

RELEVANCE : A POSER FOR
INDIAN PSYCHOLOGY AT THE CROSSROADS

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This year (1976) the Indian Psychological Association has celebrated its Silver Jubilee while the oldest department of psychology was established in the country more than 60 years back. These are significant indicators of the establishment of Psychology as a discipline in India. However, little has been discussed about the problems of psychology emerging as a discipline and the issues which psychology faces today. Nandy (1974) wrote an insightful piece of analysis on the current crisis in Indian psychology, and only one response to this critical analysis was seen as a letter to the editor to the Indian Journal of Psychology. While Nandy (1974) and Agrawal (1975) have been highly critical of several aspects of psychology, Sinha (1973a and 1975) has raised some issues for making psychology more usable for Indian problems.

The Crisis in Indian Psychology

The crisis in Indian psychology is apparent from an ironical combination of high degree of unemployment and ~~unemployability~~ amongst the students of psychology who have completed their Masters and Doctoral programmes. Those who are concerned with getting good research staff for various projects share this ironical situation. While a large

number of students are seeking jobs, very few of them are found suitable for research projects. This shows the deep crisis in the teaching and preparation of students in Psychology. The recent decision by the Ministry of Defence to reduce the status of the Directorate of Psychological Research to a lower grade, apparently based on the assessment of work done in the Directorate, is another indication of the dissatisfaction taking its toll in qualitative terms in the field of psychology. And yet, with some exceptions, psychologists have not been moved to discuss this problem as a serious one.

Very few psychologists are concerned with the professional problems and development of psychology in India. Ganguly (1971) has reviewed the growth and present status of psychological research in India. He analysed research publications during 1920 to 1967. He finds psychologists in India as more purposive, but lacking in conceptual rigour.

There have been a few good reviews on some specific aspects of psychology. Ganguly (1971) has reviewed the research effort in industrial psychology during the years 1920-1967. Teaching of psychology at the University level started as early as 1920 but research in industrial psychology started only after post-independence period. Ganguly reviewed 156 industrial psychological researches during 47 years and analysed the models on which the researchers based their studies. He also analysed the total research effort in psychology which comprised 1959 publications for the years 1920 to

1967. He found five most important areas of work in order of importance. social (15.9%), experimental (13.7%), mental testing (13.0%); general (10.6%) and industrial (3.6%). The most neglected areas were - physiological psychology, education and psychological statistics and child psychology. At the end, Ganguli analysed the research trends in various sub-areas of industrial psychology and discussed the reasons for these, which lie not only in the training and laboratory facilities available to the Indian psychologists but also in the development of new needs in industry itself. He concluded by commenting on the social climate for industrial psychology research in India which, according to him, shall remain favourable so long as state policy continues to be one of ushering in social change with consent and without coercion.

Daftuar (1969) also reviewed the published literature in industrial psychology between 1960 and mid-1968. He concluded that there had been main concentration on problems related to job-satisfaction and industrial morale, evaluation and organisational climate.

Some other branches of psychology have also been reviewed. For example, Sharma, Ojha and Vagrecha (1975) have published a survey of clinical psychologists. Such small efforts are visible for other branches of psychology also. Kaushik (1972), for example, has pleaded for learning from other than western sources for the development of educational psychology in India.

The University Grants Commission has naturally been concerned with the problem of raising the standard of teaching of psychology, and regional workshops have been held on the syllabus of psychology. One major problem in dealing with such issues in India is the eagerness to search universal solutions for such issues. The same has happened in the teaching of psychology. Such universal solutions cannot help much, since the malady may lie in the organisation of the university system, the Department of Psychology, and the style of working of the teachers. It may certainly be useful to discuss the issues, but attempts for universal solutions in the hope of resolving these on a mass scale may not be fruitful. UGC and other agencies have fallen into the trap of this simplistic approach to problem solving. Individual universities interested in trying out new experiments in the teaching of psychology should be encouraged, and such individual and bold attempts may help not only in raising the standards of the discipline and the profession, but may also stimulate others to innovate and try new ideas.

One good attempt in the innovation of teaching of psychology was made at the University of Udaipur, where modular approach was tried out, developing several modules integrating conceptual frameworks, experimental approach, and the application to Indian problems. It is a great pity that in the meetings of the Indian Psychological Association and other forums like the Indian Science Congress, there is no excitement in sharing such innovations which are likely to influence the next generation of psychologists. Since the Universities alone have the multiplying capability, it may be worthwhile to encourage not only experimentation and innovation but critical sharing of these for mutual learning and for taking new strides in this

Relevance: A Multidimensional Framework

The crisis through which Indian psychology is currently passing poses a big question to those who are concerned with the profession. Such a question can be framed in several ways. One framework for this question is relevance. How relevant is psychology today in our country? What is making it less relevant? The term relevance has been used quite frequently in recent years. Nandy (1972-1974) uses the term in a very narrow, cynical and self-defined meaning, when we mention that "psychology in India very soon became uncompromisingly relevant". Obviously, relevance has to have a referent. Relevance to what? And in this sense, it is a multidimensional framework.

Relevance has most often been used with reference to the society. However, there are several referents for a science. Moreover, relevance is a complex concept. Let us propose one definition which may help to understand and operationalise relevance. Relevance of a science can be defined as its sensitivity to and concern for a referent, and its capability to respond to its needs, resulting in a better insight into the problems and a contribution to the research for solutions. In this definition there are five elements of relevance, and absence of one or more of these may reduce relevance of a science. Sensitivity to the referent is the basic element, without which the other aspects may be superficial. For example, psychology cannot have cultural relevance unless it is sensitive to the culture. Equally important is the concern for the referent, Relevance is not possible with a disinterested attitude. Some involvement is necessary. This is likely to lead to a tendency to respond. However, the capability of

a science responding to the needs of the referent is also necessary for its relevance. Such responsiveness should lead to both a better insight into the problems of the referent, as well as to the research of solutions. These end results should be perceived by those who are concerned with the referent. In this meaning relevance is both an attitudinal as well as an 'enabling' concept.

There are several referents for psychology. And so there are several dimensions of relevance. These are: (1) theory and concepts of psychology, (2) methodology used in research and other professional endeavours, (3) profession itself, (4) Indian culture, and (5) Indian society. These referents are used here to discuss the problem of relevance of Indian psychology. Sharing of these may probably help in a wider discussion of the dilemmas Indian psychology is facing today.

The problem of relevance cannot be solved by simple approaches like preparing a list of priorities in the area of psychology. Such a simple approach may lead to what Nandy (1974) calls the 'gambit' of relevance. As Sinha (1973-76) points out mere prioritisation may not solve the problem. Relevance has to be treated and used as a multi-dimensional concept.

Conceptual Relevance

Conceptual relevance would require more rigorous approach to theory building. Mainly two aspects are involved.

Integration and growth: The new concepts being generated by research should get integrated with and build on the concepts which have already been proposed and discussed. In this way, the theoretical frameworks being suggested by research and new contributions will not hang loose but will get integrated with the frameworks already suggested by other researches. It is important to build on the already accumulated knowledge. This may help in building relevant conceptual systems. Dhaliwal (1973) calls it 'architectonic' growth and regrets that it is not happening.

Search for models: Indian psychology has been very weak in terms of developing theoretical frameworks. Mukherjee in this volume has dealt with this aspect in more details. Each research worker should try to conceptualise his findings and test such a framework with the results he obtains. Conceptual relevance in Indian psychology may increase if conceptual models are used to design research, and research results are used to validate the conceptual models. Such mutual reinforcement may lead to the improvement of various aspects of psychology.

Methodological Relevance

Psychology has been the strongest social science in research methodology and technology. However, research methodology in India has degenerated into an uncreative ritual of following some set standard of conducting research. There is a need of rejuvenation of psychology is needed on this aspect. Methodological relevance can be considered in three aspects.

Multi-method approach: It has been demonstrated by several studies on validity use of several methods of data collection rather than to reliance only on one may be much more useful. Web et al (1970) have strongly suggested this. This is particularly true in psychology where various methods may yield different levels of data. A multi-method approach will certainly increase validity of results.

Methodological innovations: We have been greatly limited to the methodology usually followed in the West. Agarwal (1975) and Nandy (1974) are quite right in accusing Indian psychology of imitation. Misra (1972) has also commented on the imitative tendency in Indian social sciences. Methodological innovations are needed much more in view of new areas of research being attempted in India. Unobtrusive measures (Web et al, 1970) may help in making research methodology innovative and creative. Similarly, use of new ways of analysing qualitative data may be developed. We have been heavily relying on paper and pencil tests or projective tests. It may be useful to explore other forms of expression and use these for measuring psychological variables.

Developmental strategy: Researches should be conducted to develop a particular area. In many cases, as Nandy (1974) rightly points out, a psychologist works on one topic for some time and then moves on to another topic, without following a strategy of developing the total area. The same is true about the various institutes and departments of psychology in the Universities. A deliberate plan to develop one area may help in increasing methodological relevance.

Professional Relevance

Psychology functions both as a profession and a field of discipline. It has several specialisations within, as well as it functions in relation to other behavioural sciences. Professional relevance has several aspects.

Interdisciplinary linkages: One source of decreased relevance of psychology is a tendency toward isolation. Psychology being a science of human behaviour, has interface with other behavioural sciences which equally contribute to the understanding of human behaviour. For an effective role, and for a high level of competence, psychology cannot escape the responsibility of building linkages with such sister sciences. Sociology and Anthropology on the one hand, and biological sciences relating like neurology and physiology on the other are two dimensions which require such interdisciplinary linkages. These linkages will help in evolving a common language and in developing some common strategies of understanding human behaviour. Building of such linkages is possible when the concerned agencies attain maturity so that the initial threat and feeling of insecurity in the absence of a clear identity no longer comes in the way of building such linkages. This seems to be the right moment for psychology to take necessary steps in this direction.

Intra-disciplinary linkages and utilisation: Equally important are linkages amongst various specialisations in psychology itself. There is very little evidence of using several approaches from different sub-systems of psychology to work on the same problem.

Some problems may require collaboration amongst clinical and social psychologists. Similarly a combination of clinical and experimental social psychological approaches may yield creative results.

One major limitation has been the lack of self-worth amongst psychologists. It is often said that psychologists in India do not quote researches done in this country, and such researches do not get the attention of their colleagues unless these are noticed by Western psychologists. This is often attributed to lack of communication may itself be a dependent variable and may be caused by our lack of respect for each other, and our lack of willingness to give credit to our own colleagues. As Nandy (1974) has said, "the clue to what we have done to Indian psychology lies in what we have done to the art of creative thinking on the one hand, and to ourselves on the other". It may be useful for us to examine these issues by having critical debates to analyse the cultural problems of this kind resulting in the crisis in the Indian psychology. We have not built the tradition of sharing personal concerns, experiences, processes of growth and conflicts. This may not done for fear of this being branded as subjective contribution. One attempt was made to start a series of autobiographical essays by psychologists in India, but this, the attempt, soon died out. Such insightful subjective and qualitative writings may contribute a great deal to the development of healthy tradition of open sharing with and learning from each other.

Improving communication: Lack of communication can certainly be attributed to lack of source material in psychology.

Professor Haj Narain initiative compilation of a directory of Indian psychologists, and three editions were published by Manasayan. Unfortunately this useful publication has been discontinued. Bombay Psychological Association (1972) has published a directory of psychologists in Maharashtra. Indian Psychological Association should take a lead in this regard. Indian Council of Social Science Research has taken praiseworthy steps in filling this major gap. Indian Psychological Abstracts, a quarterly journal, sponsored by the ICSSR, has made some attempts in systematising the dissemination of information on psychological writings both in India and those appearing outside the country on Indian problems. However, it is a great pity that in spite of Indian Psychological Abstracts having published 10 volumes, has a limited circulation and almost at the end of 1976 only 10 University libraries and no department of Psychology are subscribing to this service made available by ICSSR at such a low price. Contributions by Buch (1974), Pareek (1969, 1970, 1971), and Pareek and Rao (1974), to the documentation of researches and measuring instruments have helped in systematising information on various aspects of psychology. Various other abstracting and indexing journals and other publications have also helped this process. However, the main problem is their use in teaching, planning research, writing textbooks etc.

Professional ethics: Psychology, being a profession also, needs to develop code of ethics for different aspects of the profession. Clinical psychology obviously needs such a code. However, with increasing emphasis on intervention research, attention to professional ethics is needed more urgently. With increasing use of group dynamics

(Learning or Training Groups, Awareness or Confrontation Laboratories, etc.) guidelines for those using such interventions has become necessary. Some signs are already visible that some interventionists have been using such methods either without any adequate training or preparation, or without sharing the purpose and nature of the interventions. This may result in manipulation by and increase of dependency of the client groups on the interventionist. It is high time that we paid attention to this aspect. Another aspect of ethics relates to values the interventions promote. Some basic values like freedom of the individual, interdependence, non-exploitation, communal harmony, help to the socially underprivileged etc., should provide the necessary framework for intervention researches. An open debate on the ethical issues may lead to development of such guidelines. Indian Psychological Association may be the proper forum for this.

Dialogue, debate, and reflection: The Indian tradition has been rich in debates and reflection. We have lost that useful tradition. The practice of open dialogue on important issues should be revived. Nandy (1974) has pleaded for "an open psychology and an atmosphere of professional debate". Social consequences of some aspects of psychological researches and practices need to be debated, and the various implications can be tested through research. Debate, however, should grow out of and lead to dialoguing, rather than degenerating into mud-slinging. Similarly, a healthy tradition of reflection on what has been done, and if necessary self-criticism for new steps to take may help in increasing relevance of psychology. Only a person of a high stature of Pablo Neruda can frankly criticise and denounce his own

past works. We have the tradition of only sharing one successes (and in some cases we suppress information raising doubts about unqualified success). Sharing of failures may be as valuation as (and sometimes more than) successes.

Socio-cultural Relevance

Psychology functions in the socio-cultural framework and in the absence of actively belonging to this framework, it may lose its relevance. Several dimensions of socio-cultural relevance need attention.

Using the heritage of knowledge: India has had a long heritage of knowledge about self, and has had rich of epistemological traditions. For a meaningful role of psychology in India, it will be necessary to use this tradition, by searching psychological concepts in this tradition, and interpreting the old concepts in modern psychological framework. Sinha (1965) has discussed several elements of Indian thought and their relevance to modern psychology, especially those related to the nature of man.

Using secondary source data: Psychologists have primarily been concerned with collecting first hand data. Special devices are used for this purpose. However, this has also become a limitation of psychology. In the eagerness to collect data for a particular purpose the use of relevant indicators and data available for secondary sources are not properly utilised. Various behavioural data in terms of what is happening in a community, and what may be available in the records

is not properly utilised. Unfortunately, observational skill, which is one of the basic skills psychologists have used over ages, has not been properly developed and used. By making careful observations of social phenomena, we can derive a great deal of meaningful and valid conclusions.

Creative use of historical material: India is full of rich historical material, both in the form of literature in all languages, as well as in various other forms. Such data can be used more creatively by psychologists. McClelland has demonstrated how creatively historical data available in the form of literature and in other art forms can be used to understand the motivational dynamics as well as develop new theories of motivation. We have great scope for such creative methods in understanding the cultural dynamics and psychic reality in the culture.

Use of cultural material: Indian culture has had an unbroken tradition for thousands of years. Cultural material are available in various forms and at various levels of the evolution of the society: From pre-historical to the modern urban level. Psychologists have a great opportunity, along with socio-historians and anthropologists, to contribute to the understanding of the evolution of the Indian society, and the basic psychic themes underlying present-day behaviour.

Search for Indian psyche: The main thrust of cultural relevance of psychology may be in the search of Indian psyche, the underlying psychic dynamics in the Indian culture. Such an understanding can help in unraveling some puzzling and complex experiences in the Indian

society, and in developing insights into broader aspects of the Indian personality, Socio-historical insights (a brilliant example is reflected in Chattopadhyay,), philosophical perspective, and clinical understanding may help in developing cultural relevance of psychology. Historiographical analysis may contribute a great deal in such an effort. A recent attempt by Kakar (1977) in analysing the life forces of Vivekanand is a good example of such an approach. Training in such inter-disciplinary and creative methodology should be developed in some centres.

Societal Relevance

The term relevance has been most widely used in the sense of relevance to the society. Certainly any behavioural science should be relevant to the society to which the behavioural scientists belong. The concept of value-free or culture-free behavioural science and research leads to lack of relevance.

Keeping in touch with social reality: One could not agree more with Nandy (1974) when he says "all our pretensions to relevance notwithstanding, it is our grasp on social reality which has been repeatedly shown to be shaky". Nandy (1974) sees two main reasons for these. First, we have never cared to conceptualise the external world in psychologically meaningful terms. We have tended to work with crude molecular conceptions of the social realities which impinge on and become part of the individual. Second, we have frequently gone into fashionable subjects of research not because we were intrinsically interested in them, but because such research paid high non-academic dividends.

Work on urgent issues: Today India is seriously concerned with accelerating the pace of change. According to Sinha (1973), it involves the process of 'telescopic' or 'temporal compression' of change within the span of a generation or so. This involves, according to Sinha, "not only the building of a certain economic infrastructure, but also an all-round modernizing in the social structure, families, attitude and value systems - in fact, a large scale programme of social change. To achieve this, all forces that aid the process need to be mobilized and resistances impeding it have to be overcome. Not only technological changes are involved but also changes on psychological dimensions." One should not expect these psychological changes to come about automatically following economic transformation, but there should be a concentrated effort to induce changes in all sectors including the psychological one.

Sinha feels that psychologists in India should shift in their researches from "research for prestige" to "research for policy". He should have an increasing concern for social applicability of research. He observes that psychologists so far have been largely absent from the arena of social change. Their emphasis is more on the personal characteristics of individual actors rather than on social-structural factors involved in change. According to him (1973b) psychology should be related to the process of planning and the process of planned change.

Sinha (1975) spells out the new orientation needed in psychology in India to meet the new challenge: problem-oriented approach, interdisciplinary perspective, greater emphasis on

'macroscopic' approach, cultural sensitivity and relevance and commitment (in a limited sense).

Intervention researches: Psychology has a great potential for developing special intervention strategies to contribute to the solution of social and group problems, besides resolving individual problems which clinical psychology has been doing. Increasing awareness of the importance of process in the designing of social change provides such an opportunity to psychologists. China is a good example where work on the process, along with the structure seems to have initiated a new interpretation of Marxism, and a new creative design of social change strategy. Such a bi-pronged approach may be needed more in future (Pareek, 1968). In recent years a number of intervention researches have been tried for influencing behaviour in groups. An excellent example of such research is provided by the experiments of Mehta (1975) on influencing achievement motivation of teachers and pupils. Pareek and ^{TV Rao} (1974) conducted a similar experiment using another intervention strategy. An evaluation of a motivational change strategy to influence effectiveness of entrepreneurs by Shah et al (1974) has shown the effectiveness of the intervention strategy. Dayal (1972) has pleaded for an active role of social scientists in social action. More intervention researches are needed to develop strategies of effective change in the society.

Knowledge utilisation: One of the problems of communication for achieving results (influence) is what has been termed knowledge utilisation (KU). Knowledge utilisation researches are lacking, although

some significant work has been done on this aspect in agricultural field. Farooq has discussed this aspect in a chapter in this volume. Pareek (1975) in a note has outlined a conceptual model of knowledge utilisation, suggesting areas requiring systematic research.

Beyond Relevance: Concern and Commitment

The role of psychologists is not confined to their professional roles only. They are members of a society, and like other enlightened citizens, their concern for social issues and commitment to some basic values and social goals is equally important. Value-free position is only a myth and self-deception. If a social scientist does not commit himself consciously, he gets committed to some values without his awareness. A psychologist's concern for social issues, his insight into social reality, and his commitment to some value position does not necessarily mean that he works on the problems. Whenever there are some urgent social issues in the country, sociologists take initiative in issuing statements and showing concern. How many psychologists have been concerned with such problems? How can a discipline and a profession achieve relevance if its members and those who are doing research, are not concerned about the social issues and pretend to be value-free and unconcerned with such matters? The question of relevance of the discipline and the profession cannot be divorced from the commitment of its members to the social reality and values in the society. Not only the teachers, researchers and other professionals in psychology be concerned with such issues and take stand on

them, but in many cases, their involvement in the solution of such issues in the country is also necessary. Sinha (1975) sees only a limited role of psychologists for such commitment. The virtue in the Indian culture is to go up to a point, and not beyond, because going beyond is making commitment and taking risks! Indian culture by and large has been a culture of non-commitment, and psychologists are no exception. But this ostrich-like approach cannot help us to avert the storms ahead, and we have to take stand on some issues, and many of us have even to participate as activists as far as social action is concerned. Only by sticking our neck out can we achieve relevance for psychology.

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