



Harnessing Psychology to Analyze Critical Contexts in the Global South: Education, Sports, and Consumer Behavior

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Abstract

This paper explores the critical analysis of education, sports, and consumer behavior in the global south, with a specific focus on India. It emphasizes the importance of adopting a socio-historical perspective and decolonial mindset to understand these contexts in their nuanced forms. The paper highlights the need to go beyond traditional psychological theories, which are often developed in the global north, and expand the scope of psychology to include voices and experiences from the global south. Through a critical lens, the paper examines the historical impact of colonialism on the Indian education system, the integration of sports psychology principles in athlete development, and the diverse patterns of consumer behavior in India. Policy-level recommendations are provided for each context, including addressing disparities in education, promoting mental well-being in sports, and encouraging sustainable and ethical consumption practices. By embracing a critical lens and recognizing the socio-cultural complexities of the global south, this paper aims to contribute to more inclusive and equitable policies and practices.

Keywords: Decolonial Mindset, Global South, Interdisciplinary Analysis, Socio-historical Perspective

Introduction

Psychological theories have been used to make sense of different lived experiences, contexts, paradigm shifts, and cultural resets. For example, psychological theories of peace and reconciliation have been used to predict if violence between groups resumes after it was halted by negotiations and agreements between parties (Staub & Pearlman, 2006; de Silva & Samarasinghe, 1993); theories of motivation have been

employed to understand achievement behaviors (Wigfield et al., 2021); theories of crime and delinquency have been used to contextualize criminal causes (for example, Moore, 2011), and so on and so forth. Theories help us to gain an understanding of a situation, formulate research questions, and test our hypotheses that ultimately either confirm or contradict our initial conceptualization of the situation. Therefore, psychological theorizing is a critical tool to further the science and ask meaningful questions. In the current psychological zeitgeist, a common and crucial discourse is the absence of contexts from the global south and the subsequent theories to adequately understand them in all their richness and complexity. Most theories in psychology are historically based and developed in the global north and this has contributed to the erasure of voices from other parts of the world. To fully encapsulate the voices of people from other parts of the world, psychology as a field needs to expand beyond the global north and create theories that are representative of the people. Recognizing that there is a huge gap in the literature in unpacking the neocolonial reality of the global south, the current paper will attempt to critically analyze three contexts from the global south, namely, education, sports, and consumer behavior. These categories were chosen based on their intrinsic power to uplift society. Finally, the current paper will draft some policy-level recommendations to harness the power of psychology to unpack, unravel, and understand different contexts in their nuanced forms.

Using a critical lens to analyze status quos

After Paulo Freire published the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1968, he has come to be established as the flag-bearer of critical psychology and his work has influenced models of education and pedagogy around the world (McLaren & Giroux, 1994; Schugurensky, 2011). Adopting a critical lens refers to approaching a topic, issue, or text with a discerning and analytical mindset. It involves questioning and examining the underlying assumptions, power structures, biases, and implications present in the subject being studied. By using a critical lens, one aims to uncover hidden meanings, challenge dominant narratives, and explore different perspectives. To adopt a critical lens, one must engage in critical thinking, which involves objective evaluation of information, considering multiple viewpoints, contextualizing arguments situationally as well as historically, and examining the logic behind arguments. This approach of cautious optimism enables one to question established norms, interrogate social, political, and cultural systems, and challenge the status quo.

Status quo maintenance refers to the ways in which psychological knowledge supports pre-existing societal conditions and dominant ideologies. Status quos are the reason cultural norms that might be detrimental to a society's progress are rigidly held and strongly endorsed. An example of this is the idea of meritocracy.

Meritocracy refers to a political, social, or economic system where individuals are assigned to positions of power, influence, or reward solely on the basis of their abilities and achievements, and not on the basis of their economic backgrounds or personal characteristics. However, the concept of meritocracy is highly flawed since it promotes the color blind philosophy that anyone regardless of their race, class, ethnicity, social background can succeed if they worked “hard enough” (Sandel, 2021). Despite the concept being flawed, meritocracy is widely endorsed across democracy giving an illusion of fairness and justice to otherwise rigged practices.

To challenge any status quos and to recommend radical ways of change and development we therefore need a critical lens to analyze and unpack social realities. The benefits of using a critical lens are:

- **Uncovering hidden biases and power structures:** Critical analysis helps reveal underlying assumptions, biases, and power dynamics that are often ingrained in status quos. By critically examining the status quo, one can identify and challenge the ways in which certain groups or individuals benefit or suffer from existing systems.
- **Challenging dominant narratives:** Critical analysis encourages questioning and challenging the dominant narratives that shape societal norms and beliefs. It helps uncover alternative perspectives, marginalized voices, and counter-narratives that may have been overlooked or suppressed.
- **Promoting social justice and equality:** A critical lens enables the identification of social injustices and inequalities within the status quo. By bringing attention to these issues, it can inspire advocacy, activism, and efforts to bring about positive change and create a more equitable society.
- **Encouraging independent thinking:** Adopting a critical lens fosters independent thinking by encouraging individuals to question and critically evaluate information, ideologies, and societal structures. It promotes intellectual autonomy and empowers individuals to form their own opinions based on reasoned analysis.
- **Enhancing problem-solving and innovation:** Critical analysis challenges the notion that the status quo is fixed or immutable. By identifying flaws or limitations within existing systems, it opens up opportunities for problem-solving and innovation. It encourages the exploration of alternative approaches and the development of creative solutions to address societal issues.

- **Fostering empathy and understanding:** Critical analysis often involves considering diverse perspectives and experiences. By understanding the complexities and nuances of different viewpoints, it fosters empathy, tolerance, and a broader understanding of the diverse realities that exist within society.

Using a critical lens to unpack contexts in the global south

While critically analyzing contexts in the global south, it is crucial to discard western universalism so we can steer clear of a one-size-fits-all narrative and develop more nuanced, contextually appropriate solutions. The global north and the global south are not mirror reflections of each other in terms of power and resources. The legacies of colonialism continue to impact the quality of life and economics in the global south, thereby necessitating a deep socio-historical perspective-taking when analyzing contexts in the global south.

India is a unique case study of a context in the global south. The schism between traditionalism and modernism in India makes it a unique and yet relatively understudied context to expand theoretical knowledge in psychology and economics. The clash between traditionalism and modernism in India often manifests in debates over cultural practices, social norms, gender equality, and individual freedom. One unique aspect of India's response to the traditionalism versus modernism schism is the process of hybridization and syncretism (Holton, 2000). Instead of a binary opposition, there is often a blending and negotiation between traditional and modern elements. Indians have shown a remarkable ability to adapt and incorporate modern ideas while retaining core traditional values, leading to the emergence of hybrid cultural expressions. Understanding the diversity and complexities of India's culture will not just enrich the social sciences, but also help businesses expand their market to India.

Understanding disparate contexts in India

As mentioned above, India is a rapidly growing economy and a hub for various industries. To tap into the business and economic potential of India, it is crucial to understand the disparate contexts. Each region may have different consumer preferences, market dynamics, and business practices. A nuanced understanding of these contexts enables businesses to tailor their strategies and offerings to specific regions, enhancing their chances of success. Moreover, India's social and political landscape is shaped by its diverse contexts. Different regions have unique historical, social, and political factors that influence the dynamics within society. Understanding these contexts helps in comprehending the complexities of Indian politics, social issues, and

inter-community relations, leading to a more informed analysis and engagement. To formulate effective policies that address the needs and aspirations of the diverse population, policymakers must consider the disparate contexts. Policies that work well in one region may not be suitable for another due to variations in socio-economic conditions, cultural practices, and developmental challenges. In summary, understanding India's disparate contexts is important for cultural appreciation, effective communication, business opportunities, comprehending social and political dynamics, policy formulation, and gaining a global perspective.

In the subsequent parts of the current paper, we will analyze three different contexts in India, namely education, sports, and consumer behavior to shed light on why parsing contexts in isolation are important to understand Indian people and advance policy making through the lens of social justice.

Education in India

India aspires to become a knowledge hub with hopes to transform millions of students into educated global citizens (Jain & Prasad, 2017). Yet, there are many pre-existing disparities in the Indian education system that serve as barriers to achieving educational equity in the country. It is crucial to understand these barriers to help further India's educational goals. In order to do that, we must first understand the extant Indian education system through a lens of colonialism.

Western education was introduced in India by British colonial rulers in 19th century (see Ghosh, 1995, for review). The primary aim of this education system was to produce a class of Indians who could assist the British in administering the country. The British emphasized the importance of English as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges. English became the language of administration, law, and higher education. This policy had long-lasting effects, as English proficiency became a marker of social and economic privilege, limiting opportunities for those who did not have access to English education. This also started the legacy of an examination-oriented nature system that continues to exacerbate disparities. The emphasis on rote memorization and performance in high-stakes examinations puts students from disadvantaged backgrounds at a disadvantage, as they may lack access to proper guidance and resources to excel in these exams. The backdrop of and the influence of colonization on the Indian education system that is reflected in macro-level

and micro-level behaviors of the cultural system (like the heavy emphasis on memorization that precludes critical thinking), necessitates a decolonial mindset to bring about facilitative changes.

Moving beyond colonialism, the implementation of quality education is a concern facing many students. Statistics reveal that 110 million children remain outside of the schooling system, with approximately 60% of those enrolled dropping out by grade 8 (Subhranian, 2002). Educational patterns largely reflect wider societal patterns of oppression, occurring particularly along the lines of caste, class, gender. Even when they do enroll in schools, the poor and marginalized fail to receive an education that is equitable in terms of its quality (although the literature is not always explicit on what quality entails). A crucial problem is that education quality decreases down the social and economic pyramid, and those on the lower end, forced to rely on poor quality government schools, are unable to compete with their peers from privileged classes (Nambissam, 2005; Ramachandran, 2005). For example, a recent World Bank survey found that 25% of government primary school teachers in India simply do not show up to school, and only 50% of those who do actually engage in teaching (Kremer et al, 2005). In the last 60 years since its independence, India's education system has largely ensured that marginalized and oppressed groups maintain the poor levels of literacy, cognitive and critical abilities which serve to perpetuate their oppression.

A combination of these findings and statistics therefore garners support for our contention that the Indian education system needs to be understood through a sociohistorical lens to design and implement meaningful changes that serve all students and foster social equity.

Sports (psychology) in India

Much like education, sports in India is a reflection of the schism between traditionalist and modernist values. Traditional values continue to be endorsed, like arguments discouraging gender-based pay-gap (Bordoloi, 2023). Moreover, an integration of sports with education is fundamentally absent. Current research unequivocally supports the cognitive, health, and emotional benefits of integrating sports into classroom education (see Erwin et al., 2012 and Webster et al., 2015, for review). Indian policymakers and educators must factor in current research findings to adopt practices that will enhance sports in India.

Sports psychology plays a crucial role in optimizing athletic performance. Historically, there has been limited focus on sports psychology in India. However, recognizing the importance of mental well-being, confidence building, focus, and resilience is essential. Integrating sports psychology into training programs can help athletes manage pressure, set goals, develop a positive mindset, and cope with challenges. Mental skills training, visualization techniques, and performance analysis can enhance athletes' overall performance and well-being. Zakrajsek et al. (2016) found that encouragement provided to athletes to seek sports psychology services and previous positive interactions with sports psychologists predicted athletes' perceived benefits of seeking sports psychologists and impacted their confidence levels. A contemporary encapsulation of the benefits of sports psychology was portrayed in the series *Ted Lasso* (see Stevenson, 2021, for review).

By integrating sports psychology principles and practices, India can empower its athletes to reach their full potential, excel in their respective sports, and achieve success at national and international levels. Providing access to sports psychologists, incorporating mental training programs, and promoting awareness about the importance of sports psychology are essential steps toward fostering a holistic approach to athlete development in India.

Consumer behavior in India

Consumer behavior refers to the study of how individuals, groups, or organizations make decisions and take actions related to the acquisition, use, and disposal of goods, services, experiences, and ideas. It involves understanding the various factors that influence consumers' decision-making processes and behaviors. Consumer behavior comprises purchasing decisions, consumption patterns, social and cultural factors, and underlying it all is the decision process of the concerned demographic. Decision process refers to understanding the cognitive processes consumers go through when making decisions. This includes information search, evaluation of alternatives, and post-purchase evaluation. Understanding consumer behavior is essential for businesses and marketers as it helps them develop effective marketing strategies, identify target markets, design products and services that meet consumers' needs, and create impactful advertising and communication campaigns. It also enables businesses to anticipate consumer preferences and adapt to changing market trends. Consumer behavior research involves both qualitative and quantitative

methods, including surveys, interviews, focus groups, and data analysis, to gain insights into consumer motivations, attitudes, and behaviors.

Over the years, consumer behaviour in India has taken a gradual turn. Due to rising incomes and new ideas and technologies, the country's composition of commodities being bought has changed. From the focus of spending on traditional products, it has now shifted to spending on experiences, customized products, and time-saving services.

The population of the country has now started following a few trends in order to decide which commodity to purchase. Some of these trends are well-known, while others are lesser known. What is most astonishing, though, is how rapidly these patterns have caught on across all demographics and in nearly all Indian cities. Men and women of various ages, of all income levels, and living in cities of all sizes exhibit the behaviours. The prevalence of the behaviours has major implications for businesses seeking to increase their market share in India.

Much like education and sports, consumer behavior in India needs to be analyzed through an intersectional lens of power, economy, and sociohistorical roots. The notable patterns of consumer behavior in India are shaped by a survival mindset, particularly among the lower-income and economically disadvantaged segments of the population (41.6% of India's population or 540 million people approximately \$1.25 a day). Under this system, the primary patterns of consumption are marked by budget consciousness, a family-centric approach to investments, and price sensitiveness (Mukherjee et al., 2012). Above everything, the regional differences in consumerism call for an investigation through the intersectional lens of socioeconomic status, residence, state, so on and so forth.

Some policy-level recommendations

Based on the pre-existing analysis of education, sports, and consumer behavior in India, some policy level recommendations that can be implemented are:

Education:

- **Addressing Disparities:** Implement policies that aim to reduce disparities in access to quality education. This can include improving infrastructure, providing adequate resources and qualified teachers in government schools, and addressing the issue of teacher absenteeism.
- **Curriculum Reform:** Promote a more inclusive and contextually relevant curriculum that integrates critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Encourage a shift away from rote memorization towards student-centered learning approaches.
- **Equity in Higher Education:** Develop policies to increase the representation of marginalized communities in higher education institutions, including affirmative action measures and scholarships.

Sports:

- **Integration of Sports and Education:** Encourage the integration of sports into the education system by promoting physical education programs and extracurricular sports activities in schools. Provide training and resources for teachers to incorporate sports psychology principles into their teaching practices.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Invest in the development of sports infrastructure, including sports facilities, training centers, and sports academies, especially in rural areas and underserved communities.
- **Talent Identification and Development:** Establish systematic talent identification programs and provide scholarships and support for promising athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds. This can include financial assistance, coaching, and mentorship programs.
- **Awareness and Promotion:** Increase awareness about the importance of sports in overall development and well-being. Launch campaigns and initiatives to promote sports participation, especially among girls and underrepresented communities.

Consumer Behavior:

- **Consumer Protection:** Strengthen consumer protection laws and regulations to safeguard the interests of consumers, including measures against unfair trade practices, false advertising, and misleading information.

- **Financial Literacy:** Promote financial literacy and consumer awareness programs to educate individuals about their rights and responsibilities as consumers. This can help empower consumers to make informed decisions and protect themselves from fraudulent practices.
- **Regional Customization:** Recognize the diverse cultural and regional preferences in consumer behavior and encourage businesses to tailor their products, services, and marketing strategies to specific regional contexts.
- **Sustainability and Ethical Consumption:** Encourage sustainable and ethical consumption practices by promoting eco-friendly products, supporting fair trade initiatives, and raising awareness about the environmental and social impact of consumer choices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has highlighted the importance of using a critical lens to analyze and understand the contexts of education, sports, and consumer behavior in the global south, with a particular focus on India. By adopting a socio-historical perspective and decolonial mindset, we can unravel the complexities and nuances of these contexts, ultimately leading to more meaningful policy interventions. It is evident that analyzing these contexts through a critical lens helps uncover hidden biases, challenge dominant narratives, and promote social justice, equality, and inclusive development. By embracing diverse perspectives, questioning established norms, and considering the socio-historical realities of the global south, we can create more nuanced theories and policies that are representative of people's experiences and needs. Moving forward, it is imperative for psychology as a field to expand beyond the global north and actively engage with contexts from the global south. By harnessing the power of psychology, we can continue to unpack, unravel, and understand different contexts in their nuanced forms, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and equitable societies.

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