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East is East? Understanding Aspects of Indian Culture(s) within Organisations

A Special Issue of *Culture and Organization*
Volume 21, issue 5 (2015)

Special Issue Editors

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“No culture can live, if it attempts to be exclusive.”

(M.K. Gandhi, cited in Uyesugi and Shipley 2005, 305)

This call is an attempt to rekindle interest in understanding aspects of Indian culture in organisations. Though there have been previous special issues focusing on topics such as India-specific management including human resource management practices and Indian firms’ internationalisation strategies (see for e.g. *Human Resource Management*, 2010; *Journal of World Business*, 2012), the cultural aspects have been largely ignored. This special issue aims to fill this glaring gap. The World Bank predicts that globally in the near future India will be the second largest economy after China. The recent high growth rates reported by businesses in the Indian economy, while laudable from some perspectives (Cappelli et al., 2010), also need to be sustainable, especially amidst its high cultural diversity. As the world’s largest and most diverse democracy, the Indian society can be best described as an amalgam of multiple cultures, value systems, socio-political and institutional orientations. Collectively, this diversity generates multiple opportunities and challenges for researchers and managers to learn about and embrace Indian cultural aspects in organisations.

The spectacular growth of India’s information technology, pharmaceutical and telecommunications industries heralds openness, transparency and organisational success (see for example, Budhwar and Varma 2010; Pereira and Anderson 2012; Malik 2013). However, the nation’s extremely complex and relatively less transparent political and institutional governance structures (Transparency International 2013), and its cultural diversity, pose challenges for work and organisation. Moreover, today, India as a nation is transitioning from its long established value and belief systems to emerging cultural systems that have been diffused or that have converged from around the world, over time. As more transnational corporations seek to establish their presence and practices in India, the need to develop a better understanding of India and its cultural roots is critical for the successful social, political, and economic integration of these firms. In addition, large Indian organisations are internationalising and spreading their operations across the globe. As a preliminary step, this requires an understanding of the traditions through which such shared values and knowledge were created and

disseminated within the Indian community and organisational settings. It is only then that one can start to develop an appreciation and understanding of Indian cultural aspects within organisations.

Of course one of the controversies around the notion of culture in organisations and nations surrounds its rational and systemic conceptualisation (Alvesson 2002). Such approaches view culture as an entity that can be measured or indeed manipulated. The rational and objective approaches to culture in organisations and societies, such as those dimensions proposed by Hofstede, have attracted significant critiques (eg, Brewis and Jack 2009; McSweeney 2002). Other scholars have highlighted the ethical tensions that exist in postcolonial studies of culture (eg, Prasad 2003; Said 1978), particularly as the colonising nations focus on a discourse built on ethnocentric orientations and related political gains. More recently, evidence from India's information technology sector (Kumar and Puranam 2012) debunks the negative cultural image portrayed by popular culture studies that argue Indian firms do not innovate. Kumar and Puranam provide evidence of process, product and business model innovations as having elements of individual and group cultures embedded in each. The above suggests that an objective and popular 'think of culture' approach is much less preferable than one which invites us to 'think culturally' (Calas and Smircich 1997, 33). In view of the above, this special issue invites contributions that 'think culturally', considering culture as socially situated and something that is 'in-transition', rather than something that is rigid and stagnant. This debate can be enhanced by how people come to understand themselves as 'cultured'. How are they mobilised or immobilised by certain commitments/attachments to cultural representations in organizations? Such an approach also requires an awareness of cognitive and affective domains of learning. In India, for centuries, the development of knowledge, values and their propagation has been undertaken orally in the form of parables and fables (Pio 2007; Ryder 1925) following the tradition of a *Guru* (teacher) – *shishya* (learner) relationship. Further, the social and cultural fabric of India is interwoven by centuries of colonisation, by diverse colonisers, as well as now the wellspring of modern, vibrant, young and democratic India. Thinking culturally therefore requires inquiry through different lenses to comprehend the cultural amalgam that is India.

We invite theoretical, methodological and empirical submissions that address (but are not limited to):

- Postcolonial discourses of culture in Indian organisations
- Indian culture/s 'in-transition' versus an extant 'thing' or 'entity' in organisations
- The importance of cultural literacy in organisations in India
- Phenomenological approaches to understanding culture/s in organisations in India
- Cross-cultural approaches to understanding Indian culture/s in organisations
- Cultural integration approaches by Indian and foreign organisations
- Convergence, divergence and cross-vergence of Indian culture/s within Indian MNEs
- The role of the Indian diaspora worldwide (in cultural assimilation in organisations abroad)
- The utilisation of Indian cultural approaches by foreign MNEs in host and other countries
- Unbundling of the complexities and diversities of Indian culture/s in organisations

- Dispersal of cultural elements by Indian organisations in the process of internationalisation
- Cultural challenges within organisations for overseas Indian immigrants and foreign immigrants in India

The above is an indicative list and we encourage innovative interpretations of the call. We welcome papers that draw insights and approaches from across a range of social sciences and humanities including contributions from anthropology, sociology, philosophy, politics, art history, communication, film, gender studies, cultural studies paradigmatic assumptions and methodological perspectives as long as the submissions directly address this special issue's theme of understanding aspects of Indian culture(s) within organisations.

Submission and informal enquiries

Please ensure that all submissions to the special issue are made via the Scholar One Culture and Organization site at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/gSCO>. You will have to sign up for an account before you are able to submit a manuscript. Please ensure when you do submit that you select the relevant special issue (volume 21, issue 5) to direct your submission appropriately. If you experience any problems please contact the editors of this issue. The deadline for manuscript submission is **3rd September 2014**.

Style and other instructions on manuscript preparation can be found at the journal's website: <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/gSCO20/current>. Manuscript length should not exceed 8000 words, including appendices and supporting materials. Please also be aware that any images used in your submission must be your own, or where they are not you must already have permission to reproduce them in an academic journal. You should make this explicit in the submitted manuscript. Please direct informal enquiries to the special issue editors Vijay Pereira at vijay.pereira@port.ac.uk and Ashish Malik at ashish.malik@newcastle.edu.au

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