as Ananda (bliss), Sukha (ease), and Lokasamgraha (welfare of all) show that flourishing is not only personal but also collective. Family and community networks provide resilience and support. Role models like Swami Vivekananda and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam remind us that flourishing youth can transform society. The practices of prayers and rituals wishing well-being for all beings promote collective flourishing. Festivals, yoga, meditation, and Ayurveda embody flourishing as renewal, balance, and collective joy. Family and community networks provide resilience and support, especially for youth.

Cross-cultural positive psychological research shows cultural differences affect coping strategies, definitions of virtue, and interventions. Flourishing must be understood in context—what counts as “a good life” varies across societies. Culture provides the meaning and context (values, traditions, collective practices). Together, they show that flourishing is both biological and cultural, requiring inner capacities and external support systems. Neuroscience explains how flourishing happens, while culture explains why it matters and what it looks like in everyday life. The interplay of neuropsychology and cultural factors reveals that flourishing extends beyond mere psychological states, encompassing broader social and cultural dimensions, necessitating both intrinsic capacities and external support systems.

In conclusion, it may be stated that flourishing is a whole-person experience. It is more than feeling happy—it is living with purpose, resilience, and connection. To understand flourishing, we need to look at both the inner workings of the brain and the outer world of culture and values. This holistic experience requires integrating individual well-being, social responsibilities, and cultural richness. We need to incorporate these ideas into educational settings to nurture personal growth and societal improvement