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THE EMERGENCE OF WESTERN PSYCHOLOGICAL PRACTICE IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author discusses the issues surrounding the intersectionality of psychology in India. The current state of psychology in India is conversed along with varying social issues that pertain to hindrances towards the implementation of Western style of psychology in India. These social issues addressed are accessibility, familial expectation, cultural norms, and values. Also addressed are many complex issues the people of India face and how Western psychology purports to assist in a culture that is deeply rooted in its own values and systems that already work to alleviate the stressors of everyday life.

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INTRODUCTION

The discipline of psychology within Indian culture is relatively new (Arulmani, 2007; Mills, 2017). However, moral teachings and underpinnings have been a focal point of Indian culture for centuries (Sedlmeier and Srinivas, 2016). In times past, the Indian culture supported a methodology of moral and ethics teaching from gurus, stories, and folklore passed down from elders (Sinha, 1993). In this paper, I will discuss the current state of Western psychology in India and the issues that pertain to the merging of Indian and Western Psychological thought. The current status of psychology in India is discussed along with issues that pertain to education, licensure, and accessibility due to financial and familial expectation limitations. Specific psychological issues that the people of India are currently facing such as refugees, the caste system, and familial and societal changes in the wake of modernization are also discussed.

Current State of Psychology in India

Although several universities in India teach psychology, both at the undergraduate and the postgraduate levels, there is little

push or policing for adequately training individuals who can offer psychological services (Virudhagirinathan, and Karunanidhi, 2014). Many people offer psychological services based on Western ideas and thought without having the training offered in Western Societies (Virudhagirinathan, and Karunanidhi, 2014). Sinha (1993, 2017) stated that an individual in India can easily attend a weekend seminar on psychological services and still market themselves as a counselor and see clients and seek monetary compensation for their services. Since the discipline of psychology is largely a Western construct, the discipline has difficulty binding with commonalities from Indian roots that can help the discipline take hold and flourish (Virudhagirinathan, and Karunanidhi, 2014). Currently, psychology in India is a mere copy of a complex Western social system transplanted into a place where there is little to no understanding or relevance within the normative culture (Sinha, 1993). Granted, the modality of licensure in the United States and other Western cultures has its place, and for Western culture and society, it is needed in order to protect individuals from harm (Herman, and Sharer, 2013).

However, due to the high cost of education and supervision for eventual licensure in Western cultures, how can that mandate be transferred over to Indian culture where the socioeconomic statuses of the people at large are so much lower than Western counterparts? The cost of care may be transferred over to the patients making counseling services unaffordable for many (Bhaumik, Gangadharan, Hiremath, Swamidhas, and Russell, 2011; Dongre, and Deshmukh, 2012). There are limitations such as financial, geographic, and familial responsibilities that hinder an individual's desire to attain a higher education to meet these mandates (Virudhagirinathan and Karunanidhi, 2014). Virudhagirinathan and Karunanidhi (2014) discussed the current status of the field of psychology in India. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2005) reports a mental health crisis in India and a lack of adequately trained psychologists (ICMR, 2009). In India, there is an ever-growing need for psychologists (Mills, 2016; Sinha, 2017). Within Indian culture, there is a need for counseling services as traditional and modern philosophies merge.

Specific Psychological Issues India is Facing Now

Society is changing drastically within India with the goal of eventual elimination of the cast system, and with more women in the career field (Vallabhaneni, 2015). India has also taken in a number of refugees, and such have invited a number of various psychological issues into the country. Many people in the younger generation are often left to grapple with the stressors of a modernizing society while feeling the pressure from the older generation to maintain cultural norms (Hartnett, 2013). Younger generations are moving away from their familial home for educational or vocational pursuits, thus causing a decline in multi-generational households, leaving older generations more isolated than before (Kuriakose, 1977; Smith and Gergan, 2015).

Tibetan refugees often have issues relating to PTSD, depression, and anxiety (Alexander, David, and Grills, 2013; Hussain and Bhushan, 2011). Challenges of personal identity can be experienced by Tibetan refugees as they have been forced to leave the formative structure of their social system in Tibet due to Chinese occupation (Hartnett, 2013). Most Tibetan refugees are not allowed to have passports, further contributing to the identity issues that surround them (Alexander, 2013; Hartnett, 2013; Li, Wang, Jin, and Wu, 2016). There is a large amount of discrimination from the Indian residents that impacts Tibetan refugees' opportunities for housing and employment (Hartnett, 2013). Many followers of Tibetan Buddhism believe in the notion of reincarnation, as do many followers of Hinduism (Chandel, 2015). Many believe that the class they are born into or the lot they are dealt in this life was in direct correlation with how they behaved in their previous life (Gosling, 2013). While from the Tibetan and Indian perspective, they are paying penance for previous wrongdoings. Many also believe that suffering is a part of the human experience (Sahoo, 2014), a part of the human experience that does not necessarily need to be fixed. In contrast, in Western culture, we often want to eliminate the suffering, and we work towards alleviating pain and other Western psychologically constructed ailments (Sedlmeier, and Srinivas, 2016). From a Western psychological perspective, these issues, such as identity and changes in societal norms can be arduous to navigate. Psychologists in India face an especially difficult task when trying to implement three different psychological and spiritual

systems; Hinduism, Tibetan Buddhism, and Western psychological models (Arulmani, 2007; ICMR, 2009; Mills, 2016, Sinha and Fox Lee, 2017).

Colonialist Stance

One must ascertain the ethicality of the colonist stance that Western psychological practices must become the model for psychological practice within India (Mills, 2016). Given India's complex and ancient philosophical roots in spiritualism and Hinduism and Buddhist theory; is it ethical to say that India's standards of psychological service delivery is substandard? Moreover, therefore unethical if they do not mesh in with Western psychological models (ICMR, 2009; Sinha 1993, 2017; Virudhagirinathan and Karunanidhi, 2014). One common thematic notion surrounding Indian culture and the introduction of Western psychological theory is the concept of the ancient Indian thought and social structure being construed as indigenization (Sedlmeier, and Srinivas, 2016). There is an underlying colonialization notion within proponents of Western Psychology, and that is the idea that the Indian system must be changed. The social system is centuries old and often Western psychologists and human right activists forget that as they come in and introduce their ideas as ideal. To tear down an entire culture's belief system and deeply rooted social system raises ethical questions in pursuit of Western culture indignation (Mills, 2016).

Throughout the world, there are exemplars in which colonist "activism" or colonialism has caused cultures to lose various elements such as language, religion, and day-to-day activities such as food preparation, living arrangements, and courtship practices (Mills, 2016). This in turn can cause basic, yet essential elements of a culture to become lost. One example is the Spaniard colonization of the Native Americans (Treloar, and Jackson, 2015). The indigenous population of the Americas' entire way of life was largely abolished (Fenelon, and Trafzer, 2014). Their religious culture has mostly died off with the introduction of Catholicism (Young, 2016). Tibetan culture has been influenced by Chinese colonialism (Hartnett, 2013). The Chinese have related their colonialization of Tibet as "liberation" while in effect (Li, Wang, Jin, and Wu, 2016), their actions have seemingly been tearing the Tibetan culture apart. The people of Tibet are not able to practice their chosen religion, and their movement to and from the region is heavily controlled by the Chinese government (Alexander, David, and Grills, 2013).

As the world's cultures continue to merge in the wake of technological advances, Indian therapists, patients, and individuals at times use facets from Western psychological thought and theory such as behaviorism, when aligned with best practices, as it can help them with ailments and dilemmas (Kaur and Grover, 2016). Similarly, Western culture has adopted much of Indian philosophy and coping mechanisms to help us through our dilemmas such as meditation and mindfulness (Lea, Philo and Cadman, 2016; Sedlmeier and Srinivas, 2016; Shobbbrook-Fisher, 2016). Yoga, the mandala, and other facets of Buddhism and Hinduism have permeated into Western Culture (Arulmani, 2007). Our mindset looking at Indian culture is often that of a colonist eye and a zest to squelch the oppression of others in the name of social change without much regard for the enormity of the cultural underpinnings.

We, in the West, readily accept much of Indian thought as “hip” and it is now becoming more mainstream (Sedlmeier, and Srinivas, 2016). The worry is that the imminent introduction and inception of Western psychology within the Indian culture could adversely affect the people. This practice could cause them to lose a part of their culture, elements that have been in practice for hundreds of years. In many cases, these elements such as religion and meditative practices have been an aid to a number of people with psychological ailments successfully for centuries (Mills, 2017; Sedlmeier, and Srinivas, 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current state of psychology in India was discussed with an emphasis on the impact of the infiltration of Western philosophies to include colonialism, and religious norms. Psychological issues such as identity, changes in familial and societal expectations, and the elimination of the caste system were also discussed. India is truly at an intersection as traditional and Western philosophies continue to merge.

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