



Research in Indian management: prospects and challenges

Ashish Pandey

Accepted: 31 August 2023 / Published online: 2 October 2023
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Abstract Even a cursory look at the management research output would suggest that the majority of the management research in India takes place with the microlevel atomistic constructs developed in the Western context and used without examining their meaning in Indian society and without studying the correlated constructs in the Indian text or Indian languages. In this write-up, I propose and explain that the Indian perspective on management is important to be studied because it can make at least five contributions to the field of management, which can have local and global value. These are in terms of providing perspective, practices, concepts, models and studying management in the context of hybridity and uniqueness of the institutions.

Keywords Indian Knowledge System · Indian Concepts · Institutional hybridity

“it is generally taken for granted that the Hindus have always been a dreamy, metaphysical people, prone to meditation and contemplation In ancient India, however, physical science found her votaries. India was the cradle of

mathematical sciences including arithmetic and algebra.”.

P.C. Ray, ‘Progress of Chemistry in Ancient India,’
Science and Culture, Vol. II(16), April 1937, p. 497.

While starting to think about Indian management and the Indian knowledge system and their relationship, which I think are of the set and subset kind of relationship, my thoughts go to the work of Prafulla C. Ray, Jadunath Sinha and Rajbali Pandey. Prafulla C. Ray authored the book of two volumes titled History of Hindu Chemistry in Ancient & Medieval India, first published in 1902. These volumes present an elaborate anthology of chemistry in *Vedas*, *Āyurveda*, *Charaka* and *Sūśruta Saṃhitās*, Buddhist texts, Vagbhatt to the thirteenth century C.E. work of *Rasārṇava* and *Rasaratna-Samucchaya*. Known as Acharya amongst his students, many of whom went on to become thought leaders in the various branches of sciences, worked on ‘Hindu Chemistry’ out of the angst for Indian traditional knowledge not being sufficiently explored and explained in the modern time.

Along similar lines, I want to mention the work of Jadunath Sinha in the three volumes on cognition, ‘emotion and will,’ and ‘epistemology of perception’ (Sinha, 1933, 1961, 1969). It is a work of extraordinary scope that brings together views on various cognitive processes, like intuition and extra-sensory perception, available in India’s three major

A. Pandey (✉)
Shailesh J. Mehta School of Management, I.I.T. Bombay,
Powai, Mumbai, India
e-mail: ashish.pandey@iitb.ac.in

religious-spiritual traditions, namely Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. These three volumes are replete with psychological concepts and perspectives. When Carl Jung visited India in 1936, he was well aware of the psychological insights of Indian origin. He may be given the credit for introducing Indian Psychology to the world.

In 1969, Rajbali Pandey presented an excellent treatise on Hindu *Samṣkāras* or positive events, to inculcate certain qualities at a young age. He explained the *Samṣkāras* as the ways of self-expression, a source of moral and spiritual purpose, cultural and social integration. The householders performed the *Samṣkāras* to express their joys, felicitations and even sorrows at the various life events in the shape of decoration, music and feast presents. Each *Samṣkāra* has rituals, which involve multiple sections of society. It was the business of the *Samṣkāras* to make the body a valuable possession, a thing not to be discarded but made a holy thing to be sanctified so that it might be a fitting instrument of the spiritual intelligence embodied in it. It was how an active life of the world was reconciled with spiritual realization.

Unfortunately, all three of the exemplary works I could share here were done before or a few years after India's independence. There has been some work on history of science and technology in medieval and ancient India (e.g., Bose et. al., 1971; Dharmapal 1971) partially inspired by the work of Ray (1902). In fact there is a massive open online course (MOOCs) offered at the platform of National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) on science and technology of ancient India. However in social science, the examples of the similar research studies, which would have taken forward these lines of work are scarce. Nonetheless, these three examples represent three different types of studies in the Indian knowledge system with which management scholars can learn to develop and articulate ideas about the Indian knowledge system. The work of Ray (1902) is an example that, like in chemistry, many insights may already be there about management in the ancient text, and with little adaptation, those can be useful or insightful for modern times. The work of Jadunath Sinha exemplifies how to reinterpret contemporary knowledge in light of the Indian knowledge system. And the work of Pandey (1949) exemplifies how the original Indian constructs and categories can be

developed and presented in the language and perspective of modern times.

Indian management is an approach to management based on the Indian worldview, ethos and characteristics of Indian society (Pandey 2022). Almost any phenomenon can be studied from the outside (etic) as well as from the inside (emic). Both kinds of studies are important and useful for understanding the phenomenon from local, transnational and global perspectives. The search for a pluralistic framework to understand research on Indian management ideas and theories has led us to propose a typology (Pandey et al. 2022). This typology provides the intersection of a continuum of 'emic' and 'etic' perspectives and another continuum of the 'atomistic' and 'holistic' constructs. Here, emic refers to an inquiry from the inside and etic from the outside. Atomistic concepts and constructs result from breaking a phenomenon into constituent subcomponents and studying them individually. In contrast, the holistic approach examines the overall likelihood of the event in the context of multiple variables that influence the phenomenon. Even a cursory look at the management research output would suggest that the majority of the management research in India takes place with the microlevel atomistic constructs developed in the Western context and used without examining their meaning in Indian society and without studying the correlated constructs in the Indian text or Indian languages.

I would like to propose that the Indian perspective on management is important to be studied because it can make at least five contributions to the field of management, which can have local and global value. These are in terms of providing perspective, practices, concepts, models and studying management in the context of hybridity and uniqueness of the institutions. I will explain these aspects in the following section.

The Indian knowledge system can provide a different perspective on different aspects of management. Management or any other branch of knowledge is always linked to other branches of knowledge and has a philosophical foundation. Hence, Joullie (2016) contends that concepts that are the bread and butter of management academics have direct, often unrecognized, philosophical foundations. He traces many widely subscribed concepts and theories in management to predominant Western philosophies of heroism, rationalism, positivism, romanticism,

existentialism and postmodernism. For example, power in human relationships is a heroic concept, the case for management education is of rationalist descent and the conviction that research is to be a value-free, inductive enterprise is a legacy of positivism and so forth. In a similar vein, work, business, organization, the role of human beings in the organization, the nature of the relationship between business and society and many such fundamental building blocks of management knowledge can be examined from the perspective of various branches of Indian philosophy like *Sāṃkhya darśana*, *Yoga darśana*, *Advaita darśana* or from the perspective of *Lokāyatas*. Indian worldview informed by various schools of philosophies can open up different perspectives in management (see Pandey, 2022b, as an attempt).

The Indian knowledge system can provide various indigenously evolved practices to enrich the field of management. Current management knowledge is already influenced by various practices emerging in the field of psychology, sociology, and of course, economics and so forth. For example, the client's centered counseling practice of Carl Roger is the basis of many coaching models in the management literature. Practices arising from sociological theories have greatly influenced industrial relations, institutional structures and even accounting (Covaleski et al. 1996). The practices like incentive structure, authority structure and strategic choices are a few to name here out of endless practices arising from theories of economics. I give only three examples of practices here drawn from the Indian knowledge system, which can be useful in management. First, *Ritucarya* (routine according to season) and *Dincarya* (routine according to the solar cycle of the day), widely described in the *Āyurveda*, can give practices for a more healthy workplace (Kapadia and Dagar 2022). This can be useful in early diagnosis and prognosis of ailments arising from seasonal changes and for adopting preventive and curative measures like changes in diet and lifestyle¹. Second, the field of Yoga can provide numerous practices to enhance emotional, cognitive and physical capabilities relevant to management. Third, the knowledge of *guṇas* of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and

Tamas can help develop many practices ranging from entrepreneurial orientation, leadership to corporate social responsibilities. For example, the perspective of *guṇas* as the efficient cause can provide the moral basis of leadership in the form of *Sāttvik* leadership and address the missing element of moral disposition in contemporary leadership theories like transformational leadership and authentic leadership (see Alok, 2017).

The third major contribution through the Indian knowledge system to management is possible by developing new constructs and concepts. Gupta (2011) succinctly pointed out that despite being a large community of management scholars in India, we have contributed very few concepts and theories, which could enrich our knowledge base and contribute to global knowledge. Language is an ever-evolving system of symbols that continuously stores and integrates new symbols as they are created based on new experiences. Every language is a storehouse of folk knowledge in the forms of constructs and idioms. Hence, India's rich diversity of languages is a valuable but unexplored gold mine of new concepts and constructs. This can be done by picking up the unique indigenous constructs like *Lajjā*, *Lokasamgraha* and *Śraddhā* and tracing their meaning and nomological network in the Indian text (Bhawuk 2022) or by synthesizing the indigenous constructs with those developed in the Western literature like spiritual climate, organizational healing and Yoga and positive psychology (Agrawal & Pandey 2022; Pandey et al. 2009; Dagar et al. 2022).

Not only constructs but at many places in the Indian knowledge system, the models with the causal relations are available, which can be defined and explained in contemporary language. Brahm Vihar, i.e., the combination of maitri, karun, mudita and upeksha for interaction in society (Dagar et al. 2022), Karma Yoga, i.e., the constellation of five interrelated constructs of *indriya-nigraha* (sense control), *sama-buddhi* (equanimity), *phalasyaa tyāga* (non-attachment to the rewards), *swadharma* (following one inherent nature in a positive way) and *loksamgraha* (working for the world maintenance) (Navare & Pandey 2022), *Hitau-Sukhau* (good life), which is the combination of many psychological, social and physical traits are the three examples I suggest which represent the numerous models available in the Indian

¹ Pandey, A. (2022). NPTEL Course Yoga and Positive Psychology, Week 6: Lecture 14 C: Seasons with Revolving Sun and Impact on Physiology.

knowledge system which can be informative and insightful for the different branches of management.

Institutional hybridity and uniqueness must also be considered in the research and teaching of Indian management. This aspect emerges by recognizing that many modern Indian institutions have not evolved organically. Modern schooling and higher education system, for example, was in part thrust on India to fulfill the need of the colonial masters. The administrative system was primarily set up for the exploitative objectives of colonial powers. Many modern institutions like infrastructure (railways, irrigation), legal framework and educational systems were started or overtaken by the East India Company and later by the British Empire. However, unlike China and Vietnam, where traditional social relations were erased due to the communist revolution (Haq, 1997), the Indian Republic is constantly struggling and negotiating institutional change, which is also influenced by global changes. This churn has resulted in uniqueness and hybridity in most of India's major institutions, which affect public systems and business management in peculiar ways. Understanding these peculiarities is essential to understand Indian management. I can give one example in this matter. This example is of Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) in India. Launched in 2018, ADP aims to quickly and effectively transform the 112 most underdeveloped districts nationwide. The best administrative officers were picked up to lead the transformation of these districts into the best districts. Indian administrative service, which is notorious for bureaucracy, has become a power for the turnaround of the public systems under five broad socioeconomic themes—health & nutrition, education, agriculture & water resources, financial inclusion & skill development and infrastructure (e.g., Sinha 2019). Interestingly, despite the transformation of institutions, in this case, we still call the collector the district head of the administration, a colonial term referring to the primary responsibility of the collector in those days to collect the tax from the public.

Having stated these scholarly issues for the development of the field of Indian management, there is one practical issue I wish to highlight here. Most business schools in India consider the higher categories of the ABDC (Australian Business Deans Council) list or the Thomson Reuters Impact Factor as the desirable outlets and benchmarks for the

research output of their faculty members and PhD scholars. Most of these journals are published from North America or Europe. Research questions arising from these societies are labeled as of global relevance in these journals. They have a minimal stake or interest in India-specific issues. By design, they are not the most promising platforms for developing and disseminating new knowledge of Indian management. I urge the leaders of management education in India, particularly those who are heading the research focused business schools in India, to recognize a set of journals from the ABDC or ABS list, which have serious interest and commitment to promoting research in Indian management and support and recognize the scholars, faculty members and PhD scholars, to publish their original and practically relevant work on Indian management in these journals. The best scenario will be if we are able to nurture high quality Indian journals in management. After all, as Indian scholars, it is our responsibility to develop the field of Indian management. That will at least help develop knowledge that management professionals in India will find useful, and at best Indian management scholarship can make an original contribution to the 'global' repository of management knowledge.

Funding This study received a partially financial support by Indian Council for Social Science Research grant no. 02/6103/GN/2021-22/ICSSR/RP/MJ.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest Author declare no conflict of interest.

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