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Traditional Values

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Abstract

This conceptual paper aims to understand post-colonial India's culture, specifically the changes brought about due to economic liberalisation in the 1990s. Although traditionally India was classified as a collectivist society, contemporary Indian researchers proposed that current India is a mix of collectivism and individualism. Indians tend be collectivists in matter relating to the family and individualists in matters relating to work. While the caste system was abolished several decades back, hierarchical relationships continue to exist and translate into paternalism in the workplace. Paternalism refers to father-like behaviour of the superiors towards their subordinates. However, this perhaps was not a detrimental attitude as subordinates considered the workplace as family; willingly accepted authority; were loyal and deferential; and would go out of their way to help the superior in their personal life. Thus, post-colonial Indian culture is a complex and contradictory mix of modern and traditional values which often come into conflict and yet complement each other in a way that perhaps provides Indians with a unique competitive edge.

Understanding the Post-Colonial India's Culture: A Juxtaposition of Modern and Traditional Values

Three main historical socio-economic factors influenced the Indian organisations before economic liberalisation in the 1990s: the caste system, the British colonisation, and post-independence socialism (Amba-Rao, Petrick, Gupta, & Von der Embse 2000; Gopalan & Rivera 1997; Pio 2007). However, amidst this background after the Indian economy opened up to the world, there was a move towards transparency, professionalism and less bureaucracy (Pio 2007). Nevertheless, India remains a country of paradoxes. Despite a majority of the population being rural, agrarian, illiterate, and poor, India also possesses the largest group of skilled professionals in the world (Panda & Gupta 2007). In a colloquium to discuss India from a business perspective for multi-national corporations, a panel comprised of Indian industry captains, academics and social workers noted that India is a country where contradictions coexisted peacefully, such as a spirit of cooperation and competition; lack of discipline and readiness to follow processes; chaos and order (Jain et al. 2006). On the other hand, Jain et al. also noted that some of the virtues that Indians had were resilience; patience; entrepreneurial spirit; being innovative; and being passionate about what they do. Economic liberalisation brought about changes to several social processes in India (Bhatnagar & Rajadhyaksha 2001; Namasivayam & Zhao 2007; Medora 2007; Oza 2001; Patel & Parmentier 2005; Sonawat 2001). Scholars and researchers proposed three possible consequences of globalisation: cultural homogenisation, cultural polarisation or cultural hybridisation (Conrad & Poole, 2012). The cultural homogenisation perspective was that cultures would eventually lose their rich diversity and form a standardised culture largely based on the American culture (Conrad & Poole 2012; Pieterse 1996). The cultural polarisation proposition was that people in non-Western societies would increasingly become alienated by and hostile towards the changes brought about by globalisation (Conrad & Poole

2012; Pieterse 1996). Finally, the cultural hybridisation thesis was that people would find a balance between their cultural traditions and the changes brought about by living in a global economy (Conrad & Poole 2012; Pieterse 1996). India it seems has adopted the cultural hybridisation model in response to globalisation, but with an unbalanced mix of tradition and modern between the genders. In this chapter two areas of change brought about by globalisation is discussed: core Indian values and role of women in work.

What are the Core Indian Values?

Indian scholars (Panda & Gupta 2004; Sinha et al. 2004; Sinha et al. 2009) argued that since India is a pluralistic society with several sub-cultures it cannot be classified as a homogenous culture. However, the studies of Sinha et al. (2004; 2009) conducted across several locations in India revealed the following pan cultural Indian values: duality in thinking, coexistence of collectivist and individualist tendencies, hierarchical relationships, prevalence of familism and personalised relationships. These pan cultural values are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Duality in Thinking. Several researchers (Fusilier & Durlabhji 2001; Mathur 2010; Sinha et al. 2004; Sinha et al. 2009; Suri & Abbott 2009; Tripathi 1990) based on their studies concluded that Indians seemed to hold dual and seemingly contradictory beliefs such as: frugality and conspicuous consumption, collectivism and individualism, and humanism and power mongering. The concept of duality in thinking is congruent with the concept of dialectical thinking proposed by Peng and Nisbett (1999). Peng and Nisbett posited that East Asians were more comfortable with the existence of contradictions (dialectical thinking) than North Americans. However, this dialectical thinking perhaps reflected a greater tolerance of ambiguity, and allowed for a more context-specific behaviour (Fang 2010).

Another explanation of duality in thinking could be that with economic liberalisation and the growth of the middle class, the demand for quality education in India surpassed the

supply, leading to more and more Indian middle class youths being educated abroad (Feigenbaum 2010). This phenomenon, Fusilier and Durabhji (2001) explained, led to most Indians being educated in Western management theories and practices but imbibing Indian values through their upbringing; giving rise to contradictory and complex relationships between their Indian values and work goals and behaviour. For example, people may dislike corruption but may bribe if necessary; believe in science but may be superstitious; value autonomy but work hard only under pressure (Sinha et al. 2009). This duality in thinking is also reflected in the following pan-cultural value of co-existence of collectivist and individualistic tendencies identified by Sinha et al. (2004; 2009).

Coexistence of Collectivistic and Individualistic Tendencies. Traditional India was primarily classified as a collectivist society (Hofstede 1980; Triandis 1995), characterised by the values of group cohesiveness, putting others before oneself and an interdependent sense of self which included immediate family members, extended family members, and friends. Markus and Kitayama (1991) theorised that individuals who viewed themselves as primarily connected with others and had a less autonomous view of themselves had an interdependent sense of self. However, Indian researchers (for example, D'Mello & Eriksen 2010; Ghosh 2004; Shah 2009; Sinha et al. 2010; Sinha & Tripathi 1994; Sinha & Verma 1994) have suggested that modern Indians exhibited a mix of collectivist and individualist behaviours. For example, when presented with 18 scenarios in a study involving 292 students from three locations across India, Sinha et al. (2001) found that in the scenarios involving family a purely collectivist behaviour was chosen by the participants. Such as, in one scenario, when faced with an unjustified rebuke from his father, a son would not respond so that the father is not insulted. In scenarios where personal goals and family or friends' interests clashed, a mix of collectivist and individualistic behaviour was exhibited. For example, when a friend needed blood and the respondent had to attend an important job interview, he would arrange

for one of his family members to donate blood while he attended the meeting. Individualist behaviour when evoked was usually to serve a collectivist purpose. For example, respondents would leave their families to take up a well-paying job in another city or abroad, but a majority of their savings would be sent back home to the family.

In a subsequent study by Sinha et al. (2002) with a larger sample of 534 college students across five locations in India, found similar results. Sinha et al. (2002) confirmed that in most scenarios a mix of collectivist and individualist behaviours was evoked. For example, marriages in India are traditionally arranged by the family; however, there is an increasing trend of men and women wanting to marry a person of their choice. When faced with the dilemma in a scenario to choose their own partners or let their parents choose someone for them, rather than completely breaking away from tradition, young men and women preferred to convince their parents to let them marry a person of their liking. Sinha et al. (2002) also noted that women tended to display a greater degree of collectivism than men as "...the Indian woman's top priority is her home whereas young men must earn bread" (pg. 318). Furthermore, Sinha et al. stated that Indians living in affluent locations with better infrastructural facilities and better opportunities were less likely to be interdependent on others for day to day living.

Similar findings to those of the Sinha et al. (2001; 2002) studies were found in Shah's (2009) survey of 1,000 Indian respondents from 12 different Indian cities. The study examined the impact of globalisation on work and family collectivism and found that Indians were more likely to adhere to traditional values regarding family rather than to values regarding work. As an explanation for this phenomenon, Shah posited that the Indian job market was highly competitive with more than half of the population below the age of 25 years and with at least 25% of them with tertiary level education. In light of economic scarcity and an abundance of well-qualified individuals, a more individualist outlook

accepting competition, independence, capitalism and entrepreneurship was more likely to lead to success in the workplace in contrast to the consequences of a collectivist attitude (Shah, 2009). Hence, it could be proposed that Indians had an interdependent sense of self when it came to family and an independent sense of self when it came to work.

The coexistence of collectivist and individualist tendencies could also explain the continuing traditional roles of family despite changes in the family structure. As found in Sinha and colleagues' studies (2001; 2002), when it came to study scenarios involving family, a collectivistic attitude was evoked. Furthermore, Sinha et al. (2002) also found that women in India were more likely to be collectivists than men, a finding that is congruent with the findings of Bhatnagar and Rajadhyaksha (2001), Clark and Sekher (2007), Dernéa (2003) and Radhakrishan (2009) where it was found that women continued to adhere to traditional gender roles.

Moreover, the coexistence of collectivist and individualist tendencies are resonant with duality in thinking as both values seem to reflect an acceptance of contradictions. However, as suggested by Fang (2010) this acceptance of contradictions perhaps reflects the ability of the individuals to choose an appropriate behaviour depending on the situation and context and not be limited by a fixed pattern of behaviour. Furthermore, as proposed by Fang, this acceptance of contradictions could also reflect a greater tolerance for ambiguity and inconsistencies.

Familism and Personalised Relationships. The family is one of the most important institutions in India and an integral part of the Indian culture (Medora 2007; Sonawat 2001). Families in India are largely patriarchal (Sonawat, 2001) wherein the major family decisions are made by the male members. However, there are a few matriarchal families (Mullatti 1995) and family interactions are becoming more egalitarian among the urban middle classes (Sonawat 2001). Patriarchal families tend to be mostly patrilineal (Mullatti 1995), where

property is inherited by the son and the lineage is based on the father's family. However, changes in the legal system have ensured that some of the property can be inherited by daughters (Sonawat 2001). Families also tend to practice patrilocal exogamy (Chudgar & Shafiq 2010), wherein daughters move out of their parental homes and reside with their husband's families while the sons continue to reside with their parents and contribute to the family income after marriage.

Traditionally, families in India were joint families where several generations of a family lived together in one household. However, due to the impact of urbanisation and modernisation nuclear families are more common in India now (Medora, Larson, & Dave 2000). Nevertheless, several researchers (for example, Carson & Chowdhury 2000; Medora 2007; Mullatti 1995) have described the modern Indian family as a *modified extended family* in which family members may not live in the household nor have a joint family income, but still continue to perform roles and tasks as they did previously such as providing child care and financial assistance, regular visits and participation in all events such as births, deaths, religious festivals, and marriages.

Sinha and colleagues (2001) in their study found that meeting family and social commitments was given more importance than meeting work commitments. However, in a study to investigate work-family conflicts and its effect on job satisfaction among a sample of 162 Indians, Sharma (2012) found that there was no relationship. Sharma posited that there was no conflict between work and family as in largely collectivist societies such as India work was perceived as a means to provide for the family and enhance their well-being. Hence, work roles and family roles were not seen as separate, but interlinked.

Hierarchical Relationships. While globalisation has brought about many changes in the Indian cultural values, one value that has not changed to a great extent is the existence of hierarchical relationships. Sharma (2000) looked at matrimonial propositions in Indian

national daily newspapers, a common method to find marital partners in India (Dhesi 2001; Mullatti, 1995) and found that even highly educated individuals conspicuously stated their castes, sub-castes and financial status in those advertisements. For example, "*Senguntha Mudaliar* parents invite alliance for son 27/175, Aswini, M.E. working in USA, H-1B visa" (Sharma, 2000, pg. 174). The prevalence of the caste system (while not as prominent as before) and child-rearing practices it has been proposed, perpetuates the existence of hierarchical relationships and then these beliefs are transferred to the workplace where superior and subordinate relationships are often authoritative and paternalistic (Kakar 1971; Suri & Abbott 2009), further reinforcing these beliefs. Kakar explained that authoritative parenting in Indian homes had contributed to authoritative superior-subordinate relationships at work. Children in Indian homes were raised to be dependent on their parents for guidance which in later in workplaces translated to employees expecting to be told what to do by their superiors (Kakar 1971).

Paternalism in the workplace refers to father-like behaviour of the superiors, providing care and protection to the subordinates (Aycan 2006; Pellegrini & Scandura 2008). In a review on paternalism, Aycan (2006) explained that the underpinnings of paternalism lay in the value of familism and family relationships that were characterised by patriarchy, patrilocality, and patrilineality, all characteristics of an Indian family (Medora 2007; Mulatti 1995; Sonawat 2001). Aycan elaborated that often paternalistic behaviour extended to the workplace as well. Superiors behaved in a father-like manner providing professional and personal advice to subordinates; expecting loyalty; establishing and maintaining close relationships with subordinates; and maintaining an authoritative status (Aycan 2006; Pellegrini & Scandura 2008). Subordinates considered the workplace as family; willingly accepted authority; were loyal and deferential; and would go out of their way to help the superior in their personal life such as run errands, if required (Aycan 2006). In a review of the

Indian managerial ethos Chatterjee (2009) explained that paternalism had its roots in the concepts of *Shraddha* and *Sneha*. *Shraddha* is the loyalty and deference to the elder or senior and *Sneha* is the acceptance of a mentoring role and affection of the younger one (Chatterjee). The founder of a leading Indian organisation in an interview with Chatterjee stated that Indian organisations were sustained by the familial bonding and social links at the workplace. The attitude of considering the workplace as family could offer another explanation as to why Sharma (2012) did not find a relationship between work-family conflict and job satisfaction in an Indian employee sample. There would be no conflicts if there is no separation of work and family life.

Saini and Budhwar (2008) in case studies of two small and medium Indian enterprises shed light on some of the indigenous management techniques. In both the organisations studied Saini and Budhwar found that the senior management motivated their staff by their paternalistic and caring style of leadership. For example, the managerial staff went to their employees' homes on special occasions such as weddings and birthdays; offered financial support in way of loans to their employees; distributed gifts and sweets for important Indian festivals; regularly enquired about the employees' and their families' well-being; and provided tea and snacks for the employees when they worked overtime.

In a case study of an Indian software firm which had an ongoing relationship with a British organisation Nicholson and Sahay (2001) found that another aspect of paternalism in Indian organisations was the need for Indian employees to please and avoid confrontation. One of the interviewees from the British organisation in Nicholson and Sahay's study stated that whenever the Indian employees were presented with work and asked if they could meet the deadline, they always said yes even when it was not possible. However, Nicholson and Sahay noted that the intent behind this behaviour was positive and the Indians employees were willing to work overtime to complete the tasks if required.

In a comparative study of three organisations; the first, a multinational corporation based in India; the second, the parent organisation of the multinational corporation based in the United States, and the third, an Indian owned organisation based in India, Poster and Prasad (2005) also found a paternalistic atmosphere in the India-based organisations. Furthermore, Poster and Prasad noted a bureaucratic style of management. For example, every employee was required to sign an attendance register every day and if they were late to work twice in a month they then lost half a day's pay. Work hours in the India-based organisations were very inflexible in sharp contrast to their counterpart in the United States where employees had several options regarding work hours. In addition, Poster and Prasad found that while the Indian employees had more help at home they also had more chores to do because their families were so large.

Based on their research, Sinha and Kumar (2004) posited that a hierarchical order in India could be traced back to the ancient Indian scriptures where everything was ranked in hierarchical order. For example, animates were superior to inanimates, human beings were superior to both animates and inanimates, among human beings, hierarchical order was in terms of caste, within castes, it was based on gender and age. There was hierarchy even within the human body with the head superior to the middle, which in turn was superior to the feet. This outlook seemed to be so deeply ingrained in the Indian psyche that in a study of 311 employees in a bureaucratic organisation, Kumar (2007) found that there were no differences in hierarchical tendencies among employees who had joined the organisation 25 years back and employees who had joined the organisation two years back. Even though there was a significant generational gap between the older and newer employees, there were no differences in outlook with regard to hierarchical relationships. However, Kumar stated that the point to note was not the existence of hierarchy, but how management style can be adjusted when hierarchy was prevalent. For example, in hierarchical organisations,

participative management styles were not likely to be successful as employees may not want the additional responsibilities that were part of empowerment. While egalitarian relationships may be considered ideal by some, perhaps in some Indian organisations a hierarchical organisational structure with a paternalistic management style may work best.

Juxtaposition of Modern and Traditional Values

The brief review on core Indian values and work revealed that while globalisation has produced some changes such as the breakdown of the joint family system, some attitudes and roles have remained traditional. For example, while families in urban areas were increasingly becoming nuclear in nature, they still exerted considerable influence on the people, even at work (Sinha et al. 2001); hierarchical relationships continued to exist, paternalistic behaviour by superiors was a major source of motivation for Indian employees (Saini & Budhwar 2008); a bureaucratic style of management was still prevalent (Poster & Prasad 2005); and finally the endorsement of seemingly contradictory values such as competition and cooperation was prevalent in the Indian culture (Jain et al. 2006). However, other modern Indian values such entrepreneurship, innovation, a sense of passion in what they do coupled with Indian virtues such as resilience and patience has the potential to make India a formidable economic power in the future (Jain et al., 2006).

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