

Connecting with and Centering Silenced Voices: Ethics and Soulfulness in Critical- Qualitative Psychology

Kumar Ravi Priya,
Department of HSS, IIT Kanpur

Outline of the Talk

- Science and Psychological Science as a *Critical* Enterprise
- Being *Introduced* to Critical-Qualitative Psychology
- Structural Violence and the Challenge of Building Researcher-Participant *Relationship*
- Lessons Learnt: Two Decades of Engagement with Critical-Qualitative Psychology

Science and Psychological Science as a *Critical* Enterprise

- Defining “criticality”: The knowledge-power relationship (Vahali, 2003)
- “...The circle of human protest” (Vahali, 2002, p. 1)
 - Science as a critical enterprise (e.g., renaissance)
 - Psychological science as critical enterprise (e.g., decolonizing mental health by Frantz Fanon)

Being *Introduced* to Critical- Qualitative Psychology

- Introduction to “paradigm shift” toward criticality at the University of Delhi in 1999-2001
- Listening to Professor Parasuraman at TISS, Mumbai in December, 2006
- Introduction to “developmental disaster” occurring at that time in Nandigram as structural violence
- Understanding structural violence: Prevalent social hierarchies (gender, class, religion, caste etc.) and the socio-economic policies that may sustain them (Prashad, 2020)
- Understanding “voice”: Subjective experiences and identity often side-tracked by structural violence
- Possibilities of foregrounding “silenced voices”?

Structural Violence and the Challenge of Building Research-Participant *Relationship*

- The apparent *futility* of research interaction during suffering: “Talk to you? Why?”
- Developing human bonds as the foundation of qualitative inquiry:
 - Ethics and possibilities of solidarity

Ethics and Possibilities of Solidarity:

Two Decades of Engagement
with Critical-Qualitative
Psychology

Ethnography at Nandigram

- Connecting with villagers: “Fear psychosis” and community solidarity
- **Dhananjay Mondal (60 M; his son, Bharat, killed on 07 January, 2007)**
- “I felt *anand* (joy) while talking to you. It is so because my son died but people from all parts of our country came and talked about us and our movement. I feel honoured by that. . . . [silence] . . . It was one thing if my son had after illness but he died to protect our motherland, he can not be said to be ‘dead’.” (Priya, 2015, p. 440)

Ethnography at Halol

- Rehana Ben (30 year old woman) has been a friend since 2008 when I tried to interview her at Halol.
- I was almost scolded in the first meeting: “What will you gain even if I tell you what all happened at that time?”
- About three weeks later, when I was about to leave the field, she just sat with me and spoke uninterrupted for more than an hour
- She talked about the gruesome killing of her uncle by the mob; police’s apathy; search for safe spaces for survival

- But, something that is deeply agonizing for her is: “Would you imagine, I used to eat from the same plate with a very good Hindu friend at her house. Why doesn’t she even look at me after the burning of train? Did I or my family burn it? What kind of justice is this?”
- After she stopped talking, I gently asked her: “What made you come back to me and share what all happened?”
- She replied, “We also observed you and your work here for our children!” (Priya, 2023, p. 112)

Centrality of Ethics: Toward Solidarity and Soulfulness

- Initial reflections on critical-qualitative psychology: *‘Ik aag ka dariya hai, aur doob ke jana hai’* (“Oh, the rigorous process of ethics in research!”)
- Today, we also realize the possibilities of soulfulness (*atma sakshatkar* of a different kind!):
- *‘Lag ja gale ki fir ye haseen raat ho na ho, shayad fir is Janam me mulaqaat ho na ho’* (“Let us embrace each other for this night might not come again, and we might not meet again in this life.”)

Collaborations for Research and Praxis

- Conflictorium (Museum of Conflicts) at Ahmedabad:
<https://www.conflictorium.org/ahmedabad/>
- Art as a medium of expression, reflections, and dialogue
- Presence of a “Sorry Tree”: Confessing and transcending violence toward community solidarity

Reference

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Thanks!