



Psychology in India: Progress and Challenges

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Although the existence and use of vast knowledge for understanding the human mind, consciousness, mental processes and mechanisms can be traced to rich Indian intellectual traditions in philosophy, religious texts, socio-political treaties and reform movements from the ancient period, the seeds of imported and borrowed scientific psychology were sown hundreds of years ago.

Psychology as a subject was introduced in India in philosophy in 1905 at Calcutta University. After that, B.N. Seal, Professor of mental and moral philosophy, drew up a syllabus for experimental psychology that led to the establishment of the first independent department of psychology in 1915, headed by Harvard-educated N. N. Sengupta. This was followed by the founding of independent psychology department at Mysore (1924) and Patna (1946). At the same time psychology, including lab work, was taught in undergraduate and post-graduate classes in philosophy departments of several universities (Lucknow, 1929; Aligarh, 1932; Varanasi, 1938), which facilitated the further establishment of independent psychology departments.

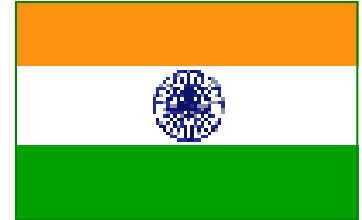
Some of the historical milestones of psychology in India include: Founding of the Indian Psychological Association in 1924; the Indian Journal of Psychology in 1926; the Indian Psychoanalytic Society in 1922; and inclusion of psychology as an independent section in the Indian Science Congress Association in 1923 (Dalal, 1990; Pandey, 1988; D.Sinha, 1986). In the post-independence period (after 1947) expansion of the discipline was and is phenomenal in terms of opening new departments in universities and colleges, and inclusion of psychology in professional institutions (e.g. technology, medical, management, agriculture, and defense) and research institutions (Dalal, 1990; Pandey, 2004).

A number of critical reviews of the progress of psychology in India (Adair, Puhon & Vohra, 1993; Adair, Pandey, Begum, Puhon, & Vohra, 1995; Dalal, 1990; Mohanty, 1990; Pandey, 1988, 2004; Sinha, 1986) discuss new trends and perspectives, identify issues and problems associated with the discipline, and appraisal of facilitating and inhibiting factors determining the course of development of psychology in India. This article summarizes an account of the development of psychology in India.

Foundations of psychological research in India

By the 1920s, the foundation for research was laid. One of the experimental investigations, for example, was on group effects on performance by Sengupta and C. P. N. Singh (1926). Another notable, early research contribution was by Prasad (1935, 1950) and D. Sinha (1952). Prasad (1935) examined the responses to the devastating earthquake in Bihar in 1934. Later, he published a comparative analysis of many earthquake rumors (1950). Later, D. Sinha studied rumors and behavior in catastrophic situations. There was an emphasis on social and contextual variables at a time

when Western psychology was preoccupied with individual level variables. These Indian studies were used by Leon Festinger (1957) in the formulation of his theory of cognitive dissonance. The trend of reciprocal influence (between Western and Indian) on development of psychology, however, failed to grow to a matured level.



The end of colonial India led to partition of the country as India and Pakistan. This was followed by wide-spread communal riots of Hindu-Muslims, displacement of millions of people making nation building and socio-economic development a complex and challenging task.

Adinarian's (1941) research on attitude and prejudice and Murphy's book *In the Mind of Man*, based on a UNESCO sponsored project to study communal riots, provide another example of the foundation of research in India and of psychologists' concern for social issues.

Psychology and Social Development

In the 1960s many eminent psychologists argued for a role of psychology in development processes (D. Sinha, 1966). D. Sinha and others suggested that psychology has a distinct role in the study of socio-economic problems, in identifying socio-cultural-psychological factors, and in contributing to policy formulation, planning, and action programs for development. As examples of research on psychological variables and development, one may cite work on motivation by McClelland (1961) and J. B. P. Sinha (1970), on poverty by Pareek (1980,1981), and on social change by D. Sinha (1966). It was argued that psychology is equipped to facilitate enhancement of motivation and attitude change for development.

Economic development also has negative fallouts that psychology may competently address. Some of the negative effects of rapid socio-economic development are social conflict and inequalities, depression and suicide, alienation, anonymity and alcoholism. Psychology is equipped to envisage, control, and alleviate such negative effects and to caution the planners while they are formulating the various policies. Thus, Indian psychologists followed this line of work and made efforts to carve out a role in facilitating development and change. This role has remained limited. Why, did this ambitious role not become a big success story? It could be argued that this was not possible with an imported discipline. Psychology in India was not rooted in the cultural context and therefore, the end product was not meaningful and useful.

In the 1960s a number of Indian psychologists joined the bandwagon of McClelland and participated in motivation research and entrepreneurial training. However, some others questioned the appropriateness of the "need for

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achievement" theory in the scarce resource society of India, which required co-operation and systematic structural change for rapid socio-economic development (Pandey & Singh, 2003; J. B. P. Sinha 1968). Even the conceptual meaning of achievement was questioned by Agrawal and Misra (1986). They argued for ecocultural and developmental perspectives of achievement in terms of subjective notions about achievement goals.

Indigenization of Psychology

Failure on the applied front provided impetus to question the appropriateness of the imported framework of psychology. D. Sinha (1997) acknowledged the importance of contextualizing psychology and argued for a vigorous scientific psychology rooted in the Indian context. Later, while recognizing importance of the context and emerging of trends, very strong voices were raised that psychology in India had to grow and, in fact, outgrow the imported conceptual framework to which it was confined.

The process of contextualizing any science socioculturally requires the use of concepts, tools, and methods originating indigenously in the same context (D. Sinha, 1983). In the case of India, this led to a decline in the perceived superiority of the Western model and the beginning of a critical evaluation of the usefulness of Western psychology. Pandey (1988) argued that to achieve the goal of a truly universal psychology, the first step required was the development of indigenous psychologies in various sociocultural contexts world-wide.

The concern for indigenization of knowledge has not been limited to only psychology in India. In the former colonial countries, a visible strong trend towards decolonization of knowledge by challenging the intellectual domination of the West has been observed. For example, Bhattacharya (1954) argued in favor of 'Swaraj' or 'self-rule' in ideas.

The call for indigenization has to go beyond the reactive phase and it must not remain mere rhetoric. Evaluation of progress in the indigenization of psychology suggests a visible shift toward cultural sensitivity and social relevance in psychological research (Pandey, 2000, 2004). Successful examples of the indigenous approach in the study of psychological phenomena are numerous and discussed in chapters of the third survey of psychology research in India (Pandey, 2001, 2002, 2004). The mainstream of psychology, however, has not changed much in terms of teaching and research programs. The most objective and systematic assessment of indigenization of research in India was conducted by Adair, Puhana, and Vohra (1993). Overall, Adair et al. (1993) concluded that there has been only somewhat marginal progress towards indigenous development of psychology in India.

Role of Professional Organizations

Professional organizations are central facilitators for the development of the discipline. The professional organizations evolve a culture of science promoting equality and ethics. Debates and dialogues in democratic professional organizations facilitate evolution of norms and ethical standards with greater acceptability. It is encouraging to note that some efforts have been collectively initiated. The National Academy of

Psychology (NAOP-India), a member society of the IUPsyS, has recently taken a number of initiatives for the development of psychology in India. A group of psychologists are committed to (a) promote indigenous psychology in India, and (b) develop new psychological models that may have panhuman relevance. Although an appropriate culture of indigenous psychological science will gradually develop, concentrated collective efforts may speed up the process and, in turn, may show the visible impact of psychological research relevant for social, human, and economic development in India. The Handbook of Indian Psychology by Ram Krishna Rao, A. Paranjape and A. K. Dalal, recently published by Cambridge Press in 2008, is an example of such a success story.

New Trends

Academic initiatives in India are not limited to indigenization of the discipline. In recent years efforts have been made to establish interdisciplinary programs like the Centre of Behavioural and Cognitive Sciences at the University of Allahabad. Other centers, primarily focused on academic programs in cognitive science, have been started at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad and International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad. Cognitive science related programs are currently underway at many institutions in the interfacing disciplines of psychology, neuroscience, computer science, linguistics and philosophy. Some prominent institutions offering academic programs in areas closely linked to cognitive science are the National Brain Research Centre in Manesar, the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences in Bangalore, and the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur.

In addition to academic programs, research in cognitive science has made a promising beginning. Research in cognitive science has spread in Indian academic and research institutions and departments. Recently, the Department of Science and Technology (DST) identified cognitive science as one of the four pillars of the 21st century along with nanotechnology, biotechnology, and information technology. As a follow up, the DST has started major multi-institutional research initiatives in cognitive science in 2008. Research in cognitive science in India spans all mental processes. Specific focus areas include emotions, language processing in the context of a multilingual society, culture & cognition, attention, and consciousness. Efforts are underway for scientific studies of the mind and consciousness based on the classical Indian theories of mind. There is also an increase in the research on yoga and meditation. There is also emerging trend in terms of neuro-scientific studies of cognitive processes as well as efforts to study different disorders prevalent in the Indian population.

The coming decade is expected to be exciting for the development of psychological science in India.

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