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The Indigenization of Psychology in India: Its Unique Form and Progress

Neharika Vohra
Indian Institute of Management

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THE INDIGENIZATION OF PSYCHOLOGY IN INDIA: ITS UNIQUE FORM AND PROGRESS

Neharika Vohra
Indian Institute of Management
Ahmedabad, India

The Progress of the Indigenization of Psychology in India: A Review

Sinha (1994) claimed that "indigenization is a global phenomenon" (p.180), i.e., it is a necessity in all countries and across all disciplines. In India, there have been repeated, aperiodic calls for indigenization of psychology following the initial call of Durganand Sinha (1973) to make psychology relevant to the Indian context and to serve the needs of the Indian people. In the past decade much has been written about the state of, type of, extent of, sources of indigenization of psychology in India, and of the positive and negative factors influencing its progress. The writings of Adair, Puhan, and Vohra (1993), Dalal (1996), D. Sinha (1994), and J.B.P. Sinha (2000) among others have each concluded that indigenization in India is slowly but steadily progressing.

Taking their reality into account, Indian psychologists have imported the concept and suited it to serve the purpose of indigenization process. J. B. P. Sinha (2000) has argued that given the pluralistic nature of the Indian society and its people, the openness to diversity among Indians, and the relative comfort with dissonance of an Indian scholar, no single route is best for the growth of psychology in India; rather a number of approaches to making psychology relevant will not only help but also ensure the survival of the indigenization movement. Three routes have been identified as possibilities for Indian psychology to travel to make research in psychology more relevant.

The first and commonly accepted route is the use of Indian traditional knowledge, categories, and theories to explain basic psychological phenomena such as motivation and personality. However, indigenization in India has not been limited to the development of a cultural psychology or of unique principles heavily based on language, as has been the case in the Philippines, Taiwan, and Mexico. Ethnic or cultural psychology has

been recognized as a source for an indigenous psychology in India, but it is only treated as one of several routes that indigenization may take and is the least popular route.

A prime reason for India not following the culture-based route to indigenization is the difficulty in defining or agreeing upon what would be appropriately culturally derived in India. The difficulty arises from the size, diversity, and complexity of the populace in India. There are large differences in the languages spoken, religions practiced, caste, and tribal affiliations of people. There are six religions that are actively practiced in India, of which there are two dominant religions (according to the 1991 Census 82.41 percent are Hindus and 11.67 percent are Muslims), and eighteen languages are officially recognized, each with a distinct script and literature. In the 1991 Census the number of people who spoke any one language ranged from 39.85 (Hindi) to .01 (Sanskrit). Approximately 10 percent of the Indian population is tribal. Most of these groups live in remote parts of the country and many of their ways of organizing their world are primitive. Thus it is difficult to agree on the topics that would be classed as topics of national importance or be culturally appropriate. Would psychologies based on ancient Hindu texts (it would not apply to more than 15 percent of the population) be more culturally appropriate than those based on Muslim texts (it would apply to a smaller but a significant percentage)? Which Hindu text would classify as national and cultural is another dilemma, given that Hinduism itself has more than eighteen ancient books of philosophy and teachings and there is no widespread agreement on which one of them is the key text. Also, if psychologies based on Muslim texts were indigenous would they be different from the psychologies of Islamic nations such as Sultanate of Oman or Iraq. The diversity indicates that rather than having one national/indigenous psychology it is more appropriate to envisage that there would be multiple indigenous psychologies. Thus the route of cultural psychology as practiced in Mexico or Philippines cannot be the only route for indigenization in psychology and it is often the least popular route in India. This is also because majority of the urban psychologists and psychology students do not identify with the "cultural" ways and means (Dalal, 1996).

In addition the current social reality in India is also very complex. In fact, there are many social worlds existing in India all at the same time. India has some of the poorest and the richest people in the world, it has

many illiterate and many highly educated people, and there are people who live in impossibly crowded conditions and those who live in some of the most palatial houses in the world. There are children who can hardly afford to take a notebook or pencil to school and there are those who worry about the immense weight of the school bag. In each of these categories, given the large population of India, even small percentages mean very large numbers of people. For example, when it is said that 25 percent of Indians live in urban settings, it means 250 million people, which is far in excess of the population of many countries. Thus the study of social problems and issues, applying psychological concepts to understand social differences is another popular route that psychologists in India have adopted. Such research is derived from various perspectives and sources, such as western theories and methods, and Indian folkways. It includes common daily realities of Indians. Research on crowding, attitudes towards family planning, and violence towards women would fall under this category. D. Sinha had proposed and argued for increased relevance of Indian research as the route for indigenization in 1973, rather than only a culture-based strategy.

Another route that psychologists in India have adopted is the examination of established psychological concepts and theories developed elsewhere with the focus on application and relevance to the Indian context. This is not mindless replication of western studies by researchers whom Mohanty (1988) sarcastically called "Yankee Doodlers" or similar to the psychological research in India in the earlier years (Adair, Puhan and Vohra, 1993). In a review of psychological research of the early seventies & late eighties, Adair, et al. (1993) found that majority of the research in India was replicative without none or superfluous mention of the Indian culture or context only in the introduction sections. Research under this route refers to mature research where a researcher is neither reinventing the wheel nor irrelevantly studying problems. Given that a large percentage of middle class and upper class urban Indians work and live in circumstances similar to many developed world contexts such research becomes purposeful and relevant.

To date the evidence for the extent of development of psychology in each of these routes is mostly anecdotal or based on analysis of the published literature. Dalal (1996), D. Sinha (1994 & 1996), and J. B. P. Sinha (2000) write at great lengths about the research in these categories but the

coverage is not extensive. By and large, the same authors, the same topics, and the same researchers get cited as examples of indigenous research through the various routes. For example, the work of R. K. Naidu and his colleagues on non-attachment (Anasakti) (cited in Dalal, 1996; D. Sinha, 1996, and J. B. P. Sinha, 2000) or the work of L. Krishnan on distributive justice, (cited in D. Sinha, 1996 and J. B. P. Sinha, 2000). Though the reader of these articles gets a sense that there is programmatic research in the different routes of indigenization, the extent or depth of this programmatic research in each of these routes is not known. The empirical study by Adair et al. (1993) measured the variations in the process of indigenization reflected in research published before 1988, and hence is no longer current. The present study examines the extent of indigenization in the various routes in all fields of psychology.

The Present Study

This chapter reports on the extent of cultural/socially-relevant research by each route based on the abstracts published in the *Indian Psychological Abstracts and Reviews* from 1998 to 2002 (Volume 1). Each year two issues of this journal were published thus nine issues were included in this study. The journal divides the published abstracts into specializations: Cognitive, Personality, Cross-Cultural and Indigenous Psychology, Life Span and Developmental Psychology, Women and Family Studies, Educational Psychology, Organization Behavior and Industrial Psychology, Social psychology, Clinical Psychology, Research Methods and Psychometrics, Experimental Psychology, Physiological Psychology, and General Psychology.

The abstracts for experimental and physiological psychology and research methods and psychometrics were not included in this study. For each of the other sections abstracts were rated by the author on whether the article was theoretical or empirical, and if empirical, whether it fell under any of the three categories of socially/culturally relevant research: (a) Research that was cultural in nature, being based on indigenous conceptualization or theory. This included, for example, the work on the role of outcome orientation vs. process orientation on motivation and stress derived from the Bhagwad Gita, an ancient Hindu text; the giving theory of motivation derived from the ancient Vedas, and the role of

practicing yoga and meditation in developing the self and its relation to the workplace. (b) Socially relevant research that was undertaken on country- specific topics such as crowding or population explosion, epidemiological surveys of, for example, the incidence of violence towards women in a certain region, or substance abuse among college students. This category also included research on HIV/AIDS and on caste, and (c) Western concepts and theories that were tested and their findings were compared to those obtained in Indian settings. For example, the work on learned helplessness, its application, or validity tested within Indian samples, the use of Somatic Inkblot Series for diagnosing schizophrenia or other mental illnesses presented by Indian patients; Piagetian conservation among Indian children; or studies on procedural and distributive justice.

Quantitative Ratings of Indigenous Research Developments

A total of 2,531 articles were included in this study of which 636 were theoretical, with the rest ($n = 1895$) or 75.6 percent of the total articles being empirical. The largest proportions of empirical articles were in the clinical psychology section (21.3 percent) followed by social psychology (15.6 percent) and organizational behavior and industrial psychology (15.1 percent).

Table 1 presents the number and percentage of empirical articles that were rated as being socially or culturally relevant under each route. Overall, approximately one quarter of the articles in the last five years were rated as being culturally/socially relevant using one of the three routes. There were also variations in the extent to which a particular route was used. The largest volume of research was in the category of socially relevant topics. The largest percentage of abstracts was in the study of socially relevant topics (the second route) in the section on women and family studies (50%) followed by those in the section on social psychology (35%). In sections of clinical, women and family studies and cognitive psychology there were no studies that could be classified as based on the cultural or ethnic route. The largest percentage of studies using the third route, that is testing western concepts in Indian settings, were in the section on industrial and organizational psychology. For example, there are studies that use western scales to measure commitment among different groups of employees (for example, working in private and public sector corporations) or that measure stress of various occupational groups, or the correlates of the Big 5 personality traits with job satisfaction among school teachers.

Table 1

The Extent of Empirical Articles from 1998-2002 in the Indian Psychological Abstracts and Reviews Rated As Indigenous In the Three Routes to Indigenization

Research Category	No. of empirical articles	Rsch based on traditional writings		Study of socially relevant topics		Comparison to western findings		Total no. of culturally/socially relevant studies	
		n	%¹	n	%	n	%	n	%²
General	40	0	0	6	15	0	0	6	0.32
Developmental	146	1	0.68	40	27.4	4	2.74	45	2.37
Social	362	2	0.55	127	35.1	5	1.38	134	7.07
OB & IP	257	2	0.78	10	3.89	25	9.73	37	1.95
Personality	122	4	3.28	11	9.02	6	4.92	21	1.11
Clinical	455	0	0	56	12.3	26	5.71	82	4.33
Educational	189	1	0.53	42	22.2	0	0	43	2.27
Women & Family Studies	173	0	0	87	50.3	6	3.47	93	4.91
Cross-Cultural	87	2	2.3	4	4.6	12	13.8	18	0.95
Cognitive	64	0	0	11	17.2	1	1.56	12	0.63
TOTAL	1895	12	0.63	394	20.8	85	4.49	491	25.9

¹ The percentages are calculated out of the total number of abstracts in each category

² The percentage is calculated out of the total number of abstracts

A Review and Examples of Indigenous Indian Research

The foregoing numbers provide an idea of the scope of socially/culturally relevant research in India, but in addition some explanation, illustration, and descriptive review of each of the types of routes is needed. Though it is not possible to provide a complete review of all the culturally/socially relevant research in this brief paper it is possible to give examples of the kinds of developments that are occurring. The nature of topics studied and one or two examples of programmatic research in each route are presented.

This review within each route reveals that in many cases the research in India has become programmatic. Researchers from various parts of the country are studying various dimensions of the same topic and building on each other's work. Such programmatic research development, which previously was not present in Indian psychology, indicates a maturing of the discipline as well as the deep-rootedness of its indigenous research.

The first route to indigenization where cultural traditions are treated as the source of research ideas and problems has resulted in a body of research developing over the past several years. Research on yoga and on a personality theory based on the writings in the Vedas provide excellent examples of this approach.

Yoga is an ancient form of exercise that was developed and perfected in India. It has been lauded as a means for attaining physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. However, there has been little empirical research to demonstrate its effectiveness. In the past five years there have been sixteen studies examining the effect of Yoga practice in various contexts. For example, Telles, Narendran, Raghuraj, Nagarathna, and Nagendra (1997) studied the changes in autonomic and respiratory changes after yoga practice among girls living in a community home, Telles, Reddy, and Nagendra (2000) studied oxygen consumption and respiration following yoga practice. Vempati and Telles (1999) studied the usefulness of yoga on reducing physiological signs of anxiety; Jhansi & Rao (1996), Mishra & Sinha (2001), Singh & Kaushik (2000), Triveni & Aminbhavi (1999) also studied the effects of yoga on depression and anxiety, and Manjunath & Telles (1999) demonstrated the improvement in visual perceptual sensitivity in children following yoga training. The usefulness of yoga in managing stress has also been demonstrated (Sahajpal & Ralte, 2000; Roy, 2000; Vempati & Telles, 2000). Yoga was also shown to benefit epileptics (Panjwani, Selvamurthy, Singh, Gupta, Mukhopadhyay, & Thakur, 2000) and when used in conjunction with psychotherapy (Rao, 1998; Rao, 2000). It was also found to benefit performance in cognitive tasks for mentally retarded children (Krejci 1998) and for normal children (Sridevi, Sitamma, & Rao, 1998). These studies serve two purposes: they help mainstream the use of yoga and provide evidence for its usefulness as well as its limitations.

In the research on personality there has been programmatic research based on local knowledge and categorization. A tridimensional personality theory based on the Sankhya school of Hindu philosophy proposed by Chakraborty (1987) postulates that the human mind is a manifestation of the primordial prakriti (nature). This prakriti has three gunas (constituents), namely, Sattva = characterized by purity, serenity, and contentment, Rajas = characterized by love of fame, passion, lust and display of power, and Tamas = characterized by anger, greed, and ignorance. Marutham, Balodhi, and Mishra (1998) have designed an instrument to measure the personality of an indi-

vidual based on the tri-dimensional personality. Occupational stress, organizational commitment, job involvement, and job satisfaction in *sattva, rajas,* and *tamas* types have been studied (Daftaur & Anjali, 1997; Sharma, 1999). In yet another study the relationship between Maslow's need hierarchy theory of motivation and the tri-dimensional personality model was explored (Daftaur & Sharma, 1998). Again, as in other areas there are several researchers who are examining various facets of a proposed concept. In this case rather than the theory remaining an esoteric concept its validity and its applicability are being widely tested and issues of measurement are being pursued.

In the second route in which social problems are the source of the research question there are numerous examples of socially relevant research. On the face of it some of the research may not seem indigenous in the traditional sense. For example, one has to be aware of the social and cultural context in India to realize, that research on India on test-anxiety (for example the study of Sood, 1998 on academic stress and coping strategies of high school students) is socially relevant. For entrance to a post-graduate college admitting 200 students, 100,000 students take an exam. For admission to a Nursery class the infant may have to undergo an interview, exam, and a play session under observation. The selection ratio could be as severe as 1 out of every 250 infants. It is not surprising that many children suffer from test anxiety in the urban centers. In fact it was reported that ten children committed suicide over a ten days period (in one city) just before their Grade 10 results were to be declared (*Indian Express,* May 6th, 2003). Similarly, the economic, social, and educational status of women in India is not the same as that of men in India, nor of women in other countries. According to the 2001 Census preliminary results indicate that 54.16 percent of the women are literate as compared to 75.85 percent of the men. The sex ratio, defined as the number of females per thousand males has declined from 1901 to 2001 from 972 to 933. The falling sex ratio and the lower literacy rates of women in India make it amply clear that research on the status of women is socially relevant in India and is different from research on women-centered research in western countries as is shown in the work of Dhawan, Punetha, Sinha, Gaur, Tyler, and Tyler (1999) on family conflict patterns in India. D. Sinha (1996) has rightly claimed that indigenous psychology "attempts to develop a psychology that is suited to the sociocultural soil of the country." (p.100)

The rural-urban divide in India is very prominent and there is much migration from villages to cities for employment and better opportunities. However, the needs, values, and motivations of people coming from rural areas and different socio-economic status groups are distinctly different from those of people in the cities. This is a serious national concern for which research is needed and Indian psychologists are beginning to make contributions. For example, Sinha, Vohra, Singhal, Sinha, and Ushashree (2002) found significant differences in the collectivist and individualistic behaviors and intentions of residents of less affluent smaller towns versus large affluent metropolitans. There have been over fifty studies that compare various facets of behavior, abilities, and cognitive development across rural and urban samples. Similarly, 13 studies studied differences in learning styles, attitude towards the environment, self-concept between tribal and non-tribal people, and numerous studies made comparisons across socio-economic status levels. It makes a lot of sense to study these differences and provide inputs for the design of education practices, and motivation and reward packages for employees. In addition, it must be noted that the recognition of differences because of socio-economic or rural-urban background and research designed around it is an advancement over previous psychological research in India on cognitive development of twenty years ago that treated all Indians as similar and blindly tested western theories and methods.

More than twenty researchers chose to study awareness of, attitudes towards, differences according to SES levels, risk perceptions of AIDS/ HIV. India supposedly sits on a veritable volcano of an AIDS epidemic according to the World Health Organization. The large numbers of migrant labor from the villages who live solitary lives in large crowded settings in the metropolitan cities and truck drivers who spend a significant part of their life on the roads are the most difficult to reach but the most critical in stopping the AIDS explosion. Thus research on understanding of mechanics of spread and of education on HIV/AIDS is extremely relevant. Also there are many epidemiological studies designed to find out the extent and spread of various issues such as, awareness of mental illnesses, education of women, incidences of dowry deaths. These are very much social concerns to Indian society, because there has been no prior research articulating the nature and extent of such problems in Indian society.

The work on crowding started at the University of Allahabad by Pandey (1978) and his associates provides an excellent example of recent Indian research applied to an indigenous social problem. This initial research seems to have taken root and different researchers across the country are studying the phenomenon in various local contexts. Recently, for example, there have been ten abstracts of studies concerned with crowding. Nagar and Paulus (1997) developed a Residential Crowding Experience Scale. Pandey, Verma, and Ruback (2000) explored the influence of age, gender etc. on perceived crowding in Indian classrooms. Ragani (2000) studied the effects of crowding on cognitive functioning of children; Evans, Lepore, Shejwal, and Palsane (1998) studied the effects of residential crowding on children's well being; Arora & Sinha (1998) studied the correlation between crowding and need patterns of adolescents; Malik, Batra, and Muhar (1997) studied the correlation between crowding and personality traits; Phookan (2000) studied the correlation between crowding, alienation, and altruism. Sinha and Nayyar (2000) and Sinha (1999) studied the role of social support in reducing negative effects of crowding among the elderly. This research not only demonstrates psychology applied to the indigenous social context, but also such programmatic research reflects on the maturation of Indian psychology as a science.

There are similar clusters of focused research in areas such as family planning. In a populous country like India, such research is extremely necessary and relevant. There have been eight studies on family planning which have focused on attitudes and values towards family planning and toward the programs designed by the government and other agencies with respect to family planning. Factors associated with the use of contraceptives both among men and women have also been studied. In earlier years Indian psychologists would not choose such topics to research. Researchers in psychology are slowly becoming more aware of the nature of Indian social problems, their importance as topics for study, and are making them the focus of their research.

The third route where western theories are replicated or findings are compared against those within India, is exemplified by research in clinical psychology that measures the extent of schizophrenia or depression and its measurement using various instruments developed in the west, studies on self-concept of Indian students, applications of Herzberg's motivation theory among school teachers and blue-collar workers, and research on the at-

tainment of Piagetian conservation of area, weight, and volume among children etc. One example of programmatic research is in the application of Somatic Inkblot Series for various purposes. For example, there are demonstrations of clinical and diagnostic utility of SIS in at least ten studies (Dosajh, 1997; Mishra & Dwivedi, 1997; Singh, Dubey, & Banarjee, 1997). The stability of SIS-II response content over time and age is evidenced in studies by Singh, Singh, & Dubey (1999), Pandey, Mishra, Mishra, & Dwivedi (1999), and Pandey, Tripathi, & Tripathi (2001). The SIS-II profiles of murderers, those suffering from depression, and in diagnosis of schizophrenia have also been researched and published.

Although such studies may appear to be merely western-type research, these studies represent a significant departure from the way Indian research used to be even fifteen years ago. Reviews of this research shows that there has been a positive movement from simply replicating western studies to actually studying and developing a conceptual perspective on Indian people and their behavior patterns through studies that are now grounded within Indian society.

Conclusions

From the above observations and data generated by examining the research trends in published research in India, it is possible to conclude that there is a visible trend toward making the practice and research of psychology more relevant to the Indian context. In fact, as pointed out by J. B. P. Sinha (1993), though the bulk of psychology research in India continues to be replicative a small but significant portion of it is relevant to the Indian context. This study finds that the small portion is now grown to a quarter of the total research produced. The foregoing has provided few examples of the range of indigenous developments within Indian psychology. The review is not exhaustive because of space limitations. However, it would not be wrong to say that India has responded more uniquely to the definition of indigenization (D. Sinha, 1996).

Durganand Sinha (1973) championed the goal of an Indian psychology that would be relevant to Indian society. His concern was that psychologists were more focused on the psychology of the west rather than being as attentive as they should have been to the context and issues within their own society. It may not have occurred in his lifetime, but there

is evidence in the recent research pursued by Indian psychologists that a strong recognition and incorporation of the Indian context has developed in their selection of topics and research activities.

Adair (2002) has proposed that indigenous psychology develops and evolves through a series of four stages namely, importation, implantation, indigenization, and autochthonization. He claims that the last two stages are intertwined, such that autochthonization (or the development of a fully autonomous science) is a crucial factor in the development of a culturally sensitive indigenous psychology. The promotion of an autochthonous psychology in India has been aided in recent years (Adair, 2002) by several developments uniquely designed to strengthen the discipline. The granting agency ICSSR has underwritten the production of a series of edited volumes surveying the knowledge accumulated by Indian psychologists on selected topics over the previous five years. The ICSSR has also seen to the development of a journal of abstracts of published Indian psychological research that has been regularly published over the past decade. A large number of topical journals in psychology and related areas have become regular quality outlets for publication of Indian research, such as the *Journal of Community Guidance and Research*, *Indian Journal of Psychometry and Education*, *The Indian Journal of Social Work*, *SIS Journal of Projective Psychology and Mental Health*, and *Psychology and Developing Societies*. In addition to their high quality, research articles published in these journals are generally applied and are contextual in nature. The cumulative effect of these developments has been the promotion of a critical mass of mature researchers who identify topics of national interest and problems relevant to the Indian context. These researchers stimulate one another and develop a national focus on relevant topics as evidenced by the programmatic research on various topics of national and cultural relevance.

One adjunct to the development of an autochthonous discipline that is still lacking is the emergence of a strong national association for psychologists. The formation of well-coordinated regional associations may also help. With India being a large and complex country, a single national association may not serve the cause. Rather, several regional associations could provide space for individuality of each group and another forum in which to make psychology relevant.

This review has been limited to a study of the extent of socially/culturally relevant research in published articles. Examining the nature and extent of indigenization in the thesis produced by young doctoral level scholars at various universities in India could provide an interesting further test of the trend towards indigenization. Only if the increasing trends towards indigenization are reflected in training and early research can one claim that indigenization of psychology has taken roots.

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Author Note

Author's e-mail address: **neharika@iimahd.ernet.in**