

Indigenisation of psychology in India

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Academic psychology which made a new beginning in India in the early part of 20th century was modelled on the Western scientific tradition. The teaching of psychology was very much on the British pattern since the colonial rule, whereas the research was mostly an extension of the Western work in India. Psychology went through massive expansion after the Independence of India, and with that there were dissenting voices about its imitative nature. A movement toward indigenisation of psychology teaching and research gained momentum over the decades. Psychology in India is now seeking a new identity which is rooted in its rich heritage and also trans-national in its orientation.

BEING one of the oldest civilisations in the world, mind and human behaviour have been subject matter of systematic study in India for the last three millennia. The ancient scriptures, such as Vedas, Upanishads and different schools of thought are rich storehouses of psychological knowledge dealing with inner human growth. The major pursuits have focused on self-realisation and alleviation of human suffering. The Yoga systems evolved sophisticated mind-control techniques to facilitate the inner growth. The *Gita* can be called as one of the ancient books on counselling, in which Krishna exhorts Arjun to fight rather than cowardly give up. It may, however, be stated that these propositions are neither in the language that we understand in science, nor are they testable with present-day research methodologies. In those earlier times no clear distinction was maintained between psychology, philosophy and spirituality. This tradition of knowledge continued unabated for centuries, albeit in low key in medieval period due to political and socio-cultural upheavals.

During the British rule when modern psychology made a new beginning in India it did not have any continuity with the existing knowledge institutions and field of psychology. Western psychology with laboratory work was a novel approach, not having any parallel in traditional Indian psychology. The colonial government was in need of a large number of teachers to induct the British educational system in India and, for

that, many teachers' training centres were set up. Psychology was an important component in their course curriculum. Much later in 1916 the first Master's Programme in Psychology was started at Calcutta University where the Department of Experimental Psychology was established. N.N. Sengupta, who chaired this department, had his education with Hugo Musternberg, a student of William Wundt. Inspired by the European ethos, laboratory research at Calcutta was in the areas of depth perception, psychophysics, attention and motivation, which became a model for other institutions to follow. Acknowledging the scientific nature of psychological research, it was inducted as an independent section in the Indian Science Congress in 1923. The Indian Psychological Association was founded in 1924 and the *Indian Journal of Psychology*, the first psychology journal in India, appeared the very next year.

When Sengupta left Calcutta, he was succeeded by Girindra Shekhar Bose. Bose was a medical doctor and a psychiatrist, and was keen to promote psychoanalysis in India. Soon Calcutta became an important centre of training in psychoanalysis. Bose's thesis on repression was much appreciated by Freud. In 1922 Bose founded the Indian Psychoanalytic Society and also established the Lumbini Park Mental Hospital in Calcutta in 1940. The Department started an Applied Psychology Wing in 1938, when Jung, Meyers, and Spearman were invited to the Silver Jubilee Session of the Indian Science Congress.

The progress of scientific psychology was slow in India. The colonial government was more interested in promoting anthropology and sociology to have a better understanding of Indian culture and society for smooth governance (Dhanangre, 1985). Academic psychology as a replica of the Western psychology was not of much interest to the then government. As a result, at the time of India's independence there were only three universities (Calcutta, Mysore and Patna) in the country having psychology departments. Until then psychology was mostly part of the course curriculum in philosophy and education departments.

After Independence in 1947 the National Government recognised the importance of social science teaching and research in attaining the objectives of national reconstruction and social development. Psychologists began to realise that they have a responsibility to engage in socially relevant research. As an example, concerned with the wide-spread Hindu-Muslim riots during the partition of India in which thousands died, many psychological studies were initiated. With the help of UNESCO a major research project was developed to find the causes of communal violence. Many Indian and Western psychologists collaborated on this project which culminated in the book edited by Gardner Murphy in 1953, entitled *In the Minds of Men*.

However, psychology as a discipline was not prepared to play an active role in developmental programmes, along with economists and other social scientists. The government engaged in a massive expansion of higher education, so much so that by the end of the 1960s 30 more universities had established psychology departments. Since there was real dearth of psychology faculties in the country, a large number of these psychology departments were established by taking a faculty from other sister disciplines, primarily from philosophy. These faculties from philosophy were not well trained in scientific methodology, nor had much orientation to deal with real-life problems.

To provide proper training to an expanding teaching faculty the National Government engaged in many educational exchange programmes. A number of bilateral academic exchange programmes were commissioned by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Ministry of Education. Under these schemes a large number of Indian scholars went to Britain, Canada, and the US for doctoral and post-doctoral training in the 1960s and 1970s. The most sought-after Fellowships were that of the Commonwealth, Fulbright and Ford Foundation. Years later when these scholars returned to their parent institutions they not only had better training in research techniques but also brought along contemporary research ideas, and continued academic collaboration with their seminal professors abroad. This brought qualitative changes in teaching and research. Under these exchange programmes many Western scholars also visited Indian universities. Psychology in India was dominated by the scholars trained abroad for the next two decades. Equipped with freshly acquired expertise in Western theories and methods, they exhibited much interest in applying their knowledge to understand and solve native social problems (see Dalal, 2002, for details).

After Independence psychology also started expanding outside the university set-up. Psychology research and teaching was promoted in many social science institutes, also in technology, agriculture, medical and management institutes. These institutes were primarily funded by the government, as there was hardly any concept of private universities and institutes in India at that time. Realising that the government did not have adequate finances, a new scheme of Centres for Advanced Studies and Centres for Special Assistance was started. Under these schemes a few psychology departments were elevated to the status of Centres of Advanced Studies in Psychology with liberal funding. These departments were expected to provide leadership in the areas of research, teaching and professional activities.

Rapid expansion of psychology in India continued in the 1970s and 1980s, and with that research publications took a quantum jump. However, most of this research was a continuation of research conducted during colonial period, or replication of the Western studies in India. Academic psychology was still cut off from the psycho-social developmental problems of Indian society. In the 1970s a number of review papers were published to take stock of the contributions made by Indian psychologists, and of the emerging trends. Interestingly, these appraisals of research publications brought home this realisation that psychology in India is mostly a poor imitation of Western research and does not lead to understanding Indian social reality. Nandy (1974) argued, 'Indian psychology has become not merely imitative and subservient but also dull and replicative' (p.5). D. Sinha (1977) called for the development of an indigenous psychology with its own paradigms to understand developmental problems of the region. There was growing disillusionment about the applicability of Western theories and their mindless testing in India. A crisis was perceptible in the discipline in the mid-1970s, as many felt that Indian psychology was going nowhere.

This ongoing debate about the imitative nature of psychology in India did result in some noticeable change in the content and quality of research. Indian psychologists were showing more interest in studying problems relevant to the country using Indian concepts and theories. Neki (1973), for example, suggested a guru-pupil model in clinical counselling to break cultural and social barriers between the client and the counselor. J.B.P. Sinha (1980) proposed a new leadership style – nurturant taskmaster – which is more likely to succeed in Indian work organisations. Kakar (1982, 1991) studied the role of traditional healers in maintaining mental health in traditional societies. Ramchandra Rao (1983) developed a concept of stress based on ancient scriptures. Pande and Naidu (1992) developed a research programme to study the

concept of detachment and its mental health consequences.

Indigenisation of psychology

Indigenisation is the process of making the discipline sensitive to cultural nuances and social reality. D. Sinha (1993) discussed in detail the indigenisation of psychology in India. According to him indigenisation can take two routes – endogenous and exogenous. The first is purely the product of culture, taking native concepts and categories. The second is the product of the interaction of cultural variables with concepts, theories and methods introduced from outside. This is a gradual process when alien concepts and theories are adapted in a different culture. A majority of psychologists in India are trained in Western models, and for them it is not feasible to make any sudden shift towards endogenous theories and methods. But it is natural for them to continue using concepts and tests borrowed from the West, albeit with increasing sensitivity to the cultural context. Taking the stance that exogenous indigenisation is local adaptation of the imported discipline, Adair (1989) observed that psychology in India is gradually getting indigenised.

In their shift toward such indigenisation Indian psychologists took quite naturally to the emerging field of cross-cultural psychology. A large number of collaborative projects were initiated to test psychological theories and models in developing countries, particularly in India. Many Indian psychologists occupied important positions in the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology and played prominent role in augmenting this movement. However, as noted by D. Sinha (1997), the cross-cultural work only led to testing of Western theories on Indian samples. Very rarely studies originated from the needs of the Indian society or tested Indian concepts in other cultures. Indiscriminate search for cultural differences and similarities made such ventures superficial, without providing much understanding of the culture or the

contemporary problems of Indian society. To a large extent cross-cultural psychology remained a methodological enterprise and culture remained a peripheral concern (Misra & Gergen, 1993). Presently, cross-cultural research is on decline in India.

Endogenous indigenisation, on the other hand, focuses on the contemporary relevance of cultural heritage and native theories, popularly termed as '*Indian Psychology*'. J.B.P. Sinha (2002) has referred to this kind of indigenisation as 'purist trend' which is based on a systematic analysis of the culture-bound concepts and categories. Such indigenisation has relied primarily on the rich storehouse of knowledge derived from Indian scriptures and philosophical texts of the last two to three millennium. The plurality of Indian tradition and an ethos of accommodating diverse thought systems provide a rich gold mine for creatively building a new psychology. It may be relevant to state here that historically a distinction is made between *Indian psychology and psychology in India*. This is to differentiate native psychological viewpoints (culturally-rooted) from the 20th century Western psychology in India.

Indian psychology has developed around the existential quest to overcome human suffering and in the process to raise the person to higher levels of awareness and mental state. Thus, Indian psychology endeavours not only to provide an understanding of the nature of a person, the causes and consequences of his/her conduct, but also to explore the methods and means of transforming the person in pursuit of perfection, knowledge and happiness. Indian psychology focuses on the inner-self which is accessible through subjective methods of self-verification. The beginning of Indian psychology in present times can be traced in the writings of many eminent thinkers, like Vivekanand and Sri Aurobindo in the early part of the last century. The monumental work of Jadunath Sinha (1934/1958, 1962) on Indian psychology can be considered as a landmark in formally establishing it as an independent discipline.

The books of Ramachandra Rao (*Development of psychological thought in India*, 1962), Ragunath Safaya (*Indian Psychology*, 1975) gave it further impetus in the early years. These efforts to rejuvenate psychology in the ancient texts intensified in the 1980s and 1990s. Some notable publications of this period are by Paranjpe (1984, 1998), Chakraborty (1995), Saraswathi (1999) and K. Ramakrishna Rao (2002, 2005). There is a rich and growing body of research in this area and many excellent reviews are available. A number of recent publications on Indian psychology, such as Kuppaswami's *Elements of Ancient Indian Psychology* (1985) and Misra and Mohanty's *Perspectives on Indigenous Psychology* (2002), have the potential of serving as textbooks. More recently, Joshi and Cornelissen's edited volume, *Consciousness, Indian Psychology and Yoga* (2004), K.R. Rao and Marwaha's *Towards a Spiritual Psychology* (2006), and K.R. Rao, Paranjpe and Dalal's *Handbook of Indian Psychology* (2008), have broadened the scope of this field. This stream has built not only on the interpretation of traditional concepts and theories in contemporary idiom, but also on their integration within a broader, global perspective. Cornelissen (2005) has pleaded that psychological knowledge from the Indian spiritual tradition needs to be integrated in the teaching programmes. According to Cornelissen, the core of its curriculum could be Indian theories of self and consciousness.

Clearly, by the turn of this new millennium, the academic scenario is changing in India. The scientific community is better prepared now than in the past to accept a psychology rooted in native wisdom and philosophical texts. Psychologists in India are increasingly aware of the wide gap between their academic pursuits and the real-life problems of people. The recipient nature of research endeavours, antiquated and obsolete teaching programmes, and lack of applied orientation have devoid the discipline of any professional momentum. Indian psychologists want to break free from the

theoretical and methodological constraints of the discipline to grapple with the real issues of development and to act as social catalysts in the change process. The endeavour is contemporarising Indian theories on one hand, and testing their relevance for enhancing human competencies and well-being, on the other. It is against this backdrop that Indian psychology is gearing itself to usher in a new era of exciting possibilities.

Teaching programmes

The educational system in India is basically modelled on the British legacy and psychology teaching is no exception. Essentially the same pattern is retained today with few changes. There is a good degree of uniformity in the types of courses taught at the undergraduate level across different universities and colleges. These courses are of an introductory nature dealing with concepts and theories in different areas of psychology, such as experimental, social, abnormal, developmental, clinical psychology, organisational behaviour, psychological measurement and testing, statistics and research methodology. In addition the students have practical training in laboratory experiments, testing and field research. The Bachelor's degree course is of three years' duration for which the eligibility requirement is 12 years of school education. Generally for the first two years all the courses in psychology are compulsory. In fact, at this stage, psychology is one of the three electives which a student chooses from the permissible combinations of different disciplines (sociology, economics, mathematics, etc.) offered by a particular university or college. In the final year of the undergraduate programme, a student chooses courses from one or two disciplines, depending on whether one has opted for an honour's or regular degree programme. For an honour's degree a student takes about six to seven psychology courses, whereas in a regular degree programme these courses are split between two separate disciplines. There are few universities in the country which offers honours courses in psychology.

An undergraduate degree is a requisite for getting admitted in a postgraduate programme in psychology. A postgraduate programme is of two years' duration, leading to an MA degree. All those who had psychology at the undergraduate level can opt for this programme though students from other streams are often eligible. Master's level courses depend on the faculty interest and specialisation of the Department. Courses which are popular among the students are clinical, counselling psychology and organisational behaviour. Practical training is part of the teaching programme. In some universities internship and research projects are also part of the course curriculum. A Master's degree is an essential qualification for applying for a Master of Philosophy (MPhil.) or doctoral degree in psychology. All universities which have psychology departments also have PhD programmes.

In terms of popularity psychology courses comes after management and economics among the social science disciplines. The courses which are taught are still on conventional pattern where teaching is mostly confined to classrooms. In recent years liberal funding is available for designing and teaching innovative/applied courses and the scenario is changing slowly. One change is that now more courses are offered which have derived their content from scriptural sources. Courses are also offered which deal with the socio-economic developmental issues. However, there are still few courses which are of interdisciplinary nature, or jointly offered by the faculties of different departments. Innovative and applied courses are more a trend in technical and elite institutions which offer specialised courses. Most of the universities and colleges in India are funded and controlled by the government. Only in recent times private universities are coming up. With the winds of change psychology courses in India are in for a major overhaul.

The medium of instruction at the undergraduate level is generally regional languages; which is English at the higher

level, a form of British English with a mix of Hindi and regional languages. The textbooks are mostly Indian reprints of American books, their translations or imitations. There are very few good textbooks by Indian writers. With emphasis in recent times on indigenisation of psychology there is greater input from Indian researches in these textbooks. There are number of quality reference books in psychology by Indian scholars but they are mostly treated as extra readings, not integral of the classroom teaching.

Teaching of psychology at the institution-level does not necessarily follow the university pattern. There are institutions of professional studies in varied areas, such as mental health, rehabilitation services, counselling, health management, psychometry and testing, human resource management, etc., which offer job-oriented courses. These courses vary in terms of pre-requisites, duration, teaching programmes, and often are of interdisciplinary nature. Such institutions are mostly in private sector and have much greater scope for innovation and experimentation. There is a mushroom growth of such institutions in India, marketing all kinds of crash courses. Many educationists are, indeed vary of this growing knowledge industry in India whose primary motive is profit making.

Demographic profile of Indian psychologists

It is difficult to answer the question, 'How many professional psychologists are there in the country?' with any precision. There is no such institution or organisation which maintains any national register to keep a track of psychologists working in universities, colleges, institutions, industries, or in other professional bodies. There are few regional bodies or associations which compile data about psychologists in a particular region or profession. There is no precise definition of psychologist in professional or academic field and that also complicates any enumeration of psychologists in India.

Using data available in the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) Direc-

tory Ganguli (1971) classified 734 psychologists according to their fields of specialisation. One other survey of academic psychologists in mid-1970s was conducted by Pareek, Dixit and Sarupriya (1979) in which they contacted about 2500 psychology faculty in universities and institutions. It was found in both the surveys that social, clinical and industrial/organisational psychology were the areas in which majority of the Indian psychologists were engaged in research and teaching. Pareek et al. also found that 43 per cent of the psychologists they studied had a PhD degree, about 10 per cent of which were from the West. Also nine per cent of them were residing in metropolitan towns and only three to four per cent of them were from rural areas. In a nationwide survey of PhD. students conducted by Singh and Dalal (1996) found that most of the doctoral students (95 per cent) had the urban background. About 44 per cent of these students had their research topic from the fields of social and organisational psychology and 61 of them aspired for an academic job.

Study of psychology is more popular among female students, which is also reflected in the increasing number of female faculty in universities and colleges. Most of the students and faculty come from the middle class background. The challenge at present is to attract bright students to psychology who mostly opt for more job-oriented courses and are less interested in serious academic pursuits. To improve the quality of research students the government is offering a large number of fellowships and other incentives. Also, in higher education there is substantial quota for students coming from the weaker sections of the society.

Employment avenues and psychological services

Before the 1950s, very few job avenues were open for psychologists in India. Because of the academic orientation of teaching programmes at universities and lack of professional courses, most of the graduates were employable only in teaching positions.

That was the period when many brilliant scholars had to be content with junior teaching positions or with research fellowships. Many bright students of that period, therefore, left the country to settle in the UK, the US and Canada. The situation did improve for a short period between the 1950s and 1970s when large-scale hiring was done in universities, colleges and institutions which were expanding in a big way. Generous grants for teaching and research provided by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) did contribute to this boom. The state governments also paved the way for the opening of a large number of degree and postgraduate colleges with facilities for the teaching of psychology. Thus, most of the jobs available to psychology students were in the field of teaching and research. Even today, teaching absorbs the maximum number of graduating students. The minimum qualification for a teaching job is a good academic record with a post-graduate degree; a PhD is considered desirable. Now, with growing competition for a depleting number of academic positions, it is difficult to get a teaching position in any university without a PhD.

There are now increasingly more job openings for psychologists in applied fields. There is a growing realisation of the possible contribution which psychologists, suitably trained, can make in industry, NGOs, government departments and other spheres. One of the major employers of psychologists is the armed forces. The Defense Institute of Psychological Research hired a large number of psychologists for training, selection and research activities. This Directorate, presently known as the Defense Institute of Psychological Researches, is located in Delhi. It has 15 Service Selection Boards situated in various parts of the country for selection of army, navy, and air force officers. Major openings in coming years are expected for school psychologists as many states are now making it mandatory for schools to have a psychologist on its staff.

With globalisation and booming economy the job market is opening up for young promising psychologists. A large number of medium- and large-scale industries hire psychologists, particularly in their personnel, and research and development departments. Recruitment, training, labour relations, work motivation and employees' health are some of the areas in which psychologists are expected to contribute. With the emphasis on human resource development and orientation programmes for managers and administrators, the demand for psychologists qualified for training activities has increased. There is burgeoning number of organisations which run training programmes for work efficiency, leadership, labour-management communication, entrepreneurship, and organisational effectiveness. Many consultancy services providing psychology-related expertise for various organisational matters have also come up recently.

Clinical psychology is still considered the most stable job opening. In a vast country like India, the magnitude of mental health problems outpaces the available trained manpower and health facilities. Statistics reveal that there were only 900 psychiatrists, 400 clinical psychologists, 300 psychiatric social workers, and 600 psychiatric nurses in 54 medical colleges with psychiatric units and 42 mental hospitals (Murthy, 1982). A more recent survey (Verma & Puri, 1996) shows that the number of clinical psychologists only increased marginally to 600 in this period. Estimates reveal that there are seven to eight million people who need mental health care. It, therefore, seems that there is vast scope for clinical psychologists in this country. However, in reality, the working conditions for clinical psychologists are far from satisfactory. With few exceptions, as in some reputed mental hospitals and medical colleges, clinical psychologists are mostly appointed for diagnostic and classification purposes, and they have very little say in the treatment process. They, for all practical purposes, are appendages to psychiatrists and do not enjoy freedom and status on par

with their medical colleagues. Many clinical psychologists are finding it more lucrative to start their own diagnostic and treatment centres, though these are mostly confined to big towns.

The services provided by clinical and counselling psychologists are yet to be brought under the purview of any legislation. So far there is no licensing system, nor have qualifications for practicing been specified. Generally, a clinical psychologist is supposed to have a PhD in clinical psychology or a two-year diploma in medical and social psychology, but in the absence of any law, many unqualified people or those who simply hold Masters' degrees are practicing psychotherapists. Lack of trained clinical and counselling psychologists in the country has also created this anomalous situation. The professional bodies, particularly the Indian Association of Clinical Psychologists, has prescribed a code of conduct for clinical psychologists, but it is mostly self-imposed and is at the discretion of the individual practitioner. In India there is no registration or licensing of clinical psychologists at the national level. There are very few states where laws are enacted about the practice of clinical psychologists. A regulatory body is needed to assess manpower requirement and to devise the strategy to generate this manpower and to regulate their activities.

Academic psychology is now nearing 100 years of its existence, if we count from the establishment of the first university department in India. In this period there is a phenomenal expansion of the discipline, as far as, teaching and research is concerned.

At present a wide range of courses and teaching programmes are offered in psychology, as the scope of research is also widening. This visibility of psychology has aroused both expectations and doubts about the contribution of psychology in dealing with waxed psycho-social economic challenges that the country is facing. Psychology, as a recipient science, has looked towards west for ideas and inspiration, with little understanding of Indian social reality. With pressure building up to be relevant and useful to the society, an intense debate is raging within the discipline about how the discipline should shape to meet the challenges of rapidly changing Indian society. Psychology in India is going through an identity crisis in its endeavour to outgrow the Western model of psychology and situate in its rich cultural heritage. It envisions that such an emerging psychology in India would be compatible with cultural values and beliefs; would build on traditional knowledge; and at the same time would remain part of the global psychology. There is distinct progress toward indigenisation and equally earnestly psychology in India is striving to be trans-national. How these two opposing trends will be amalgamated to forge a distinct identity is yet to be seen.

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