

The Lecture Contains:

- World Wars
- The social movements of 1960s
- Methodology for the study
- Social Psychology in Independent India
- Social psychological applications in contemporary India

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- The assumptions of objectivity or value-neutrality in the theories or research in social psychology have been deconstructed as the so-called 'empirical' research actually uses as a hypothetico-deductive approach (Gergen, 1997; Moghaddam & Harre, 1995). Moreover, as Gergen (1997) noted, much of research and theorization in the field of social psychology originated as a response to the social concerns or demands of a particular historical era. This lecture reiterates the importance of understanding the historical contingency of theorization and research in social psychology. It then takes up the nature and focus of research in social psychology in India. Finally, the lecture brings our attention to the contemporary social issues and problem faced by modern societies, especially the third world countries and accentuates the need for alternative perspectives and methodologies to address these.

World Wars

- It is of historical importance to note that the World War I gave rise to many issues to be addressed by social sciences. One among them was to predict the behaviour of people correctly. This had a major impact on the then social psychology as we may notice that after the World War I, behaviourist principles of human behaviour were given far more emphasis by social psychology in their research than the instinct-based psychology of McDougall, which was a dominant school of thought within social psychology.
- Similarly, World War II gave rise to an increase in the study of persuasion and social cooperation in the societies at war. Also, after the war, research into prejudice and racial intolerance gained substantial momentum. For example, the study of authoritarian personality (types of people showing negative attitude and behaviour towards people who are different from their own group members) took place besides an increased momentum in the study of attitude and attitude change.

The social movements of 1960s

- Sampson (1993) made an attempt to illustrate to the psychologists and social scientists that a paradigm shift in psychology or social psychology is not just a matter associated with an intellectual debate. He showed through a systematic analysis of the reasons behind the four social movements (a misrepresentation and stigmatization of the identities of women, African Americans, third world country people and the sexually deviant people) in the USA that the dominant positivist paradigm within psychology and social psychology became a tool in the hands of the dominant sections of the society to legitimize a forced and stigmatized identities of the members of the movements. He, in the same articles also presented a case for paradigm shift within social psychology that provided alternative theoretical frameworks and methodologies.
- As noticed earlier in the first few lecture of this course, similar to Sampson's (1993) realizations, Gergen (1997) too pointed out how he could himself experience a "crisis" in social psychology as it ignored the intricate associations of human experiences with the socio-cultural meaning systems prevailing in a historical era. Both of them put forward the need for a paradigm shift in the discipline that came under sharp criticism during 1960s and 1970s.

Social Psychology in Independent India

- Until the beginning of the twentieth century, indigenous model of the social or moral behaviour were coded and prescribed in the ancient Indian philosophical texts. As Dalal and Misra (2002; p. 36) pointed out, the modern social psychology in India was an application of concepts from the West:

“What constitutes traditional social psychology in the West can be rechristened as modern social psychology in India. As mentioned earlier, traditional (or ancient) social psychology is largely a derivative of scriptures like the Dharmshastras, Nitishastras, Smritis, Arthashastras, Mahabharat, and Puranas. The concepts and principles of social psychology inherent in these texts not only mirrored Indian society but also prescribed models of social behaviour till the beginning of twentieth century.”

- After the independence of India, the Prime Minister Nehru sought development through economic growth models of the West. Besides, Western science and technology were imported also for social sciences and psychology. Dalal and Misra (2002; pp. 37-38) elaborated on this :

“After independence, Prime Minister Nehru was keen to put India on par with the West as far as economic development was concerned. He considered the adoption of Western science and technology as the panacea for rapid socioeconomic growth of the country. As a result, there was wholesale import of Western science, a phenomenon which affected psychology as well. ...As a case in point, greatly disturbed by the mass scale communal violence during India's partition, Nehru sought the help of UNESCO to conduct large-scale studies on communalism and social violence.”

Social Psychology in Independent India(...continued)

- A paradigm shift in social sciences and psychology was evident among the works of some of the social psychologists of India. For example, as Dalal and Misra (2002, p. 39) noted, McClelland's concepts of human needs were researched upon and challenged in the Indian context :

"In the early 1960s, McClelland's (1961) n-Ach theory attracted the attention of a large number of Indian psychologists. Some of them were convinced by his argument that an important cause of India's underdevelopment was the low achievement level of its people. The Small Scale Industrial Training Institute was set up in Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh, where many Indian psychologists collaborated with McClelland to provide entrepreneurial training along the lines of his theory. J.B.P Sinha (1968) questioned the usefulness of n-Ach theory in the Indian sociocultural and economic context. He found that under scarce resource conditions, high n-Ach did not facilitate helping behaviour. The later experimental work of J.B.P. Sinha and Pandey (1970) showed that in two high n-Ach groups, the selfish type tended to hoard resources more than the altruistic type. This raised doubts about the relevance of McClelland's theory in the Indian context. Work in the area of achievement motivation took a different turn in the 1980s with the focus shifting to understanding the meaning of achievement in Indian context"

- Such a paradigm shift towards indigenous or socio-culturally meaningful research in social psychology was anticipated by one of the prominent psychologists of India, Girindrashekhara Bose (1938; p. 15):

"...time was not distant when it will be able to open new paths for itself. The field is exceedingly rich and good harvest awaits the earnest and intelligent workers. Much fruitful work may be done in folk and social psychology."

Social psychological applications in contemporary India

- What follows from above is that an uncritical import of the concepts and theories from the West may not always be the answer to the questions that people's reality may pose to the social sciences dealing with the issues and concerns of societies. In today's world and India, marginalization, alienation due to breaking of relational network, and inter-group conflicts are some of the major concerns where context-sensitive understanding of human experiences and worldview are the need of the hour. Kleinman, Das and Lock (1997, pp. ix-x) pointed out :

"Social suffering is shared across high-income and low-income societies, primarily affecting, in such different settings, those who are desperately poor and powerless. This is not merely a statistical correlation, but a causal web in the global political economy. Many of the same sources of breakdown, violence, emerging infectious diseases, and mental and social health problems are at work among poor population worldwide."

- Clearly the role of culture and social structures in shaping human experiences can not be overemphasized and for that alternative methodologies and conceptualization are warranted.