

# Psychology in India

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*Psychology forms the basis of every human activity. The scope of psychology is increasingly widening in various economic, political, social, cultural and technological aspects. Though the application of psychology is extending to various aspects of life, it needs to be indigenised to address the dynamic needs in the various socio-economic contexts to make the subject highly relevant to the contemporary society. The present article explores the development of psychology in India in various fields in this context.*

**Keywords:** *indigenous psychology; applied psychology; political; economic and socio-cultural value of psychological services; student cohort; teaching and research.*

**P**SYCHOLOGY is the scientific study of behaviour. Behaviour is all pervasive, so is psychology. Psychology is such a widening discipline that its usefulness is perceived through out as Physiological Psychology, Psychology of Religion, Counselling Psychology, Clinical Psychology, Health Psychology, Consumer Psychology and Behavioural Economics, etc. No aspect of life is devoid of psychological basis. It is seen in the behaviour at individual and group levels. It forms the basis for various social aspects like primary groups, secondary groups, etc. Individuals in the society influence and in turn are influenced by the culture and environment they belong to. Individual differences thus are evident across cultures at micro and macro levels.

## **Indigenous psychology**

Psychologists all over the world have felt the need to examine the 'indigenous psychologies' (Kim & Berry, 1993; Kim & Park, 2005) for their contemporary relevance to account for behaviour, locally and globally, wherever they have the potential utility. India is no exception to it. India is rich in its cultural diversity, with variations across the country, which forms a fertile ground for psychologists to study and research upon, contributing to indigenous psychology in India.

The research in psychology in India has by and large, been dominated by the research done in the West. However, there has always been a gap felt in understanding the

complexity of human nature from the perspectives of theorisation and research done in the West due to the gaps in cultural and social relevance. In this context, 'Psychology in India' refers to the history and current status of psychology as an academic discipline or a professional speciality within the country. (Dalal, 2002; Misra & Mohanty, 2002)

Legends in Indian psychology like Sinha (1977, 1983, 1986, 1994, 1997) have tried to direct the researchers towards indigenisation and to make psychology relevant to the Indian context and to serve the needs of the Indian people. Pandey (1988) voiced his argument that to achieve the goal of a truly universal psychology, the first step required was the development of indigenous psychologies in various socio-cultural contexts worldwide. This approach has been explored by the likes of Adair, Puhan and Vohra (1993), Dalal (1996), Sinha (1994, 2000) who felt that indigenisation in India is slowly but steadily progressing. A number of critical reviews of the progress of psychology in India have been done (Adair, Puhan & Vohra, 1993; Adair et al., 1995; Dalal, 1990; Mohanty, 1990; Pandey, 1988, 2004; Sinha, 1986) to discuss new trends and perspectives along with the others. Several examples of the research done on psychological phenomena from the perspective of an indigenous approach have been discussed, for instance, in the third survey of psychology research in India (Pandey, 2001, 2002, 2004), as well as by various researchers.

## Applied psychology

Psychologists in India have been predominantly engaged in teaching and research activities. They teach various fields like Social Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Cognitive Psychology, Educational Psychology, Industrial Psychology, Psychopathology, Human Resource Management, Counselling, Health Psychology, Personality Theories among others.

Apart from the theoretical fields of teaching and research, psychologists in India are engaged in various applied fields like School Psychology, Counselling Psychology, Clinical Psychology, Health Psychology, and Organisational Behaviour. Apart from this, there are interface disciplines like the ones between Cognitive Psychology and Human Computer Interface, Psychology and Entrepreneurship, etc.

Psychologists are also working in practical utility areas of contemporary demand like soft skills training, where in they train the prospective groups/people in enhancing their skills and competencies required in life skills, like communication, problem solving, motivation, decision making as well as interpersonal skills, planning and organisational skills, etc.

Psychologists are hired by the marketing wings of the corporate sector, where their services are utilised to develop strong relationships with the clients, so that clients are retained and are motivated to repeat the business with that organisation. Recently Consumer Psychology has picked up pace in the context of increasing globalisation (and consumerism) and the services of psychologists are being utilised in several ways like designing advertisements based on the principles of perception, attention, etc. Psychologists also work as content writers/medical journalists, where in they deliver customised writing in specific areas with precise vocabulary.

## Teaching and Learning

In India there has been a tradition of teaching since the vedic times. The teacher is

called guru and the student is the disciple. The teacher-student relationship was unique where the teacher was considered an epitome of knowledge and wholeness. Guru was considered an icon reflecting the qualities of the Holy Trinity involving creation, maintenance of wisdom and knowledge or '*Jnana*' and destruction of '*Agnana*'. He is considered the source who helps such that 'universe of knowledge' is made visible to the student through his teaching. '*Brahmacharis*' left house, went to gurukulas and sought knowledge, wisdom not just by rote learning methods but also by practical hands on experience. India is a proud symbol of knowledge with well-known universities hundreds of years back like Takshasila, Nalanda, etc.

The knowledge imparted to the student, involved an understanding of his fellow beings as they are in various contexts and states of being. Basic psychological principles, though not as a separate science, were ingrained in the theoretical and practical training of the disciplines in gurukulas. Stories, anecdotes were used to help the student develop different perspectives of human behaviour and empathise with others.

With the changing times the teaching methods have also slowly undergone change. Teaching of psychology in the present day involves engaging students in the classroom situation. The lecturer needs to stimulate the students and be a facilitator in developing their curiosities. A two-hour lecture is just a gateway to the huge body of knowledge consisting of various competing theories and empirical evidence generated over many decades. As is true with the whole teaching world, we may say that, the enthusiasm for subject knowledge generated in the students, continues in their future endeavours. (Sen Hyun Rho, 2008)

It is the responsibility of the lecturers to synthesise the knowledge. This implies, when teaching any concept to the students, it has to be explained in the context of the whole rather than pigeon holing the

concept. This is because phenomena are to be understood from a multifaceted perspective to understand the reality as a comprehensive whole.

Keeping in view this aspect, at the start of the teaching sessions, the students are provided with the aims and objectives of the lesson/topic to be studied. Present day teaching involves incorporating the technique of explaining/introducing the concept by using the flowcharts, thus linking the concepts across the units in the syllabi. This also facilitates citing real-life situations, which form the basis for experiential learning. This helps in widening the knowledge base of the students and helps them to bridge the gap between lab and land. During the seminar presentations, it is suggested to the students to start with the aims, objectives and conclude with the implications, so that they understand the purpose of working on the topic, which makes them think divergently. Present day gadgets and technological support like PowerPoint, internet surfing and various search engines are effectively used by the teachers in many places now, as well as encouraged to be utilised by the students, for widening their horizon.

The students learn the content by submitting assignments, course works, and dissertations. They actively participate with the teacher in the interactive classroom situation. This enables the teacher to gauge their needs and appropriately tailor their lectures keeping in view their cognitive paradigms. Whenever necessary, queries are directed to the students to expand their knowledge base. They are encouraged towards seminars and presentation of assignments after extensive reference work on topics of their choice. Role plays, stories from Indian folklore, mythology, anecdotes from daily life around them and events of everyday happenings are used and encouraged as examples to enable the student to understand the concepts and relate to them more intensely. While traditional lab experiments are taught, social experiments are also encouraged along with fieldwork and

projects. Case studies and field studies are an integral part of practical exposure and training in psychology.

### **Political, economic and socio-cultural value of psychological services**

The services of psychologists are utilised to provide training to budding political aspirants in the present-day modern political scenario. Some of the progressive political parties which emphasise the importance to advances in technology, social change and advancement are planning to train their young political aspirants in communication skills, interpersonal skills, etc., to present themselves as SMART politicians relevant to the needs of the present generations and changed expectations.

Any human social phenomenon can be studied from a psychological perspective. In developing economies there is a need for rapid capitalisation of indigenous economy to overcome the problem of poverty. Since women constitute half of the human resource, it is imperative to tap their potential for rapid capitalisation of the economy. In this context, women self-help groups have been promoted by the government of India. In addition to these, NGOs are also associated with development of self-help groups in rural and urban areas. Psychologists are invited to play an active role in training the volunteers/workers from grassroots level to the supervisory level in helping and training the needy. Psychologists are also working on exploring the psychological aspects/dimensions which promote the women entrepreneurship in the Indian context.

Given the rise in social entrepreneurship, psychologists are also working as community facilitators, where they motivate, support the venturers by organising workshops and making community visits. The workshops are aimed at identifying and improving improving the skills in economic, social, functional aspects. The venturers are assisted in identifying the area, in which the venture can be started, by mobilising the existing native resources and utilising their latent potential.

They are provided training in various skills/ aspects like goal setting, problem solving skills, decision making, planning, organising, multi-tasking and being a team worker, etc.

Now, psychologists are also active in conducting youth oriented awareness and training programmes through mass media (television, radio and print), wherein there is application of psychological principles to improve the quality of life and thrust on self-development of the underdeveloped and groups lacking awareness of various psychological issues of life.

Psychological services are utilised to dispel certain illogical blind beliefs, which have been carried over generations. Psychologists are working towards helping such people in developing rational and logical thinking and enhancing their physical and mental health. For example, age-old beliefs related to black magic are still prevalent in many parts of the country thus leading to individuals causing harm to self and others. Psychologists and social workers along with socially conscious volunteers help the people in unravelling the irrationalities and restructuring their thoughts and activities in more positive directions. Psychologists help the volunteers in conducting awareness camps related to issues of physical, psychological health, motivation, self-development related issues and enhancement of life skills in rural, semi urban, tribal and underdeveloped areas.

### **Educational/School Psychology**

Researches related to the need for school psychologists strongly point to the importance of the professional psychological services in the school scenario owing to various contexts and psychological problems ranging from emotional disturbances to learning difficulties. (Paliwal, 1984)

With an increase in the establishment of schools with international standards in metropolitan and cosmopolitan cities across India, a strong need is recognised for school counsellors and child psychologists by the administrators of schools. This trend has picked up across the schools with private

management. There is a slow and progressive increase in employing child and school counsellors in educational institutions.

It is now been increasingly understood that there is a need for psychologists to address the children's behavioural issues in school settings and to motivate them to actively engage themselves to meet the targets in educational environment. They help not only in positive academic as well as holistic development of the child, but also in early identification of learning and behaviour problems and possible help or with a referral. They are also helpful in teacher development programmes, parental awareness and counselling programmes given the diversity of problems in Indian scenario. With the growing awareness, there is ample scope and future seen for psychologists not only in diagnosis and problem identification but also in contribution to the well-being of children, in helping them as they grow with choices related to education and career and in counselling at various levels of education, i.e. primary, secondary school levels as well as college and university education levels. The role of a psychologist is increasingly seen in dealing with academic issues, behavioural issues and also with reference to addressing problems at various stages of education of a child and subsequently in career.

### **Future of psychology in India**

Given the situation wherein the application of psychology is widening in India with psychology branching out to many areas hitherto untouched, there would be many more areas of increasing application. There are many unexplored areas in Indian cultural ethos, which fall under the ambit of various psychological aspects ranging from attention, perception to learning, motivation, personality, etc. Psychological research can be done to explore these aspects. The findings of these studies can be used to draw parallels with the existing concepts. In other cases, these findings can be used to implement similar methods to enhance performance in different contexts.

### **Qualifications of professional psychologists**

Professional psychologists need to have a Doctorate in Psychology (PhD) in the field they are working in. For example, school psychologists have a PhD in the area of school and educational psychology. Those psychologists who practise as psychological counsellors need to have a specialised course recognised at a university level in counselling skills and applications.

### **Study of psychology at the university**

Though the demand in India is more towards professional courses involving pure and life sciences, Psychology as a profession is slowly picking up. There is increasing demand as many more universities are opening the doors at undergraduate level to psychology admissions. More often the students who seriously want to be professional psychologists choose the subject. Those who are attracted by hearsay and feel that it is a 'glamorous' subject and choose it, do not sustain for long and drop out shortly once its scientific methodology is felt. Some students select it as a subject helpful in administrative services and utilise it in their day-to-day administration in the long run. Now, universities are also offering psychology on distance mode and there is a heavy demand for the same. The distance mode courses offer contact classes to the students according to a systematic schedule and also provide the students with reading material.

### **Psychology courses at university**

**Undergraduate:** The students pursue a three-year undergraduate programme in psychology. This is usually Bachelor in Arts (BA) in psychology. While some universities offer psychology as one of the optionals at graduate level, some offer it as an honours degree. There are some provinces in India, which offer psychology even at +2 level after 10th standard/class.

**Postgraduate:** Once the students complete the undergraduate course, depending upon their interest, they pursue a postgraduate programme (MA/MSc) in psychology.

**Integrated Masters in Science:** It is an integrated five-year course starting after 10 +2 stage, where at the end of the course the students obtain a Master's degree. The University of Hyderabad is presently offering this course in Health Psychology.

**Research programmes:** Few students who are very interested in the subject, pursue research programmes/projects after completing a postgraduate programme (MA/MSc) in psychology or closely related subjects. Meritorious students who prove their capacity are encouraged through fellowships offered by the government for furthering their research.

**Doctoral degree:** Those who are very keen in research, pursue PhD in psychology with a specialisation.

### **Profile of a typical student cohort**

**Age:** There are a few provinces in India, which offer psychology at +2 level which means the student studies psychology from 15 years onwards. The typical age of the students who start the undergraduate psychology course is 17 to 18 years. This is commonly seen across the country in various universities. The same is the case with the students who join in the integrated MSc (Masters in Science) which is a five-year course in some universities like the University of Hyderabad, while other students opt for an undergraduate degree of BA or BSc in psychology in other universities.

The age of the students who start the postgraduate course is 20 to 21. For the postgraduate diploma courses the age of the students ranges from 20 to 40 years. In the case of mature students of the distance education mode, the age approximately ranges from young aspirants of 18 years to senior adults. In some cases even retired

people take it up, so that they can apply it in some way or the other for the service of the society. The demand for psychology either at regular mode or distance education mode is fairly good.

**Gender:** It is observed that mostly women/girls opt for pursuing psychology courses than men/boys. Indian culture predominantly has been looking at boys as future breadwinners as a result of which boys more often choose traditional courses offering professional degree and assure immediate jobs like engineering, medicine. But interest in psychology is all pervasive. Some boys who seriously intend to pursue psychology as a profession, do choose it along with other fields like social work, management, etc., as there is psychological base for all aspects of human behaviour. A few other boys also, choose psychology as a subject to gain entry into competitive administrative jobs. Girls on the other hand blessed with lesser pressure regarding career choice, feel free to opt for psychology and go ahead.

**Socio-economic background:** Most of the students are from varied socio-economic backgrounds. The courses are pursued irrespective of the religion, economic and social backgrounds. The students may be Hindus, Christians and Muslims or may belong to several other religious and cultural backgrounds owing to the varied socio-economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds in India.

**Ethnicity:** In the last decade, it has been observed that apart from native students, international students have been seeking admission and pursuing courses in psychology. The international students are from African, Arabian countries, Europe, the US, Far East, as well as neighbouring countries of India. A number of Indian universities have set up separate departments to specially take care of the needs of foreign students. The University of Hyderabad established by the government of India, for example, offers one such programme, where international students

study in India. It is the same in provincial universities like Osmania University.

### **Aspirations of students when they graduate**

Increasingly, the students aspire to be employed in the applied fields like counselling, clinical psychology, behaviour engineering, etc., as mentioned in the previous sections. Usually, the success at the degree level enables them to choose their next course. Some of the students who delve deeply into in the subject, with an aptitude for gaining further knowledge, pursue research programmes and doctoral programmes.

### **Comparison between globally dominant psychology of the US and of India**

Indian tradition believes in the determination of the being of an individual by his inner state of being rather than the outer circumstances. It believes in looking into inner depths of consciousness rather than the resources outside for a healthy state of well-being. However, the mechanistic perspective and the externally oriented research paradigm with the influence of the West formed a larger part of the research thrust as against the internal orientation in the Indian thinking. This has created the need for a new paradigm in research, which the Indian psychologists are pursuing.

Psychology in India aims to be intensely practical and applied. It is derived from indigenous thought systems. It offers psychological models and theories which could be widely applied. For example, a number of hurdles in the way of removing suffering and reaching happiness are identified and means for overcoming them are suggested. The role of knowledge (*Jnana*), celestial love (*Bhakti*), and altruist action (*karma*) in the deconstruction of the ego are studied. Similarly a variety of techniques to enhance human potentials, such as a multitude of meditative practices, were developed, which are some of the fertile areas of research stemming from Indian psychology. By

including the transcendental aspects of our experience in its coverage, Indian psychology blunts the distinction between science and spirituality and renders a meaningful dialogue between science and religion possible. (Rao et al., 2008)

Indian psychology has theories, technologies and techniques for personal growth and well being as well as for enhancing the human potential. India is a country with diversity in various social, economic, cultural, political aspects. All these open up new frontiers for serious psychological study and research anchored in Indian conceptual systems (Rao et al., 2008).

To sum up, the range of application of psychology is widening in the present-day society as mentioned above. There is a necessity of addressing the diverse native needs by taking into consideration the variations

across the cultures and countries, so that the solutions are tailor-made to the specific situations. In this context, the indigenisation of psychology has been emphasised by psychologists. Looking from such a perspective, the teaching and research of psychology can be rooted in the specific socio-economic/situational contexts to make the subject highly relevant to the settings.

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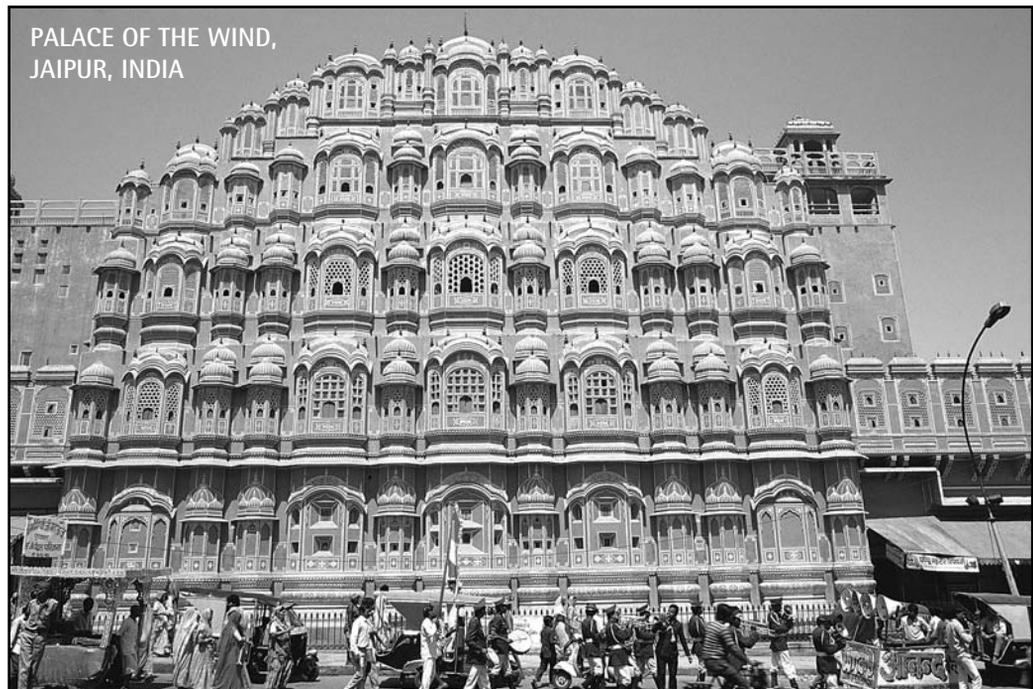
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## Glossary

**Ajnana:** Lack of wisdom.  
**Bhakti:** Celestial love, attachment, devotion.  
**Brahmachari:** Celibate student.  
**Guru:** Teacher, preceptor, a spiritual master.  
**Gurukula:** The place where the guru (teacher) imparts education to the disciple (student).  
**Holy Trinity:** The Holy Trinity are Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva in Hindu mythology. They are the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe respectively.

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