

## Purview of Indian Culture in 1980's: Review of papers published during the decade

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### ABSTRACT

Culture is beyond observable behaviour of cohort of people interacting within the group and outside. As explained vide hundreds of different definitions, it loosely can be defined as bundle of verbal, nonverbal behaviour interacting within each other and across the external variables inclusive of inherent semiotics and sublime processes. The way people behave and react to the situations in reality, the expressions, motifs and symbols along the common dimensions and characteristics those all cultures do share differ, and this distinguishes one culture from another. How people from different gender celebrate, ensure discipline and system in the society, the way economic transactions occur, the way individuals behave with same and opposite gender, meet, mate and rear their children etc. together pose a picture of the culture, which undergoes dynamic and continuous change. Culture reflected by the society during a certain period is distinguishable from the culture of same society in different period. The articles, papers published during that period, media and other communication medium together give a reflection of the thought process and its manifestation in reality. This paper reviews the articles and papers published during 1980-90 to understand the existing culture of Indian society during the decade.

### 1. Introduction

Culture is everything that people have, think, and do as members of their society. The three verbs in this definition (have, think, and do) can help us identify three major structural components of the concept of culture; that is, for a person to have something, some material object must be present. When people think, ideas, values, attitudes, and beliefs are present. When people do, they behave in certain socially prescribed ways. Thus, culture is made up of (1) material objects; (2) ideas, values, and attitudes; and (3) normative, or expected, patterns of behaviour. (Ferraro, The culture dimension of International Business). Though Cultural universals, which are commonalities amongst the greatest of diversities, when seen from a broader perspective are same, perpetual change a culture experience, male female interaction and relationships, social control systems, economic systems, education delivery and responsiveness, management of finances and spending behaviour are some cultural universals for any micro or macro culture. However Culture becomes distinct by innovating, which generally happens in the culture by borrowing from other cultures which is known as culture diffusion which is a selective process.

One of the greatest challenges in studying culture is displaying of ethnocentrism that is evaluating the behaviour of the visitor by measurement which are our own standards as we feel that our behaviour are correct and all other way of doing things is wrong. Cultures should be thought of as integrated wholes-that is, cultures are coherent and logical systems, the parts of which to a degree are interrelated. That is any one component may be related to other components in some way and definitely is not random assortment of customs. Hence to study culture of any society or organization, it is important to observe it along the following dimensions (1) the learned nature of culture, (2) how culture influences biological processes, (3) cultural Universals, (4) the ubiquity of culture

change, (5) ethnocentrism, and (6) the integrated nature of culture. It is assumed that an awareness of the concept of culture (what culture is and how it functions) is a necessary yet not sufficient prerequisite for an understanding of any particular culture. The influences of behaviour of actors should be distilled from self-analysis of actors themselves and must be specified at much lower fragment than the general broad approach that study of cultures usually use. (Hammel, 1990). It is important to note that since these generalization is the outcome of thousands of cultures hence it is likely they may not fit to any specific existing culture perfectly. It can be said that culture are complex phenomenon, features of which change very fast and some do not change at all. Accordingly to understand the existing culture reflected by Indian society during 1980's till 1990, the pattern of behaviour of individuals and their formal and informal groups have to be analysed across above mentioned dimensions. This analysis can be done through several methods, one may interview people across generations to understand what they did during that period, which may have serious perceptual biases. The other method is to analyse symbols and semiotics which were prevalent during the specific period. These may include movies, architecture, newspapers and write ups. Study of published papers and articles is much more authenticate method as the raw material based upon which we attempt to define culture is validated and authenticate. Further research undertaken during the period takes into account most of the variables and factors which comprise and effect behaviour exhibited by people in general and hence is a valid tool. The papers and articles published during that period has been analysed to understand culture exhibited by Indian society during 80's by review of papers published on various behavioural aspects of people both as individual and in groups.

It is interesting to note that how different human beings have evolved to solve the universal problems faced by the

mankind. Any society, if it has to survive have to arrive at some solutions to the fundamental human needs which must be satisfied. When we take a particular cohort we would see that there is a distinct pattern of behaviour that has evolved to address these universal needs, which makes that cohort distinct from the other. It makes one culture different from another, which is of course dynamic. Hence to understand the distinctiveness of any culture we should look how a particular society responded to the confrontations posed by universal problems. This holds true even for the same society for different periods as the ways to solve these problems evolve and may change with time. For the purpose of understanding Indian society during 80's it is logical to look into how individuals and their groups responded to these common cultural universals and weave a pattern of behaviour exhibited by people living during that period.

## 2. Economic Systems

Since supply of required commodities is finite hence a society must develop systematic ways to produce distribute and consume these finite resources. Similarly Indian society has been exhibiting various economic and social trends, which indicate the mind-set, situations and reactions of policymakers which is reflection of the mass as a whole.

India experienced a very sluggish growth in the 80s because of several factors which were political, financial etc. The constraints of the state interventions impacted economic system to a great extent. The distressed economic system of the country after the failed public sector planning were tried to revive by taking few major decisions like deregulate industrial licensing, de regulation of automobile and telecommunication sector, waiving of MRTP clearance for 27 industries, boost to IT sector by trained IT services, and subsidies to farmers assured maximum growth in agriculture. Also a lot of committees were set up like sengupta committee etc. to reorient the economic policies. 1980's saw favourable factors to encourage urban savings in India yet the improvement in household savings moderately improved despite substantial subsidisation of household consumption and of household savings. The fiscal privileges resulted in sizeable perceived wealth which encouraged conspicuous consumption (Shetty, 1990). It can be said that India faced a mild version of economic liberalization in the mid 1980's.

Further to 1980, India achieved an economic growth rate of 4 to 5 percent, its highest since independence. The industrial growth rate is twice the rate, however the dismal picture is that nearly of the population 40% i.e. 300 million was below poverty line of yearly income of \$500 for the family of four (Weisman, 1987). India also suffered its worst drought in decades, resulting in lesser crops. There was a vicious circle as without adequate drinking water the cattle died, which effected subsequent year crops as well. This also effected power shortage due to countries reliance on hydroelectricity, which effected productivity and suspension of work at factories (Spaeth, 1987).

The political-economic system during this time had become a corruption racket in terms of industrial licensing, and also an increased dependence on international funds for funding public deficit had pushed the economy into heavy debts and financial crisis. The state tried to strengthen the

country's economic position by heavily investing in public sector industrialization but failed because of lack of efficiency and instead became a burden on the public revenue. Five year plans were launched to achieve development but unchecked population growth at that time surfaced the weakness of the economic strategy. The roots of financial crisis of the country can be attributed to their failure in changing the orientation of economy from an import substitution to export oriented unit.

The retarded growth and looming financial crisis was because of the high fiscal deficit, due to high interest payments on commercial borrowings, subsidies for agriculture, industry and defence expenditure. The farmer, urban middle class and industrialists all exerted pressure on the government for concessions, moreover because of social mobilization due to untouchables and backward classes govt. had to pay heed to larger number of interests groups. India's hampered economic development during 80's was due to serious balance of payment crisis, financial losses and political instability which did not permit it to stand out as a global economy.

## 3. Marriage and family system

All societies must evolve systems of mating, child rearing and upbringing, as without a systematic process and procedure in place its very survival shall be jeopardized. Similarly human infants require longer gestation period of dependency for their survival, accordingly family systems are vital for any society. India is inhabited by people practicing various religions and beliefs making it a country showing unity in diversity. However, during the period India witnessed a blend of positive and negative developments taking place in the socio-economic-political structure of the country. The society of eighties had some significant characteristics specific to that period, distinguishing it from the present times. The society was just recuperating from societal backlashes of sati & widowhood. There was substantial increase in migration of people because of several reasons both within the country and outside. Patriarchal ideology was in place. High moral standards, traditional attitude, conservatism, flexibility towards adjustments and stable joint families were common. Cooperation and emotional attachments with the family members in which the elders played vital role in making decisions on marriages and career was an important aspect. The family used to be an excellent support system and exhibited a sense of togetherness and attachment especially during festivals. Homemade spices and condiments were solely used. All food items to be consumed during the festivals were homemade. The elders were held in esteem and commanded huge respect by the family members and also community members. Property was owned by the male member only but the eldest member happened to be the decision maker. The family worshipped a common deity. The number of working women was less because of the low literacy and social structure prevalent during the period coupled with very low exposure to the outside world.

When engaged in social interaction with partner, Indians preferred both 50% and 100% look (staring with mutual silence) and found visual avoidance much uncomfortable than either despite the fact that often marriages were arranged and there was least or no courtship before marriage. Further mutual silence was perceived to be more uncomfortable than partner

speaking or listening (L'Armand, Preferences in patterns of eye contact in India, 1984). The joint family concept practiced in the eighties involved child rearing collectively by the members in which division of labour, time management and creation of a spectrum of exposure and awareness were affected. Grand-moms observed closely the company that the child kept, their food habits and the entertainment preferences. Grand-moms have been good story tellers and loving baby sitters. They injected morality in their personality through the stories. The mutual advantage of living in the joint families and having grandparents around is the understanding of world as a positive place to live and inculcating positive values to make further better place to live. In eighties the government sanctioned a huge expansion of Doordarshan. Hamlog (1984), Nukkad and Buniyaad made their existences. After watching Ramayan and Mahabharat, people started praying actors and actresses. Watching these serials became an important ingredient of social culture. People used to gather at one home and the environment used to become spiritual. The IT and telecommunication sectors got a boost which initiated the process of bringing in positive changes in the society.

In some minority communities like Parsis of India, low nuptiality, low fertility, and emigration and out marriage happened because of high aspirations and goals of distinctive lifestyle in the face of diminishing opportunities leading to decline in their population unlike other communities. It is noteworthy that in such communities which rose as middle class during British Raj, marriage and child rearing were perceived as less significant than achieving a western standard of living (Axelord, 1990).

India between the years 1980 and 1990 went under a huge transition and women started to become more liberalized and educated, they were being supported by the society, which lead to a decline in early marriages and thereby had fewer children. As many Indian families were facing poverty, large number of children led to greater expenses hence with fewer children, women devoted a lot of time in taking care of them where they could have worked as paid labour. Between the years 1980 to 1990 there was an increase in children born to unmarried women.

Where there were changes in child bearing in India, child rearing practices also went under transformation. Child rearing is vital for any society, as it is critical for personality development. Initially, India made improvements in the state of the health of children and this was reflected in the infant mortality rates (Seymour, 1989). The following table shows the Height-Weight ratio of rural girls, with respect to their age exhibiting, how young rural girls during 1970s-80s were malnourished (ideal weight for 150cm height is between 42.27-56.4kg) indicating a possibility that they were less cared viz a viz their siblings (report of the years, 1974- 1979, 1980). As a solution to such problems, emphasis was given on improvement of diets and the importance of breast feeding. India also introduced a ban on child labour in the year 1986, which focused on better lives for children and on their proper education and training. Also it set a proper age for children to work. During these years (1980-1990) the concept of preschool child and the right school age for children also gained some substantial changes (Bardhan, 1987). Apart from these, mid-day meals were introduced (to overcome the mal nutrition

levels) and children living in rural areas were also enticed to attend school (for better education and future) (C. Gopalan).

The entry of women in management and their career paths can be segregated in three distinct phases. First appearing in fifties characterised by societal transition where entry of women was linked with economic independence or engaging herself to justify acquired education. Second phase from 60's to late 70's where women created opportunities for career paths characterized by task orientation, competition, collaboration and formal work roles. During the third phase i.e. the decade of eighties women became more professional and had much clarity between societal and formal work roles. Women from all walks of life and diverse background started entering in managerial positions. Negative stereotypes of both women and men about themselves and other genders started to break and the societal gender roles started to be redefined. This decade show emergence of women as successful achievers and some organizations were also receptive of this change where women leadership had realized that their way of being effective at home may not work in organizations and vice versa (Parikh, 1990). Sex – role socialization in India can be deciphered by the fact that men had less favourable attitude towards emerging women management in India. It is important to note that highly educated women even had much more favourable attitudes. It is interesting to note that during the period women had started to break their sex role stereotype which portray men as aggressive, dominant and firm whereas women as submissive, docile and soft where education had a substantial mediating effect (Gulhati, 1990).

#### 4. Educational systems

The way traditional knowledge and systems are passed from one generation to another and the process of transmission of cultural knowledge paves path for evolution of some form of educational system in any society.

Between the dilemmas of adhering to the traditional or becoming modern, Indian education was at a sad state in 1980's. More than 60% of India's 800 million population then couldn't read or write, which would eventually lead to India becoming the world's most illiterate nation. With a rapid pace required to change to cater to new demands, problems and constraints, India's education system was struggling. Going abroad and getting education from good institute resulted in better jobs fuelling demand and hence huge waiting list for so called elite private schools (Sheila, 1989).

#### 5. Social control system

If individuals will violate each other's rights and do as they feel, anarchy will prevail. Hence every society has its own mechanism to coerce people to follow the rules it has laid down to be followed. These mechanisms may differ in their process and objectives, however every society has to have a system to ensure that people follow these laid down rules and procedures. There are many methods adopted by human beings to be perceived by others to be useful or to say impress others which is termed as ingratiation tactics. The tactics adopted by Indians during eighties which have seen relatively less change include name dropping (as in resource scarce society, high connections are highly valued), inconsistent behaviour to please the target rather than based upon some

value, ideology or norm and instrumental dependency to induce tactics to like and seek help from the target (Pandey, 1981). As India is a traditional patriarchal society, the purchasing decisions between spouses were found to be autonomous during the period, where dependence upon spouses were found to be least in making personnel decisions. This was directly correlated to the extent of role segregation in the society and moderated by wellbeing and marital harmony between the couples (Wolfgang Wagner, 1990).

Dowry became prohibited by law in 1961 with the purpose of prohibiting the demanding, giving and taking of dowry. Although providing dowry is illegal, it is still common in many parts of India for a husband to seek a dowry from the wife's family, in some cases leading to extortion or violence against the wife. To stop offences of cruelty by the husband or his relatives against the wife, section 498A was added to the Indian Penal Code and section 198A to the Criminal Procedure Code in 1983. Section 498A was being criticised by many in India as being prone to misuse. Domestic violence in India is endemic. Around 70% of women in India are victims of domestic violence. National Crime Records Bureau reveal that a crime against a woman is committed every three minutes, a woman is raped every 29 minutes, a dowry death occurs every 77 minutes, and one case of cruelty committed by either the husband or relative of the husband occurs every nine minutes. This all occurs despite the fact that women in India are legally protected from domestic abuse under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act. Human trafficking is the trade in humans, most commonly for the purpose of sexual slavery, forced labour or commercial sexual exploitation for the trafficker or others or for the extraction of organs or tissues or for providing a spouse in the context of forced marriage. Human trafficking can occur within a country or trans-nationally. Human trafficking is a crime against the person because of the violation of the victim's rights of movement through coercion and because of their commercial exploitation. Human trafficking is the trade in people, and does not necessarily involve the movement of the person from one place to another. Female infanticide in India has a history spanning centuries. The dowry system has been cited as one of the main reasons for female infanticide and sex-selective abortion as many families who live in poverty cannot afford to raise the funds for a suitable dowry. The government has tried various approaches to help prevent the practice. The dowry system was abolished in 1961, in 1991 financial incentives began, and in 1992 the baby cradle scheme was launched. Female foeticide is the act of aborting a foetus because it is female.

The frequency of female foeticide is indirectly estimated from the observed high birth sex ratio, which is the ratio of boys to girls at birth. The natural ratio is assumed to be from 103 to 107, and any number above it is considered as suggestive of female foeticide. According to the decennial Indian census, the sex ratio in the 0 to 6 age group in India has risen from 102.4 males per 100 females in 1961, to 104.1 in 1981.

## 6. Supernatural belief system

All questions existing in the universe can't be answered. There are several phenomenon which are unexplainable. Every society has its own explanations based upon some mechanism to explain these, which constitute the societies supernatural belief system. Superstition and black magic were practiced across the country especially in under developed regions on which the society laid importance. Answers to unexplainable questions were explained by many mythological epic stories and folklores prevailing at that time.

## 7. Conclusion

Eighties saw a change in the political leadership and gender role re- classification. With women taking greater space in both social and work space proving themselves with acquired education and skills paved a new path for Indian population. Emergency imposed and decisions taken at that time restructured the beliefs of common man which arose his interest in countries macro issues. Liberalization had just begun and India started to make a mark in world forum. Stereotypes and archaic social norms started to break. Television and other medium of communication had just put a foot and society started allocating time to abreast themselves with latest updates. Broadcasting of epic serials imbibed values amongst the society and bonded people with each other. Emergence of middle class and increase in disposable income also triggered consumption and consumption patterns of the society. Due to stark difference in the society in healthcare, child care and education impartation, Government was compelled to undertake reforms which were much needed. It can be said that eighties was critical period in Indian history as India started to emerge as a developing nation and started to mark its entry in the world form in all round development, which were evident from organization of several events including Asian games, emergence of welfare schemes and increase in the allocated budget along with consistent economic reforms which ensured sustained growth in national GDP despite natural calamities like draught during the period.

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