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Robert W. Rieber

Psychology in Modern India


Girishwar Misra¹  and Anand C. Paranjpe² 

(1) Department of Psychology, University of Delhi, Delhi, 110007, India

(2) Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6, Canada

 **Girishwar Misra (Corresponding author)**

Email: misragirishwar@gmail.com

 **Anand C. Paranjpe (Corresponding author)**

Email: paranjpe@sfu.ca

Without Abstract

The history of psychological thought in the Indian subcontinent may be divided into three distinct periods: *first*, a multi-millennial span from antiquity to the founding of the British empire in the mid-nineteenth century; *second*, about a century of British colonial times up to independence attained in 1947; and *third*, bit over half a century of the independence era. The first period is covered in a separate entry in this volume (see Pre-modern India and Psychological Thought). This entry covers the 2nd and the 3rd periods.

Psychology in the British Colonial Period (1857–1947)

The British East India Company adopted a policy of funding only European-style education within its territories several years before the subcontinent was formally accessioned to Queen Victoria's empire in 1857. The aim of this policy was to produce a class of Indians who would be brown in color but English in their thinking. The success of this policy was enormous; its results were at least twofold. While on the one hand the vitality of the indigenous intellectual tradition was reduced to a great degree, Indian intelligentsia became exposed to European thought and modern science. Education in colleges and universities was modeled after Oxford and Cambridge. Modern psychology was introduced at Calcutta University with the starting of a

separate department of psychology in 1916. Dalal (2002) has given an excellent overview of the history of psychology since that time onward. During nearly a century that has passed since, Indian psychologists trained abroad as well as those trained in India almost exclusively followed the Western brands of psychology. Their theoretical contributions will be discussed in a later section. But first let us take a look at psychology as it developed on the foundations laid by India's own intellectual tradition.

The tradition of spiritual self-development which gave psychology in India its most distinctive character continued to flourish despite the Anglicization and modernization of various aspects of the Indian culture. Numerous lineages of teachers and disciples (*guru, śiṣya*), that are recognized as distinct "sects" which followed their own brands of theory and practice, continued to proliferate and flourish. One of the many well-known pairs of teacher and disciple in the modern times was Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the great saint of Kolkata, and his disciple Swami Vivekananda. He is widely recognized as the first Indian monk whose lecture at the world conference on religions in Chicago in 1883 became a landmark in introducing Indian thought in the USA. The importance of his work for psychology follows from the fact that the Swami made a deep impact on William James and his ideas about the higher states of consciousness (Taylor 1988).

With the increasing prevalence of the distinctive Western world view promoted by Anglicized higher education and the inevitable influence of science, there was a great need to interpret traditional ideas in light of modern concerns and concepts. Among the important pioneers in interpreting Indian thought in the context of Western philosophy two names may be mentioned: Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya (1875–1949) and S. Radhakrishnan (1888–1975). In terms of articulation of the basic principles and theories for psychological theory and practice, we may note the work of B.G. Tilak (1856–1920), who interpreted the Path of Action described in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* in light of post-Kantian philosophy and Darwinian thought. But beyond doubt the most important contribution to psychology in the Indian tradition was made by Aurobindo Ghose (1872–1950), widely known as Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo was a genius. Educated from childhood in England, young Aurobindo mastered French, Latin, and Greek, and learned enough German and Italian to enjoy Goethe and Dante in the original, before graduating from Cambridge University. He started his adult life as a freedom fighter and journalist, but spent later years as a poet, sage, and a yogi. Psychology was one of the important topics in his voluminous writings. He was not formally trained in psychology; he was a sage in the Indian tradition who wrote on psychological topics on the basis of his profound experience as a yogi. Prominent in his contributions to psychology is his work called *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Aurobindo 1949/1999) in which he brings together the essence of the three basic varieties of yoga, namely the paths of Knowledge (*jñāna mārga*), Devotion (*bhakti*), and Action (*karma*). Having mastered the Sanskrit language, which he learned as an adult, Sri Aurobindo wrote commentaries on the principal Upaniṣads as well as the Vedas. In this work, he gives symbolic interpretations of several hymns of the Vedas explaining the psychological significance of the parables therein.

Turning now to the academic psychology that was transplanted from the West, we may note two

pioneers: Narendra Nath Sengupta of the Calcutta University, who was trained in experimental psychology with Hugo Munsterberg at Harvard, and his successor Girindra Shekhar Bose, who became a self-taught psychoanalyst to be admitted by Freud to membership of the International Association of Psychoanalysis (see Vahali [2011](#) for details). Thus, both Western experimental and clinical approaches were imported, and since then numerous psychologists trained abroad have continued to bring Western trends into psychology in India. Of these two strands of Western psychology, the experimental model flourished, while psychoanalysis lagged far behind. As to psychology of the Indian tradition mentioned in the first part of this essay, its theoretical side became a small part of philosophy courses in universities, while the applied aspect was completely sequestered away from the academe. With the exception of Indra Sen ([1986](#)), few psychologists recognized the great contributions to their discipline by Sri Aurobindo.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) is universally known as a saint, a freedom fighter, social reformer, and a great thinker, but not as an academic – let alone a psychologist. However, it is necessary to recognize his contribution to what may be called “applied social psychology.” Seeped in traditional Indian thought and culture, Gandhi emphasized the principle of nonviolence (*ahimsā*), and developed *satyāgraha* (the word literally means insistence on truth) as a technique for nonviolent resolution of social conflict. Gandhi’s style of leadership demonstrates his deep understanding of what modern psychologists have called “group dynamics.” He may be legitimately considered an applied social psychologist par excellence. Gandhi’s work reflects the *practical* orientation of psychology in India. It is neither abstract theory-building nor empirical validation of propositions that take central stage in the tradition of psychology in India; the primary goal of human sciences is to devise ways that help in successfully dealing with problems of living.

Dalal ([2002](#)) quotes the following observations made by a prominent contemporary psychologist Ashis Nandy: “[T]he usual encounter between an ancient culture with its distinctive culture of science and an exogenous science with its own distinctive culture fractured the self-definition not only of Bose but of many others involved in the similar enterprise” (Dalal [2002](#), p. 83). Nandy’s words would convince anybody who has noted that, in the case of many Indian psychologists in recent times, their world view as qua-psychologists seemed to be completely divorced from their world view as members of the Indian culture. This historical background is necessary to understand how and why the development of psychological theory in later years split into two loosely linked and yet rather distinct streams, one following the Indian tradition while the other remaining Western in style and spirit. In the mainstream, however, the Western impact continued with the choice of British, American, and Canadian Universities as preferred destinations for higher learning. The first generation of academic leaders in most of the Indian universities, therefore, were products of Western training and psychology modeled after natural science remained the dominant voice.

Psychology in Independent India (1947–)

Soon after India gained independence from the British rule, psychology witnessed an explosive growth with departments of psychology opening up in old universities as well as in a continually widening circle of new universities and institutes of technology and management. There was a similar explosion in the number of research publications in Indian as well as international journals. Despite all the exceptional growth of the field, there has been acute restlessness about the significance of the accomplishments.

Dalal ([2002](#)) complains about the

- ▶ growing disillusionment with applicability of western theories and their mindless testing in India. Their failure to resolve inner conflicts of cherishing Indian cultural values at the personal level and maintaining western orientation at professional level was reflected in their methodologically sophisticated but socially irrelevant research. Western psychological theories and research were not effective in understanding the Indian social reality. As a result, Indian psychologists became increasingly marginalised in society. (p. 95)

Regardless of such restlessness, psychological research has continued at an ever-increasing pace. As far as theories are concerned, there are notable contributions that have followed both traditional Indian as well as a few Western models. A brief overview of the more important contributions is in order.

Theoretical Contributions Following the Traditional Indian Lines

A natural reaction to finding the cultural misfit and redundancy of imported models is to turn to the rich intellectual heritage of one's own culture. A clarion call in this direction was given by Durganand Sinha ([1965](#)) asking for the integration of modern psychology with Indian thought. In a national conference in 2002 well over 150 psychologists proposed the "Pondicherry Manifesto of Indian Psychology" (The full text of the Pondicherry Manifesto of Indian Psychology is available on the following link on the Internet:

www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/i_es/i_es_corne_manifesto_frameset.htm) which repeated Sinha's call in following words:

- ▶ By Indian psychology we mean a distinct psychological tradition that is rooted in Indian ethos and thought, including the variety of psychological practices that exist in the country... Indian models of psychology would have enormous implications for health psychology, education, organizational management and human and social development. Emphasis on Indian psychology would provide a comprehensive foundation and a refreshing new and indigenous orientation to all other branches of psychology.

Two rather distinct but related lines of development in "Indian Psychology" can be identified which signify elements of resistance and protest. The first one mainly involves interpretation of

traditional approaches in light of modern perspectives. In such works, attempt is usually made to explain the relevance of traditional concepts and methods with explanations given in currently popular idiom. Foundational issues underlying theory building in terms of ontological and epistemological issues are discussed in Rao et al. (2008) and Cornelissen et al. (2011a).

There is a wide range of studies that explain how insights of traditional Indian origin contribute to the understanding of specific psychological issues. Notable in this context are publications in the fields of consciousness (Rao 2002; Cornelissen 2001), self (Paranjpe 1998), emotion (Paranjpe and Bhatt 1997), and perception and cognition (Rao 2011).

Aside from such theory building efforts based on traditional foundations, there are efforts toward the empirical validation of theories with the use of Western-style tests and measurements. Several measures have been developed to assess personality typology based on the Sāṃkhya concepts of the three strands of Prakṛti, the principle of materiality. A remarkable effort was made by Pande and Naidu (1992) to empirically examine a set of propositions from the theory of acting without attachment to results of one's action described in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. Then, they developed and validated a measure for an attitude of nonattachment, and correlated the strength of such attitude with various indices of mental health.

The dominant approach to psychological knowledge in the Indian tradition is, however, grounded in a different world view in which focus on self and self-development is valued, and the success of a theory is judged in terms of the usefulness of applications in existential benefits and spiritual progress. With the divorce of religion and science in the history of Europe typified by Galileo's inquisition, spirituality was driven into the religious camp, and it became an anathema for the "science" of psychology in the West. Most Indian psychologists simply followed this trend. But things have changed more recently; research on meditation has become common in contemporary psychology, and yoga has become a household word. In this context, theories and methods of traditional Indian origin are being recovered and critically examined and articulated in the contemporary context.

First of all, there is a burgeoning body of literature on various techniques of meditation and the measurement of their success. A review of this literature with specific reference to Indian approaches may be found in Rao (2011) and Salagame (2011). Paranjpe (2008) has adopted a case-study approach; he has examined the life history of a modern sage, Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi, to see how the traditional Advaitic method of meditation is modified and practiced in modern times, and the kind of transformation it can lead to. Similarly, he (Paranjpe 2011) has examined the life history of B.G. Tilak, a modern exponent of the Path of Action (*karma yoga*) and tried to assess how and how far he brought into action the principles he preached. Such use of case studies for validation of theories fits the distinctive character of the Indian tradition where a personal application of psychological models is crucial. The worldwide popularity of Yoga and meditation indicates the relevance of the Indian approaches where similar goals are valued. Patañjali's theory of Yoga provides the backbone of an ambitious and continuing program for the assessment of psychosomatic benefits of Yogic practices. Literature reporting the results of numerous studies is available from the website (See http://www.svyasa.org/research/research_publication.asp) of the Swami Vivekananda Yoga

University, which has become the hub of research on Yoga. Another similar source of information about ongoing research focused on psychological theories of Indian origin is the website of the Indian Psychological Institute, which is closely associated with Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry (See <http://ipi.org.in/>).

Theoretical Contributions Following Modern Western Lines

Since the growth of knowledge is socially conditioned, the developments of psychology in India including its theories and concepts need to be appreciated in the local and global historical and sociocultural matrix in which the country has been positioned. Being a developing country with millennia-old culture, a richly diverse society, and a two-century-long colonial past, India is currently aspiring to emerge as a self-reliant and economically strong nation. Faced with the challenge of socioeconomic transformation, the country has been engaged in efforts toward industrialization, modernization, and globalization. Navigating through this difficult terrain has been a complex challenge and has shaped the developments in the academic disciplines also.

India has been engaged with rapid growth of higher education and rapid expansion of professional institutions to meet the increasing demand for trained personnel in various service sectors like health, administration, banking, police, military, and management. The cultural complexity of India due to diversity in ecology, language, religion, family structure, and uneven introduction of technology has put a challenge before the planners to ensure social welfare through democratic processes. This context has shaped the course of higher education in general and psychology in particular.

The challenge to relate India's past and modern psychology was a main concern in the early period and continued since then. In fact, the search for a distinct identity for psychology in the Indian context has remained a key issue. Theoretical innovations came from the real world as well as the difficulties faced in applying psychological knowledge to the diverse problems faced in the Indian conditions. In the course of the disciplinary journey, the theoretical–conceptual ambience of the works of Indian psychologists has undergone several shifts in themes, alignments, and emphases.

The teaching and research in modern psychology began largely as an extension of the Euro-American tradition in the British period. Its initial emphasis was not so much on questioning and doubting the Western concepts and methods, but on preserving the essential configuration of the discipline and keeping it as similar to the one in the Western world, as possible. We also note that there existed a tradition of British psychoanalysts who tried to offer interpretations of the Indian psyche to justify the British rule. (Citing Christine Hartnack's work *Vahali* (2011) has discussed at length how early British psychoanalysts tried to create universal psychoanalytic conceptualizations that explain away Indian experiences of selfhood, or view them as essentially inferior, less worthy or simply pathological, or otherwise deficient. It acted as a tool to justify social oppression and colonial rule).

In the mainstream critical paradigmatic questions of ontology and epistemology were sidelined

to give space for the newly emerging positivist scientific enterprise. We find that the Western model of research and teaching provided the initial necessary direction to Indian psychologists. Dependence on Western thought was deemed legitimate owing to unexamined theoretical suppositions about the universality of psychological knowledge. It was largely in the 1970s that many psychologists raised the issue of insufficient and inadequate attention to social-psychological problems. The Indian psychologists realized that they had been indifferent to the vast and rich collection of knowledge inherent in the Indian texts. However, the commitment to scientific inquiry was venerated and debates related to the philosophy of science and related arguments could not receive due attention until the 1980s (Mukherjee [1980](#); Misra and Gergen [1993](#); Varma [1995](#)). Also, there has been a constant pressure for problem solving and application in the social world (Sinha [1986](#)).

A scrutiny of the published literature suggests that the theoretical endeavors of Indian psychologists have taken many forms (for details, see Misra and Kumar [2011](#); Pandey [1988, 2004](#)). They have been more interested in the use of theory as a heuristic device for problem solving in relation to the changing features of the social reality (e.g., technology, economy, media, environment, migration, and education) rather than formal theorization. The mismatch between western theories/concepts and Indian reality has led not only to the introduction of new concepts but also to the modification of constructs in vogue to accommodate newer aspects of reality as applicable in the Indian milieu characterized by a mix of factors demanding a balancing act between the age old traditions of oral culture, cosmological worldview, and hierarchical social order on the one hand and modern influences which emphasize more on technology, social and geographical mobility, secularism, and materialism, on the other. There are growing attempts to test the assumptions and predictions of psychological theories in the Indian context. While culturally informed studies are on rise, full scale reconceptualization or indigenous theorization has been limited.

Early Efforts

Keeping in mind the colonial background of modern learning in India, the mandate of initiating scientific psychology in the prevalent Wundtian tradition and subsequently in the behaviorist tradition was a natural choice. The eagerness to attain an independent identity for the discipline constituted the package of academic delivery consisting of empirical work, positivist metatheory, a universalistic stance, and the presumption of cultural immunity of psychological concepts and theories.

In terms of the institutional structure, psychology was earlier a part of philosophy departments. Separate psychology departments were started largely between 1940 and 1960. In order to maintain a separate identity, the teaching and research practices opted to fashion themselves as differently as possible from the parental discipline of philosophy and similar to the physical and natural science disciplines. To this end, they over-emphasized experimental psychology and psychometry – the distinctive features of the new science – and made them the core of psychology curricula which continues till today. Indeed, empiricism and quantification made possible the flourishing of an empiricist-positivist brand of psychology aimed at generating and

testing nomothetic laws as objectively as possible.

However, it will be a mistake to ignore another feature of the academic prowess of the first generation of Indian psychologists. They were also cognizant of their cultural roots and tried to address the academic as well as nonacademic audiences. In a pioneering work entitled *The Science of the Emotions*, Bhagwan Das ([1908](#)) presented a rich account of the Indian science of affect. G. S. Bose wrote about the Upanishads and mythology in Bangla language and had an academic fascination for psychoanalysis (see Dalal [2002](#)). Early researchers did attend to the theoretical issues and noted the importance of traditional knowledge but did not reject modern theories.

It is interesting to note that even during the early part of the development in India, many indigenous lines of inquiry were also prevalent. Examples that highlight this trend include Asthana's ([1950](#)) work on Sāṃkhya theory of personality and Indra Sen's ([1986](#)) elaboration of the integral psychology of Sri Aurobindo. E.G. Parameshwaran started research on the Triguṇa (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*) theory (Uma et al. [1971](#)) which has been followed by several studies (see Salagame [2011](#)). We also find works on the Indian typology of personality (Krishnan [1976/2002](#)) and tantra (Mukerji [1926](#)). Some notable works were undertaken from the Western tradition for further study. For instance, Asthana ([1960](#)) proposed that perceptual distortion is the function of the valence which an object acquires from the field structure in which it exists. In this way he tried to resolve the differences between gestalt and learning theories and incorporated Lewin's field theory. In the area of learning theories, the S-R theory was challenged by Kothurkar ([1968](#)).

Thus, we see a dual focus of the researchers. One set of works was focused on the study of phenomena pertaining to sensation, perception, psychophysics, and reaction time in the natural science tradition with the spirit of creating a universal theory which would be modern in its texture. Another set took a theoretically relevant initiative to interpret various Indian phenomena in the light of Western theories and constructs and vice versa, while also trying to develop theories based on traditional Indian concepts. The scholars were cognizant of the possibility of indigenous knowledge resources but considered scientific enlightenment as more important. The coexistence of the two traditions which had some overlap but maintained separate identities was gradually replaced by a move that led to a greater gap between the Indian ethos and the academic pursuit of psychology. The assumptions of universally shared computational notion of the mind/brain and strong empiricism were very powerful in creating the boundaries of the discipline and furnishing the criteria of inclusion and exclusion.

Under the prevailing academic culture, Indian psychologists' theoretical engagement remained confined to attempts at enlarging the scope of a set of explanatory (independent) variables that may enhance predictive power in accounting for a set of chosen (dependent) variables. Thus mapping quantitative variations in psychological variables was the main research strategy. Other theoretical and methodological approaches (e.g., Indian, spiritual, qualitative, and discursive) were marginalized on account of their doubtful scientific status and consequently underrated as knowledge claims.

Against this backdrop, it was natural that testing (western/universal) psychological ideas on Indian samples or creating the Indian version of Western tests/tools/concepts became a major preoccupation. This led to proliferation of adaptation and adoption of tests in different areas like intelligence and personality. The practice of psychology remained Western in content and orientation, and used Western academic developments as standards for comparison. This was done as an authentic and legitimate academic practice and got reflected in teaching programs and choice of research topics. The traditional Western models from behaviorism, schema theory, Gestalt school, Pavlovian theory, and information processing theory were popular. Similarly, theories by Cattell, Eysenck, Erikson, McClelland, Piaget, and Herzberg served as some of the dominant frameworks of Indian psychologists for conceptualizing psychological issues and explanations. The researchers were dominated by the mindset that psychological characteristics are stable and reliable dispositions subject to quantification. On the other hand, cognitive processes were handled in terms of concrete and manipulable entities. The positivist methodology was dominant and critical determinant of the choice of problems, variables, processes, and practices. Theory was treated as a copy or map of reality. A strong correspondence between the two was emphasized. There was explicit and implicit endorsement of biology as the ultimate, and reductionism became a strong belief. Affective and social phenomena were mere derivatives of biological and cognitive processes which were foundational. All this was going on in terms of an image of science and scientific practices that did not bother about the dynamic nature of social reality and social conditioning of knowledge. The “basic problem”, as Nandy and Kakar ([1980](#)) have observed, involved “dependence on conceptual frameworks which are not intrinsic to the experience of society” (p. 159).

A Socially Relevant Psychology

In the 1980s, several lines of investigation across many domains of social psychological processes showed that many of the phenomena reported in Western research literature required different explanations rooted in the Indian cultural milieu. Examples of this kind are found in the areas of social cognition. Thus predictions from attribution theory with socially and culturally specific causal categories were tested for understanding achievement, health, and other aspects of human behavior (Dalal [1988](#)). The change took place when psychologists found the applications of Western theories/methods to be either ineffective or irrelevant in real life situations in India. A selective overview of some of these developments in key areas is presented below.

Human cognition: Researches on attention, emotion, and consciousness (see Srinivasan [2011](#)), by using multiple methods and approaches, have shown cross-cultural aspects of emotion as well as of meditation, in terms of underlying neurophysiology. There are also researches on philosophical aspects of cognition that view cognition and other mental phenomena as central to the functioning of all living beings. To put it another way, the fundamental principles governing cognition run from a single cell to human societies.

Planning is a key intellectual function. Extending the earlier work on PASS (Planning, Attention, Successive, and Simultaneous Processes) theory, Das et al. ([2000](#)) have brought out its significance in various cognitive functions. Srivastava and Misra ([2007](#)) have developed an

indigenous conceptualization of intelligence and termed it integral intelligence. It has four dimensions: cognitive competence, social competence, competence in action, and emotional competence. The analysis of creativity has been undertaken from a culturally informed position (Misra et al. [2006](#)).

Sinha (see Misra and Tripathi [2004](#)) was perhaps the first one in India to emphasize the role of sociocultural context in understanding cognitive development. Following this tradition, R.C. Mishra ([1997](#)) has been investigating the ways in which basic cognitive processes like perception and memory get shaped and manifested under diverse eco-cultural settings. Pirta ([2011](#)) has investigated native cognition in Himalayas and has endeavored to develop a bio-ecological framework integrating ecology, biology, and behavior.

Attitude and social cognition: With the political independence of the country in 1947, the highest challenge was that of the problem of communal tension arising out of partition. This led to studies of conflicts, prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination, and violence. Since then it has remained a productive area of research. These studies were directed toward measuring attitudes, stereotypes, and cognitions and relating them to a number of contextual and dispositional variables. Also, there was the challenge of social and national development of reality and psychology played the role of identifying the facilitators of, and resistances to, the process of development.

In interesting rumor studies, Prasad ([1935](#)) examined the responses to an earthquake in Bihar, and published a comparative analysis of earthquake rumors which provided basis for cognitive dissonance theory.

Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy* (Nandy [1983](#)) and *Illegitimacy of Nationalism* (see Nandy [2004](#)) and Sudhir Kakar's *The Colors of Violence* (Kakar [1995](#)) have touched on the cultural-historical aspects of selfhood and intergroup relations, indicating the need to attend to macro aspects to capture and understand the psychosocial systems. Further, such works encouraged psychologists to employ other methods to understand human behavior. A major programmatic and cross-cultural work based on studies in the Netherlands and India is by De Ridder and Tripathi ([1992](#)) recognized the prominence of group norms in intergroup behavior. They pointed out that norm violation by one group leads to a chain of negative reactions by both groups and, if this sequence continues, it is likely to escalate violent behavior.

Singh ([2011](#)) has systematically examined judgment and decision-making within the framework of information integration theory. His work spanning over a period of more than 3 decades has found that Indians use averaging, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing rules and their combinations. Such cognitive algebra, however, represents causal beliefs and not mathematical calculations.

Research in the area of distributive justice has focused on principles of distributive justice. L. Krishnan ([2005](#)) has analyzed the Indian notion of *dāna* (charity) and has drawn attention to its nuances with respect to deservingness in the Indian tradition.

The above works demonstrate a significant shift in research thinking and execution, where the psychologist seeks a realistic appraisal of the problems in the Indian context. This socially relevant focus helps in understanding everyday social issues, caste, and religious identities, intergroup behavior, justice, and nation building. The need for Indian psychologists to be rooted within the sociocultural and historical contexts was and is repeatedly emphasized.

Psychology of poverty and deprivation: The study of poverty and deprivation has been an important area of research where researchers in different parts of the country (e.g., Rath at Bhubaneswar, A.K. Singh at Ranchi, D. Sinha at Allahabad, L.B. Tripathi and G. Misra at Gorakhpur) moved in many directions and have mapped the diverse effects of poverty, social disadvantage, and deprivation (for a comprehensive review see Misra and Tripathi [2004](#)). Most of these studies have situated deprivation in the experiential-environmental context and have traced its detrimental influences back to aspects of development. The detrimental effects of poverty are accentuated by the unfavorable proximal environment of the child. Thus, intervention should address not only the cognitive-attentional drawbacks of the children but also the conditions prevailing in the family and school settings. They should be planned to create in the people a sense of empowerment to effect change in their life conditions. Unfortunately, the planning rooted in the Western model of development often ignores the traditional attitudes, beliefs, and values, and considers them antithetical to development ideology. There is growing evidence that social-psychological problems of Indian society are now being increasingly addressed by psychologists.

The challenge of achievement: The economic and social development was an important concern for a developing country like India. The theoretical analysis by McClelland underscored the significance of achievement motivation (n-Ach) as a driving engine for development. The lack of emphasis on individualistic and competitive spirit and independence were identified as the main causes of underachievement. This became the basis for a major intervention program at Kakinada in Tamil Nadu, as reported in *Motivating Economic Achievement* (McClelland and Winter [1969](#)). It provided impetus for promoting entrepreneurship. The relevance of achievement motivation theory was, however, Indian challenged (e.g., Sinha [1968](#)). The perceived value of various achievement goals is determined by the expectations of significant others. The concepts of “extension motivation” (Pareek [1968](#)), “dependency proneness” (Sinha [1968](#)), “achievement value” (Mukherjee [1974](#)), and “dissatisfaction-based achievement motivation” (Mehta [1972](#)) are important contributions.

Organizational behavior: Rapid industrialization in the 1960s led to recognition of the need to study the labor-management relationship and organizational effectiveness. Chakraborty ([1995](#)) has brought into focus the critical role of values in managerial transformation, as well as ethics in management. R. Gupta ([2002](#)) emphasized the need to go beyond the American and Japanese models of organizational behavior, and develop models specific to the Indian conditions.

The concept of “nurturant task leadership” proposed by J.B.P. Sinha ([1980](#)) was an innovation showing the need for developing a theory relevant to culture-specific aspects of organizational behavior. It emphasized nurturance, dependency, personalized relationship, and status consciousness from the Indian cultural context and combined them with the contingency

approach and the principle of reinforcement.

Individualism-collectivism, self, and identity: Indian scholarship has shown that the elements of Indian selfhood are complex and it is difficult to categorize it as either individualist or collectivist. Sinha and Tripathi (1994) see that there is the presence of individualist as well as collectivist aspects of self indicating a kind of “coexistence of opposites.” Mascolo et al. (2004) have demonstrated multifacetedness of the representation and experience of Indian self. They propose four ways of conceptualizing selfhood: independent, interdependent, relational, and encompassing. In addition, there are text-based, theoretical, in-depth, and extensive analyses – like the ones on the Indian views of self and identity (Paranjpe 1984, 1998), concept of self in the Sufi tradition (Beg 1970) – which offer insights to selfhood and identity embedded in the Indian traditions in which higher or “spiritual self” occupy important place.

Sinha and Pandey (2007) have proposed that Indian people function with diverse mindsets in different contexts. Thus, they manifest a materialist mindset in multinational organizations, and dependence prone or collectivist mindset in family owned, bureaucratic, and/or traditional organizations. They noted that Indians are holistic in terms of combining excellence in work, personalized relationships, abstract thinking, emotionality, rationality, and spirituality in those organizations that valued both performance and people. Materialistic mindset was associated with manipulative behavior, and a holistic mindset with a proactive stance that manifested in innovative and extraordinary performance under inspiring superiors; both materialistic and holistic mindsets were instrumental to success at work, in different organizational contexts. The use of mindset varied depending on the cultural context.

Cultural psychology of emotions: In this area, certain indigenous concepts with culturally specific implications such as *lajjā* (shame) (Menon and Shweder 1994) and *bhakti* (devotion to God) (Paranjpe 1998) have been recovered and elaborated. At another level, depersonalized, transcendental and transformative aspects of the *rasa* experience have been delineated (Paranjpe and Bhatt 1997).

Health, human development and well-being: The Indian ideas and concepts like *ahamkāra* (Salagame 2011), *anāsakti* (Pande and Naidu 1992) have been explored, as are implications for health of various issues particularly relevant for the Indian context, for example, experience of crowding (Jain 1987), notions of health and well-being (Dalal and Misra 2005), and Hindu parents’ ethno theories (Saraswathi, and Ganapathy 2002). Neki (1973) has tried to build therapeutic interventions for the promotion of mental health and well-being using yoga and has come up with a model called *Guru-Chela* therapy which involves the teacher-disciple relationship developed in the Indian tradition. Kakar’s *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors* has become a classic which talks about indigenous healing practices. It clearly indicates the role of traditional healers in maintaining mental health in traditional societies. In *The Inner World*, Kakar has tried to present the interplay of the universal processes of development and the specific aspects of Indian social reality. He comprehensively tries to weave the story of development, health, passion and relationship by drawing from various sources including religious ideals, traditions, and institutions that constitute a society (see Kakar 1996; Vahali 2011).

These dimensions of psychology are leading psychologists to develop theories and concepts which do not take from any Western thought, but derive entirely from Indian traditions of thought.

Move Toward Indigenization

The indigenous thought systems remained neglected because there was a strong aversion toward them owing to doubts regarding their scientific status, contemporaneous relevance, and ontological suppositions (see Gergen et al. [1996](#)). Psychological theories and constructs were taken as intrinsically biological, materialistic/objective in content, and quantitative in methodological approach. Therefore psychology, like other natural and physical sciences, was thought to be culture and psychological processes as distributed/shared uniformly across diverse cultures and sub-cultures.

This spurred the need for a radical change in cross-cultural psychology's universalist stance, and its almost exclusive focus on the discovery of panhuman patterns of behavior. "There was an implicit assumption that the definition of... concepts and their measurement as proposed by the Western research workers will also hold good in our cultural context" (Mukherjee [1980](#)). The signs of efforts to outgrow the alien frame were noticed in the 1970s. The search for a new identity became a major question. Culture-specific concepts, and a search for culturally appropriate methods and tools were emphasized and the relevance of culture was realized. In this context, the interaction with cross-cultural and cultural psychologists has provided important impetus. Gradually, blending scientific ways with indigenous concepts emerged as an important academic agenda (Sinha [1997](#)). Ramanujan ([1990](#)) has emphasized context sensitivity as the key feature of Indian way of thinking. Critical reflections (Misra and Gergen [1993](#); Nandy [2004](#); Varma [1995](#)) have drawn attention to the limitations of natural science-based approaches and to new possibilities. It was realized that an understanding of Indian social reality would benefit from indigenous psychological knowledge and the discipline should contribute to the programs of socioeconomic development.

Rao ([2002](#), [2011](#)) has discussed human cognitive processes from the perspective of *Sāṃkhya-Yoga* system. According to this system, there are two principles that govern our existence – *puruṣa* (consciousness) and *prakṛti* (matter). *Puruṣa* is pure consciousness and has no quality or characteristics of its own; it is inert and formless. *Prakṛti*, on the other hand, is the material basis of our being. In Yoga, *citta* denotes the functional mind, which comprises of not only the cognitive processes, the ego and the senses, but also contains instinctual tendencies (*vāsnās*) inherited from previous lives and the effect of past actions in the present life (*saṃskāras*). They influence our cognitions and predispose us to behave in certain ways.

In Yoga, *citta* controls our actions. Information processing in *citta* may take place at three levels that is, *buddhi*, *ahamkāra* (egoic self), and *manas*. *Manas*, the central processing unit, selects information provided by the sensory system and processes them. *Ahamkāra* (the emotional self) appropriates the processed information from *manas* and considers it as required by the perceiving person. And, *buddhi* decides and plans the actions and reactions in an appropriate

manner.

The above discussion indicates the gradual inclination of Indian psychologists to move from Western theories, models, and modes of research toward an indigenous approach to theories and methods. We note the continued use of Western theories; yet they are consistently being tested in the Indian context. A beginning toward cultural sensitivity in the form of culture-based concepts, theories, and methods has been made. Today an Indian psychology is emerging which promises a broad theoretical foundation for the exploration of human consciousness (Yoga), and radical psychological transformation. Its applications are found in modern areas like organizational behavior (Chakraborty [1995](#); Gupta [2002](#)). Accounts of the states and contents of mental functions regulating responsible human conduct available in vast Indian texts and practices is being rediscovered in a more contemporary context. It emphasizes a kind of perspective which is practical path or life ways that allow pursuit of balanced living and enjoying well-being and equanimity through self transformation and personal growth. The universal consciousness and transcendence requires methods that combine sensory, mental and spiritual tools and innovative theoretical paradigms. The recent publications on Indian psychology (e.g., Cornelissen et al. [2011a, b](#); Gupta [1999](#); Joshi and Cornelissen [2004](#); Misra [2011](#); Rao [2011](#); Rao et al. [2008](#); Salagame [2011](#)) clearly indicate a serious move in the direction of creating and using *samvada* (dialogue) for better understanding. The conceptual network is being extended. The current theoretical developments such as feminism, subaltern studies, critical theory, and post modernism are providing new ways of engaging with reality. The life world is being appreciated in newer ways and options are generated. There have been enabling moments that have helped Indian psychologists to go beyond the constraints. Promising elements of critique as well as reconstruction are seen.

Concluding Observations

Indian psychology in the twenty-first century shows that the initial emphasis on the replication of Western studies has given way to socially relevant research, and that there is a shift from experimental work (micro) toward understanding the psychocultural contexts (macro) using qualitative approaches.

Academicians have come to appreciate the depth, wisdom, and insightfulness of Indian thought traditions, and that it is possible to develop a scientific psychology based upon them. There are small but definite steps toward changing the content and quality of Indian psychology. Indian psychology endeavors not only to study the person and the causes and consequences of his/her behavior, but the process of transformation of the entire self, its growth and well-being. It is being realized that the psychological world is an intentional world that evolves in the matrix of the culture. Therefore, we need to look at psychological processes within cultural contexts, holistically. With these directions and prospects, the move toward indigenous psychology holds promise for the future of the discipline. The journey toward an indigenous psychology is in progress.

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