

Indigenous Psychology and Development

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to examine how the commonplace and academic use of indigenous or native psychology can lead to the **understanding of the local narratives of development**. It is a known fact that the modern notion of development is very much Eurocentric in nature. The World Bank notion of development has been inspired by the way the United States and the other Western countries perceive the underdeveloped countries. My paper will try to trace the linkages between the notions of development that are culturally and psychologically reproduced by the people of the Third World particularly South Asia. A comparative analysis of the existing notions of development will I hope highlight the ideological contradictions and antagonisms inherent in them. The use of indigenous psychology has been opted for in this paper because of the fact that it is the branch of psychology which will help us to understand what development means for a peasant in Honduras or for a woman weaver in Manipur. **The paper's humble endeavor would be to develop a comparative scheme of how people conceptualize development around the world** and with the help of a sociological perspective I will try to understand the role of social factors like that of culture, economy etc in shaping development thought. Positive structural changes and government policies should take into account the perspective of the underdeveloped populations who are the primary stakeholders of the development process.

Research Questions:

Q. How native or indigenous psychology can be used to understand the notions of development as perceived by the people of the third world or the underdeveloped world?

Q. Can an academic approach to study the native perspectives of development be formulated that **combines the use of both psychology and sociology**?

Keywords used:

Indigenous psychology, development, underdeveloped countries, Culture and Society

INDIGENOUS PSYCHOLOGY:

At the beginning of this paper I would like to pen down a word of caution. Being a student of Sociology Honors, I have referred to sociological facts and authors to support my arguments and research questions of this paper. This might give an impression to the reader that my paper is entirely sociological, devoid of any psychological insights. However Sociology as a discipline tends to study the entire **social structure** of a particular

society in its own cultural setting. This I believe is identical with the aims and objectives of native psychology which seeks to study the **psychological perspectives** of people also in their own cultural or indigenous settings. Hence I have tried to propose an academic approach that tends to understand the cultural, psychological and social perspectives of a person with the help of both psychology and sociology. The main essence of this approach would be to examine the **worldview** as well as the **psychological ideologies** of the indigenous people and what they exactly mean by development. The reader may also feel that through instances and examples I have demonized the West and victimized the West. However the dichotomy has been referred to highlight the way in which the psychologies of the people comprising the two areas differ from each other. **Both of them have their own distinctive and peculiar characteristics which native psychology does take into account and which is why it can be used to understand what development for different people is.**

After all it would be futile to assume that development as a thought process and theory is composed of the universal and uniform ideas that epitomize westernization and modernization. Instead I would propose that each of the ideas and perspectives of development that have evolved over the ages by not only primitive or ancient societies but also recently by the countries belonging to the third world. Authoritarian rule which curtails freedom of expression and people's opinion is replaced by an ardent desire who want not only economic growth but also wish to be a part of a robust political process that demands **democracy and human rights**.

As I research deep into understanding what actually is indigenous psychology, I am frequently encountered with the need of **modeling Western psychology on the ideals of culture, history and social values of the people who make up the indigenous or the native population belonging to the Asian, South American and Asian continents**. As pointed out by Kim and Berry (1993), "Indigenous Psychology means the scientific study of human behavior that is native; that is not transported from other regions and that is designed for its own people". Thus it is implied that indigenous or native psychology is a scientific discipline that applies to the study of a particular ethnic or cultural group as to how they perceive the world for developing a systematic body of psychological knowledge. **Yang (2000) defined indigenous psychology as "an evolving system of psychological knowledge based on scientific research that is sufficiently compatible with the studied phenomena and their ecological, economic, social, cultural, and historical contexts"**. He pointed out that all these definitions "express the same basic goal of developing a scientific knowledge system that effectively reflects, describes, explains, or understands the psychological and behavioral activities in their native contexts in terms of culturally relevant frames of reference and culturally derived categories and theories" (pp. 245-246).

Thus it can be proved that indigenous psychology can be very well used to understand what a peasant of Vidarbha or a coffee plantation worker of

Columbia perceives development to be. What the paper would suggest is that there is a need to *think on native lines* about development. Even though the age old ideology that countries like India are the lands of snake charmers and are in mysterious in nature, are beginning to wither away with the improvement in communication and also with the growth of **an indigenous academia**.

Introduction:

The so called natives or the non civilized populations of the world were first brought into the awareness of the civilized world through the various anthropological works undertaken in order to facilitate the British rule and establish communication with these natives. The work of Evans Pritchard among the Nuer of South Sudan which is one of the cardinal texts for sociology students was in fact sanctioned by the British administration existing in colonial Africa during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Anthropological studies around the world have unearthed various facts about primitive and inaccessible tribes. In India, M.N Srinivas conducted extensive fieldworks on the Coorgs of Mysore. However these studies were conducted out of sheer curiosity. This was not the era of development as it is today. However the anthropological studies did enable was to establish direct contact between the 'ruler and the ruled'. Harry Truman's Four Point speech in the year 1949 introduced the term "underdeveloped" in the academic and mainstream discourse. After the Second World War, the United States of America emerged as the sole hegemonic economic superpower. As a consequence of which the country and its allies sought to impose its ideologies of modernization and economic development on the newly independent 'underdeveloped' countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa. One of the primary intentions of the so called developed capitalist countries was to eliminate the immediate threat of communism which was apparent with the rise of the Soviet Union. Therefore for this 'noble and uplifting of the underdeveloped task' various international institutions like that of the World Bank and even the United Nations to a great extent became their agents. These agents pursued economic policies which reflected the interests of the developed world.

Thus the economically backward countries were all **clubbed together** under the title 'underdeveloped' irrespective of the different social and cultural needs of these countries. Thus the white **World Bank official was now the master and the rescuer of these backwards countries.**

The native conception of development- ignored:

One of the major faults in this conception of development was the fact that it does not take into account the **peculiarities of the social and cultural contexts of the countries** which required not only economic development but also human security. Rapid industrialization of the developing countries has reduced them to factories for the developed countries unbalancing their ecologies and environments alike. For instance, Andre Gunder Frank using his **metropolitan- satellite theory** critiques the modern day industrialization. Offering a neo Marxist critique, he says that indeed the developed nations (metropolitan) take away the economic surplus arising out of the production undertaken in the factories of the Underdeveloped countries (the satellite). As a consequence, the satellite countries become subjected to the whims and fancies of the developed countries leading to the birth of poverty and social backwardness in these countries. In Latin American especially in that of Spain, feudal estates known as the *Latifundia* where slavery and bonded labour strived in the medieval times still exists today as it provides cheap labour to the multinational factories of Spain.

The Marxist approach to understanding

The birth of the social science since the time of Marx has been closely associated with the study of industrialization as one of the primary indicators of development. With industrialization in Europe the birth of the two antagonistic classes of the owners and the workers was seen. There was tension between the two classes because the former would always pocket the surplus while the latter would be compelled to perform the same monotonous tasks day in and day out; whilst being deprived of the profits accruing out of the increased production of goods. This monotony would lead to his eventual alienation not only from his family but also from himself as he tries to earn his bread by absorbing himself in daily drudgery ignoring his creative pursuits. Marx's work even though Eurocentric has

indeed deep profound psychological implications. His principle of capitalistic accumulation is in direct opposition to the spirit of the protestant ethic in which Weber talks about how capitalism pursuing profits is seen as an end in itself. To interpret this from a **psychological perspective**, it can be argued that people may earn and accumulate more profits to indulge in more charity and pro social activities. I am talking about capitalism because it was the first ever major mode of production that could initiate economic development highlighting the role of industries as the centers of mass scale commercial production. However this was the case of European countries where industrial revolution led to mass production while ignore the humane aspect; sparking off revolutions in the future.

In the case of the Asiatic mode of production, it can well be argued that Marx generalized a lot about the consequences of the industrialization. He actually thought that the process of **industrialization** would bring about the **same effects** on all the countries across the world. This is where native psychology of India should have been taken into account. For instance, according to Marx it was due to imperialism and capitalism that the feudal and backward countries of Asia and Africa were made aware of their rampant poverty and hence it provided them an impetus to develop themselves economically.

The need for native or indigenous psychology felt: Marx's analysis about the Asiatic mode of production which he did without conducting any prior fieldwork in India or any other Asian countries tells us that he had not taken into account the various contingencies and peculiarities inherent in the production system of various countries. Even though he acknowledges the presence of the village economies which were economically self-sufficient, however he fails understand the **deindustrialization of the Indian handicraft industry** which was a direct outcome of the British economy's decision to grow commercial crops.

The crops which used to sustain the farmers were substituted under the British rule with crops that were grown for purely commercial purposes like that of cotton and indigo. This proved disastrous for areas which were very much drought prone in nature for instance in Bengal and Maharashtra.

However psychologically, it could well be argued that **ignoring the native psychology of the local agriculturists which were very much oriented towards subsistence crop was a flawed administrative tactic of the British administrators.** Had they incorporated the knowledge of the local administrators, the British would have been well acquainted with the characteristics and peculiarities of the Indian agricultural policies. The Bengal Famine of 1943 that stuck pre partition British India was a direct outcome of the wrong policies pursued by the British to rule not only India but also the entire Indian subcontinent.

The **native psychology** which advocates the study of the worldview or *Weltanschauung* of people in their particular **cultural setting** has to be studied in a different light especially in the era of development. The academic sphere, the economic planners of the West and the institutions of the so called liberalized and modernized west had made **long and unverified assumptions** about the post colonial societies and economies of the West. For too long there have been made wrong generalizations about what would be development for the newly independent countries. As I read through the various accounts of people writing about their native perspectives about development, I come to realize **how our own thoughts and ideologies about the development have been influenced by what the West thinks of development.** Even the United Nations and other so called non partisan world organizations have not been spared by these generalized assumptions. What the developed world has done is to construct **ideal types** of what would be development for the so called 'underdeveloped' economies of the world. Various authors like that of Andre Gunder Frank, Gustavo Esteva and Chandra Mohanty have all argued that there is a need to produce original and local narratives of development.

Native Psychology for Women:

For instance Mohanty, argues that women in the **West have formed definite images of their bodies** and even psychologically the suffragette and equality demanding woman have been more vocal about their rights as equal stakeholders of the

development of their society. Thus it was naturally thought that women too in the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa who were still battling with poverty would lead feminist movements demanding gender equality and emancipation.

However as seen in India, the role of women in society have always been restricted by the steel grip of patriarchy. Even though this has been very well recognized in the academic sphere, however in the policy and also at the **grassroots level** and at the **actual field level** there has been very **little academic work to understand the native psychology of women in the third world.** Women studies have been instrumental in pointing out to the fact that indeed women themselves have been playing an important role in **propagating patriarchy** by adopting hostile attitudes towards fellow women (Veena Das) (1979).

The feminist movements around the world are the best examples where we can examine the working of the native psychology of women. This is because women around the world face different problems (demands for pay hike and suffragettes) in comparison to the women of South Asia (alcoholism and dowry deaths). Even in India there has not been any united feminist movement as the idea of feminism is restricted to the academic and elite sections of women who could organize themselves but unfortunately could not identify themselves with the needs and preferences of the grassroots rural woman. The latter are left to be helped by the NGOs and INGOs working at the rural level or in the slums. The white empowered woman was seen as the rescuer of the women in burkha and the women working in the brick mills. What the white empowered women failed to recognize was the fact that the yellow, brown and black woman was different. She is a product of a completely different cultural and social setting. In India itself where there are inherent **class differences**, a woman belonging to a family of the Tata or Birlas cannot be expected to understand the pain or suffering endured by a woman living in Dharavi who might be harassed everyday by men on her way to work or who might be forced to share a washroom with hundreds of other people.

The main question is what exactly goes into the making of the psychology of these women who have to face different obstacles in different social settings and still cope with the new challenges that development as a new socio-economic phenomena tends to throw at them? Let me quote the Narmada Bachao Andolan that sought to 'develop India' by building the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the river Narmada. **This is a classic example where the World Bank backed project failed to take into account the ill effects of development ignoring the native perceptions of development.** The submersion of the villages around the river Narmada is a direct testimony of this fact.

Native psychology would have taken care of the fact that do women and men in the remotest parts of a country like do care for their environment and as yet desire development. Therefore what is required is a **strong collective consciousness or cultural mindedness** through which non Western psychologists and sociologists would be able to take into account the cultural factors of their own societies in their research rather than ignoring them. This is obvious in the various policies adopted by the Indian government post independence.

The Case of India- Native Psychology:

Reiterating the need to understand the psychology of the indigenous and native populations by trying to examine their world view, I would like to highlight here the policies adopted by the Indian government in post independence India. In India after independence, it was seen that a lot of emphasis was placed on rapid industrialization. While ignoring the fact that majority of the population still lived in the villages and depended on agriculture for their livelihoods. According to Jonathan Barry, a study on Satnami laborers of the BHEL industry tells us that **psychologically** farmers were not really prepared to work in the industry because they were not really positive about employment in industries which required a lot of **technical education**.

In the 1960s, the **Green Revolution** was started to 'develop' the agricultural sector of the country and to make sure its economic benefits percolate down to the **small peasants**. This was supposed to be achieved by the introduction of the **High Yield Variety seeds** which was on the contrary **accessible**

financially to the rich and upper class farmers only. The poor farmers who needed the inputs to enrich their production could not avail these facilities due to lack of financial assistance. For the small peasant the **lack of state assistance** and a proper support system to help them and assist in taking agricultural loans were completely lacking. The revolution only strengthened and empowered the already affluent capitalist farmers in rain fed areas. If the policymakers would have tried to conduct **detailed fieldworks** and tried to understand the needs and perspectives of the small peasants, then the situation would have been different. One of the important fieldworks that should have been conducted before the introduction of the HYV seeds was the **credit taking capacity** of small peasants. This would have reduced the burden on the small peasants.

The trickle-down effect evidently did not work in the Indian agrarian sector. **The examination of the native psyche post the green revolution reveals disastrous effects on the drought prone areas where farmer suicides became a daily affair.**

I would like to quote Peter Berger over here who argued that **development implies the sacrifice of the living standards of the present generation to bring about a future utopia.** This is indeed true. We cannot expect the interests of the aboriginal and the indigenous population of the third world to be sacrificed at the altar of development or to be compromised so that they can function as the satellite of the First World. The native psychology of the people studied in a particular cultural setting has to be taken into account. The deforestation of the Amazon Forests annually have threatened the original habitat of the **indigenous Peruvian people** as they do not formally hold ownership titles over the forest. (Simon, 2004, New York Times)

The beginning of the need for native psychology:

Thus while economic development in India was thought to be a direct product of industrialization; it was also thought that the economic growth development would percolate down to all sections of the Indian society. However on the contrary it led to psychological and social alienation of a group of people who could not reap benefits of this economic transformation.

This is why Ramachandra Guha in his book *Sociology and the Dilemmas of Development* says that development often challenges the status quo of the existing society. He says that, "As a process of directed social change, development implies the **radical restructuring** of people's lives and livelihood patterns of a million people. At the everyday level, the application of **modern science and technology** alter economic and social life". Guha's summing up of what exactly development is true to a great extent for the failed experiment of green revolution.

There are people trying to survive at the **periphery** of the country's economy who could not benefit from the country's capitalist policies. The people living in the slums or the people who operate outside the **country's legal system**- were the ones who were alienated from the so called benefits of development.

The Naxalite movement of the 1960s can be in fact proclaimed a consequence of this alienation. According to Nandan Nilekani (Imagining India-The Idea of a Renewed Nation) (2009), the country right now at this stage is experiencing a **huge demographic dividend** where the **youth occupy a huge proportion of the population**. This is a phenomenon which is not witnessed in the developed countries. However the potential of the youth in India especially remains untapped as educational opportunities and employment opportunities do not reach every one of them. This leads to terrorism and gives birth to slums which become the hotbed of criminal activities.

Native or indigenous psychology will help development theorists to be able to deal with the rationale behind the rise of the drug wars in Mexico and also provide a framework to deal with problems of gender injustice, fight for indigenous resources and also the rise of the radical left in countries.

Various critiques like Amartya Sen have critiqued the obsession of economic growth as the only important indicator of development. **Human freedom, human rights, political participation and gender equality** some of the non economic indicators were also highlighted as important components of development.

In fact the effort to devise a **global happiness indicator** by Mahbub Ul Haq, the United Nations and other international organizations was also an endeavor to counter the obsession with economic growth as the sole indicator of development.

In his book *Development as Freedom* (1999), tells us that countries like Sri Lanka, China or even Kerala had reduced their mortality rates even without being economic superpowers. Thus the overall notion of this paper would be to convey the message that **economic growth is means** to development and not the ultimate **end**. To be more encompassing, what indigenous development can do is to make clear how the non economic indicators of development like that of health can be made an indispensable component of development.

CONCLUSION: The Way Forward for Indigenous Psychology and Sociology

The reader should not be of the impression that I severely detest the idea of development today. I know that for a lot of underdeveloped countries it has meant economic growth and technological advancement. However I am critiquing it for sure. I am critiquing it because I know that the cultural and social notions of people for whom development is indeed indispensable for economic and social upward mobility have been ignored. Everything is just too westernized and rest on generalizations which can be true only for European or American societies. The collective consciousness mentioned above is yet to be activated.

Owing to globalization, it has been seen that the personal problems of the individual have now transcended to become a part of a global milieu.

As factories of production of big fashion houses like that of Nike and Adidas close down in China, lose of cheap employment and the repercussions of expensive costs of production are affecting huge production houses that have their headquarters in the West. Carbon emissions of China have been estimated to cause global climate effects that have forced countries having diverse ideologies on climate change. **With the emergence of the Islamic State as an overarching anti state entity various countries have united with each other irrespective of their differences and divergences in their respective foreign policies.**

C. W Mills said that it is important to make use of one's own **sociological imagination**. This imagination would help individuals to make use of their **commonsensical knowledge which would enable them to grasp the relationship between their own history and biography within their respective societies**. This opens up new avenues for native psychology in which indigenous people can academically frame histories of their own societies from their individual perspectives instead of the other white academic authors writing on the behalf of the black and the yellow people.

As mentioned above one of the research questions is if there can be a combination of the disciplines of Sociology and Indigenous Psychology to study the native notions of development. For this there is a need to **explore the avenues of academic collaborations of sociologists and psychologists**. Even though non Western psychologists may embark on a mission to De-westernize indigenous psychology, however there is one problem over here. The methodologies and tools undertaken to research into indigenous psychologies would be **again based and modeled on the principles of**

Western psychology. There cannot be a total remodeling of the basics of psychology which had its birth in the West. This is where Sociology can come in. Sociologists work in the policy making department and can help analysis what development means in different societies. There is a need to look beyond

This is where **diversity** will come in which is the correct and real essence of development studies today and which will be better understood with the help of sociology and native psychology. This paper was an attempt to understand what development means in different **socio-cultural settings** and how the two academic disciplines may be used to understand development and which I hope will bring about positive implications in the policymaking department.

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