

Critical and Cultural Psychology in India: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

The impact of culture on the formation of the sense of identity of an individual is sufficiently researched and disseminated over time. Critical cultural psychology as an area of focus emphasizes the need to acknowledge the multitude of factors that encapsulate the experience of being from a socially sensitive perspective. The self, in the Indian notion, isn't just based on human biology but exists as an entity that is intimately connected to its surrounding, the social landscape which nurtures the identity of the psyche. One isn't just taught adherence to the norms surrounding gender, caste, or order in an anthropological way but is taught pre-verbally as a knowledge feeling. In this empirical experience, the models are internalized by unconsciously mimicking what has been registered by living in a society with a set of standards and introjecting it into our personal systems. This paper is a theoretical review and aims to articulate the importance and the need for critical and cultural psychology in India.

Keywords: *Culture, Indigenous Healing, Critical Psychology, Indian Psychology*

Time and again, the Indic mode of thought and its diversity is discussed in different frameworks across various disciplines. The history of psychology that we have learned over the years in its universal essence is a single story, born and nurtured in a particular western culture and disseminated globally. It can be complex and unsettling as context is often lost in the transmission of such knowledge models. Additionally, context comes from a culture and holds immense relevance in the exchange of ideas. The challenge, then, is to accept these universalities, which have been developed in the absence of certain cultures yet claim relevance to them. Hence, while Sigmund Freud was shocked even to realize the existence of psychoanalysis in a far-off land called India, as we see in the letters exchanged between him and Girindrashekar Bose, how could his theory of interiority of the psyche reflect the totality of an experience with no understanding of the social landscape here. Richard A. Shweder's remark on cultural psychology yields relevance when he states that one cannot think of the psyche without thinking about the social. Thus, critical consciousness is not about putting questions in the void but deliberately exploring the norms of a system while cultivating a consciousness of context. Understanding this in the light of critical thinking also gives way to challenging the default norm underlying the discipline of psychology, which can be referred to as the global principles but, in reality, falls under the local dynamic of formulation with limited pertinence.

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Culture of Psychology

The framework of cultural cognition and how it provides a sense of self, behavior, and affective balance is quintessential while discussing critical cultural psychology. Furthermore, the discourse of cultural psychology is incomplete without the recognition of aboriginal narratives, which have been running across in the form of shared myths, fantasies, and legends to describe the nature of everyday representations of individually embodied experiences constituting the living psyche. The underlying conceptions in these narratives describe an actor in its ecology to give an overall understanding of the “hermeneutics of idealization” (Kakar, 1995). To understand the individual's anecdote of one's fantasy, we need to acknowledge the larger landscape of myths that birth the former.

Reflecting upon cultural psychology also requires definitive knowledge of the *culture of psychology*. The embedded dynamics of power introduce us to the ‘system’ in the individual psyche, which is motivated to render stimulus into something meaningful. Therefore, the power play leads us to understand that specific narratives fall in the center while others are marginalized and pushed toward the periphery. This predisposition of psychology as a culture point towards the need to dissect the unthought-known of our deliberate gaze on the linear narrative of dominant characters. Although there will always exist a preference for psychological positions, the kinesthetic nature of it makes it into concentric nests with sheer tangibility and interrelatedness. Critical cultural psychology relevant to India can therefore be imagined in entirety by interweaving elements from myths, fantasies, and cultural narratives, which script the larger discourse and represent it in the indigenous framework of relevance.

General psychology would put in the picture the common central processing mechanism and psychic unity underlying all human cognition. However, it is indispensable to understand it wholly to acknowledge cultural cognition and how it provides a sense of self and identity to the populace. Hence, different positions conceptualize the figure and the landscape differently. What must be hypocrisy and inconsistency (Ramanujan, 1989) for one looking from the outside might be an eminently relevant form of tradition for the one on the inside.

The landscape of Healing

A progression of knowledge is thus witnessed when a preference for cure can be looked at from the psychological idiom whose ideological orientation is not limited to the biomedical paradigm of illness and inclined more towards the paradigm of a-rational therapeutics where an illness is metaphysical, psychological, or social. While looking at the departure from western notions of mental health and convalescence, indigenous healing methods help us focus on the immediacy of an inner-lived experience situated in a particular culture that can otherwise go unnoticed. The possibilities of healing are thus extended to the polyclinics, namely sacred spaces or shrines where the possessions are treated as *afflictions in the air*. This takes us back to the implicit norms which have been operating as an undertone to the *normal* conduct of behavior since most of the spirits or bhoots/pret/jaljogini/churels that exist is a feminine spirit with a horrific identity that overpowers, exhausts, and drains even the most powerful male to death (Kakar, 1991). Strong feminine sexuality is associated with a stigma that generates anxiety and is thus feared.

While the paradigm calls for a reconstruction and a deconstruction, a *psychical return*, the critical theme that emerges over and over again is the one around the level of analysis in psychology.

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While keeping in mind the role of subjective interpretation and intervention in the discipline, one would argue that it aims at the systematic subordination of individual behavior to false social norms where cure and justice often fail to coincide or come together. What is missed out is the interplay of intention and consequence. Since the individual doesn't exist in a vacuum, the level of analysis has to be expanded at the interpersonal and societal levels to bring together the psycho-diagnostic with the socio-diagnostic, to denaturalize the politics of the discipline as a mandate limited to a clinic.

Furthermore, the psycho-biographies take us to an internally conflicted arena that has indeed grown from the society, which fosters the development of emotional, intellectual, and spiritual self, which cannot be differentiated from a person. Preference for the dominant predisposition of a society (culture-free and culture-sensitive) is seen as an information process that isn't static but ongoing. Nandy (2009) is henceforth right in problematizing "repeat, repeat, repeat" because we are not just passive recipients but active contributors to our culture, as Shweder (1990) would call us culturally shaped shapers. In formulation, the quest for domain-specific truths is more comprehensible than looking for universal realities.

One's involvement with reality creates their reality. Interpretation of facts assembles the subjective truth and therefore strengthens the interplay of culturally constituting realities and realities constituting psyches. Thus, psyche genesis could allow psyches to come together. Still, an absence of recognition would create an unacceptable hegemony that would cause existential energy in the discipline's discourse, bringing us back to why critical psychology in cultural contexts is needed.

CONCLUSION

The vocabulary of stigma also takes us to the framework of cure, which is devoid of equity and accessibility but opens the door to the domain of totem and taboo, which are incarnate in the life stories of people whose script of desire has an emotional relevance in the realms of demonology while deconstructing the indigenous notions where the fundamental need of a person is belonging to a community which deviates from the western notion of mental health with an emphasis on a self-contained psyche.

The practice of cure can be looked at from a more relevant and context specific lens to foster a holistic sense of healing. The need to discuss critical and cultural psychology in different spaces and areas related to mental health is steadily growing and gaining importance. The focus on the intricate nuances of cultural psychology is conducive in gauging an overall perspective of the individual in specific contexts and settings.

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Conflict of Interest

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