Unravelling the layers of Indian culture and worldview: an exploratory study

Richa Awasthy*
Organizational Behaviour Department,
School of Business, Public Policy and
Social Entrepreneurship (SBPPSE),
Ambedkar University Delhi (AUD),
Delhi-110006, India
Email: richa@aud.ac.in
Email: r.awasthy@gmail.com
*Corresponding author

Rajen K. Gupta
Organizational Behaviour Department,
Management Development Institute,
Gurugram – 122001, India
Email: rajenkgupta@gmail.com

Abstract: The purpose of this exploratory study is to explore worldview of budding Indian management professionals. Taking an interpretivist epistemological position, this paper attempt to address the ontological perspective of Indians. Respondents were asked to write their views on ‘What is reality according to people around you?’ Followed by one 90-minute focus group discussion (FGD) and two in-depth interviews were conducted. Four types of analyses were conducted to minimise researcher bias and touch deeper layer of meaning. Based on Schein’s layers of culture, the paper ends by proposing multiple layers in Indian culture namely, basic assumptions, values and artefacts. Paper conjecture ‘go with the flow’ or samarpan (devotion) as the deep-rooted philosophy or basic assumption that influences Indian values and practices. Typical Indian values: faith in God, paradoxical mindset, family orientation, contextual sensitivity, and tolerance. The physical artefacts: jugaad, adaptability, visit to temples, prayers, fasting, yoga, meditation and tolerance for ambiguity.

Keywords: go with the flow; India; Indian culture; qualitative research; samarpan; worldview.


Biographical notes: Richa Awasthy is an Associate Professor of Management, Ambedkar University Delhi (AUD) at Delhi since April 2016. She has more than 20 years of work experience in the area of teaching, consultancy and research. She is author of the co-edited book Qualitative Research in Management: Methods and Experiences, Sage Publications (with first author Professor Rajen K. Gupta). She has written chapters in book and published
more than 30 papers and reviewer to various journals such as Academy of Management Conference 2010, Asia Pacific Journal of Management, and so on.

Rajen K. Gupta is a Professor of Human Behaviour and Organisation Development and retired from Management Development Institute, Gurugram. Before this he was a Professor at I.I.M. Lucknow. He has four books and over 90 scientific publications to his credit. He is also on the international editorial boards of a number of journals such as International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management (Sage, London), Journal of Research Practice (Online journal) and International Journal of Indian Culture and Business Management (Inderscience, Switzerland). In addition, he is on the academic editorial boards of a number of management institutes, and is often involved in doctoral thesis examination, etc.

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1 Introduction

In an increasingly globalising world, it is not only desirable but necessary to understand every culture in its own right. Only then interactions among people from different cultures will lead to realisation of full potential of cultural diversity. India is representation of diverse culture and host to many multinationals. Since the economic liberalisation in India, the interface between Indians and foreigners has gone up manifold both in India and abroad. Interactions among different sets of people involving exchanges around work, relationships and life, in general, form an integral part of people’s lives, and are likely to influence their personal philosophies. Studies so far do not provide a composite view of Indian culture. Therefore, there is a need to take a fresh look at Indian culture. Taking an interpretivist epistemological position, this paper attempts to address the ontological perspective of Indians. In other words, the current exploratory study endeavours to understand Indian culture by understanding the worldview of a section of Indian society namely budding management professionals.

The term ‘worldview’, the English translation of a German word Weltanschauung (from Welt, ‘world’ and Anschauung, ‘view’ – Merriam-Webster Dictionary), is used for an intellectual conception of the universe from the human perspective and a set of assumptions about physical and social realities that may have an impact on human cognition and behaviour (Koltko-Rivera, 2004). According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, ‘worldview’ is a person’s way of thinking and understanding of life, which depends on their beliefs and attitude (accessed on 4.2.19 https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/world-view). The Dictionary of Social Sciences defines ‘worldview’ as the way a person or a group interprets the universe (accessed on 4.2.2019 https://sociologydictionary.org/worldview/). Personal worldviews evolve as people try to integrate their knowledge, experience, and intuitions into a coherent framework, which they can refer to as they try to make sense of their lives (Hiebert, 2008; Rousseau and Billingham, 2018; Laininen,
Leontiev (2007) explained a person’s worldview in four aspects: beliefs (implicit or explicit beliefs, e.g., all politicians are liars); values (system of ideals, e.g., honesty defines the character of a person); structural (peculiarities of the integrated worldview, e.g., family is the core of a person); and functional (influence on the perception about reality and individual’s action, e.g., exchange of bribes to expedite work).

Academic interest in worldview largely originates in the 18th century in major disciplines. Worldview is known variously as philosophy of life (Jung, 1954), world hypothesis (Pepper, 1970), world outlook (Maslow, 1970), vision of reality (Messer, 2000), self and the world construct system (Kottler and Hazler, 2001), and cultural orientations (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961). It seems appropriate to look at cultural orientation as an expression of cultural worldview. The shift from the industrial to post-industrial society brings about fundamental changes in an individual’s daily experiences, which are reflected in the changing (cultural) worldview (Inglehart and Baker, 2000) universally. India has been witnessing immense development in terms of higher literacy rate, better job prospects, increased female participation in workplace, and migration from rural to urban areas making the cultural context even more complex. Hence, an understanding of Indian culture is of profound importance and there is a need to study people’s cultural worldview.

Thus, there are different perspectives of worldview – philosophical, religious, theological, economic, cultural, political, and scientific. In theology, worldview is an individual’s view about the existence and nature of God, while in management science it is understood as a value system. In the current paper we focus on the cultural worldview of Indians to take a fresh look at Indian culture.

The simplest definition of culture is ‘a way of life’. The term ‘culture’, first used by the British anthropologist Tylor (1871, p.1) in his book *Primitive Culture* as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”. Hofstede (1980, 2001) looks at general beliefs as representing desirable values, which people include in their worldview. Leontiev (2007) defines culture is most commonly defined as the mental programming that shapes the individual mindset, including beliefs, values, attitude, customs, etc. (see also, Hofstede, 1991; Torbom, 1982). Culture even impacts various aspects of organisational life such as human resource management practices and the performance of an organisation (Bruton and Lau, 2008; Gochhayat et al., 2017; Tran, 2017), managerial effectiveness (Neelankavil et al., 2000), intercultural relations (Clausen, 2010; Leung, 2007), person-supervisor fit (Bhattacharya et al, 2018) and mergers and acquisitions (Denison et al., 2011; Groysberg et al., 2018). Worldview of an individual is an important yet neglected area of research, which is predominantly theoretical and conceptual.

2 Literature review

Triandis (2004) has classified culture as objective and subjective: objective culture is institutional culture from a political or economic system to the products such as cuisine, music, or art; subjective culture refers to the social reality as formed by a society’s institutions, in other words, the worldview of a society’s members (Landis et al., 2004, cited in Al-Bannay et al., 2014). The empirical research in the area of cultural worldview
is largely missing. Since our study is looking freshly at the culture, the following section presents the literature on Indian culture.

2.1 Indian culture in cross-cultural studies

Numerous large-scale surveys have been conducted to map cultural dimensions across nations. Minkov (2013) presents a wide-ranging review of 27 studies on cross-cultural analysis covering 13 countries, and some of these are: Hofstede (1980, 2001), Bond et al. (2004), Smith et al. (1996), House et al. (2004) study and World Value survey (Inglehart and Baker, 2000; Inglehart and Welzel, 2010). Minkov (2018) collected data from 53,000 respondents representing 56 countries to revisit replicability of Hofstede’s dimensions. He found that individualism (IDV) vs collectivism (COLL) is important dimension of understanding and comparing culture and power distance seems to be a logical facet of IDV-COLL.

Hofstede (1980, 2010) identified six cultural dimensions to compare societies. Those were: power distance; individualism vs collectivism; masculinity vs femininity; long term vs short term orientation; uncertainty avoidance; restraint vs indulgence. Indian society scoring high on the power distance dimension indicating an appreciation for hierarchy and a top-down structure; both collectivism and individualism; a male-dominant society and medium to low preference for avoiding uncertainty; has long term orientation; culture of restraint; an acceptance of imperfection (Hofstede scores and interpretations, retrieved from https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/india/, accessed on 09.12.19). Many studies are based on Hofstede’s dimensions in different cultural contexts, such as by Merritt (2000) and Boopathi (2014).

In one of the Asian cross-cultural studies (Bond et al., 2004), India was found to be a collectivist society, low on human-heartedness and high on Confucian work dynamism.

Another popular work in this domain (based on 50 countries) is Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993), which was re-analysed Smith et al. (1996). Trompenaars gave seven cultural dimensions: universalism vs. particularism; collectivism vs. individualism; neutral vs. affective relationships; defuse vs. specific cultures; achievement vs. ascription; human-time vs. human-nature relationships; and internal vs. external control. India was found to be a more particularistic society with a strong collectivism; an aspiration-oriented culture, it shows an ‘affective’ approach towards relationships and a diffuse culture; mainly oriented towards the past and believe in external control.

House et al. (2004) study collected data from 61 countries on nine cultural dimensions: assertiveness, future orientation, gender egalitarianism, humane orientation, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, performance orientation, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance (Chhokar et al., 2007). The Indian culture was found to be relaxed in dealing with uncertainties and showed a greater humane orientation; high on in-group collectivism (i.e., high degree of cohesiveness in family and organisation); high on assertiveness and values competition, progress, and success; scores low on gender egalitarianism, which indicates greater male domination; does not score high on future orientation, which gets reflected in the Indians’ trust in astrology and vastu1 predictions (Boopathi, 2014). Like Hofstede, the GLOBE survey found that India is high on power distance and has a hierarchical structure.

The World Values Survey was carried out by a group of researchers across the world (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart and Baker, 2000; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005, 2010; Norris and Inglehart, 2004). The data was collected from 82 countries on two predominant
dimensions: traditional vs. secular-rational values and survival vs. self-expression values. Asian societies are distributed in the traditional/secular dimension in two clusters, with more secular Confucian societies at the top and more traditional South Asian ones in the centre.

Neelankavil et al. (2000) compared middle level managers among four countries – China, India, the Philippines and the USA. They found that managers might have to rely on leadership abilities in India and argued that national culture in India has evolved into a hybrid approach towards management practices and is rooted in a framework of transcendental ideology (purification of mind, self-discipline, renunciation and detachment), the primary mode of behaviour being traditional Indian approach and Western influence is reflected in management philosophy.

In these cross-cultural studies, India emerges as a society that is hierarchical, collectivist, relationship-oriented and flexible. These studies used large sample sizes and hence adopted quantitative and deductive methodology. A major problem with a deductive approach is that the data is collected along \textit{a priori} dimensions, which leaves less scope for new dimensions. Despite the contributions made by positivist studies to understand the Indian culture, there is little consideration for ‘how Indians experience Indian culture’ in a deep way. In positivist research, data that is captured by measures such as Likert scale, and ‘life experiences,’ which constitute the experiences of a culture, are often ignored. Such studies reinstate the belief that culture is homogeneous across nations; in other words, it reflects an ‘emic’ approach. However, an ‘etic’ approach is highly desirable to develop a better understanding of a culture, but there is a dearth of bottom-up, inductive, qualitative studies.

2.2 Indian culture in Indian studies

The most significant work in Indian context has been done by J.B.P. Sinha (Sinha, 2014; Sinha and Kanungo, 1997; Sinha and Pandey, 2007; Sinha et al., 2001, 2002, 2004a, 2004b). Sinha et al. (2010), based on a pan-India survey, found that two most dominant modes of behaviour – self-serving calculative and achieving high positive goals – coexist in India but have different causes. Contextual sensitivity facilitates both modes of behaviour but adequate infrastructure and friendly, helpful people in the neighbourhood encourage high positive goal behaviour. The Indian mindset is conceptualised as a configuration of collectively held beliefs, preferences, and action orientations that let Indians respond to their environment in particular ways. The roots of Indian culture and values go back to the pluralistic tradition of the Vedas (Radhakrishnan and Moore, 1954). There seems to be an acceptance of co-existence, discrepancies, inconsistency and contradictions. The origins of acceptance for co-existence can be traced back to the religious figure of \textit{Ardhnarishwar}, which represents the synthesis of masculine and feminine energies of the universe (\textit{purusha} and \textit{prakriti}) and illustrates how \textit{shakti} (power), the female principle of God, is inseparable from (or is the same as, according to some interpretations) Shiva, the male principle of God. Similarly, many gods have multiple names: Ganesha has 12 names, Surya 108 and Saraswati 12.

Indians are deeply spiritual (Roland, 1988) but at the same time they are materialistic and indulge in worldly pleasures. Varma (2004) argues that money is a major motivator for Indians. Preaching morality is prevalent along with a high preference for self-interest (Sinha and Kanungo, 1997). On the one hand, Indians have an easy-going attitude towards work and quality (‘chalta hai,’ literally, it goes) and on the other hand they foster

Some studies describe Indians as collectivists (Hofstede, 1980; Kapp, 1963; Sinha and Verma, 1987; Triandis and Bhawuk, 1997), but Sinha and Tripathi (1994) and Sinha et al. (2004b) find that Indians are both collectivists and individualists. Jha and Singh (2011) found collectivist orientation was lower among urban Indians and women scored higher on both individualistic and collectivistic orientation. Indians are also perceived as ‘individuals’ (Marriott, 1976), but they have a well-protected secret self that contains highly individualistic thoughts, feelings, and fantasies (Roland, 1988). They are described as hierarchy-oriented, status conscious (Sinha, 1990) and high on power distance (Hofstede, 1980) but “deep respect and veneration are only given to those who are indeed superior persons, no matter where they might be in the formal hierarchy” [Roland, (2005), p.4].

The roots of collectivism can be traced to the ancient belief that the Supreme Brahman is expressed in inanimate and animate, including both human beings and the divine. Thus, everything in the cosmos is interconnected and interdependent, sharing the same elements as the Supreme Brahman (Sinha, 2014).

The difference between the Western and Indian literature is that Western studies perceive India as a collectivist society (Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004; Triandis, 1995), Indian studies highlight the co-existence of both individual and collectivist orientation (Mishra, 1994; Sinha et al., 2001, 2002) and the ability to live with contradictions. Moreover, there is hardly any study using the worldview lens to understand a culture. Our study aims to fill this gap and capture the worldview of Indians. Research on India must attempt to capture the worldview of the people in their cultural space (Bhawuk, 2010, 2014).

3 Methodology

Taking an interpretivist stance, this exploratory study uses the qualitative approach to gauge the perceptions, feelings, and experiences of the Indian way of looking at reality, which is not possible through positivist research methods (Gupta and Awasthy, 2015). ‘What’ and ‘how’ questions can be answered better with a qualitative approach. Increasingly, qualitative researchers are exploring the study of culture and experience of reality (Cunilffe, 2010; Gertsen and Søderberg, 2011). Multi-method design is adopted to bracket researcher bias (Denzin, 1989), as it is related to the Indian worldview and being an Indian researcher it was possible to influence the data. Three different data collection methods were used: written narratives, focus group discussions, and interviews.
3.1 Data collection

Data was collected from Delhi and the National Capital Region, India. The respondents were budding management professionals, 71 Indians (31 men and 40 women) who represented between the ages of 21–45 years. Around 80% did not have any prior work experience and were pursuing their master level education, whereas the remainders were working at different organisations such as advertisement agencies, university, oil refineries, and healthcare sector.

Respondents were asked to write their views on ‘What is reality according to people around you?’ After collecting the narratives, a 90-minute focus group discussion (FGD) was held with five members from this pool. Two individual in-depth interviews for 90 minutes were then conducted on different people. The purpose of follow-up FGD and interviews was to explore a deeper insight into Indian worldview. Multi-method approach for same research questions in all three modes of data collection helped in overcoming the limitations of each method (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003).

3.2 Data analysis

The analysis was guided by inductive, abductive, and pluralist principles. Inductive analysis uses detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data (Thomas, 2006). This understanding of inductive analysis is consistent with Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) description, “The researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data”. Abductive analysis is about the inference to a best explanation and is focused at finding explanations for observed facts (Peirce, 1955; Richardson and Kramer, 2006).

The authors independently read the data 4–5 times and discussed it to get deeper insights. Given the complexity of the research question, the data was content analysed in different ways to infer the characteristics of the Indians’ way of looking at reality. The first step was to look at the codes and themes emerging from the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The responses were coded verbatim in N-vivo, which is an appropriate tool for an inductive, bottom-up approach. Second, content analysis was done to look at values, beliefs and practices/actions to understand the worldview (Sinha, 2014). Third, thematic analysis of each paragraph was done (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to capture the overall trends emerging from the descriptions. In order to get deeper insights from the data, case-wise analysis was done. The themes that emerged from the focus group discussion and interviews helped to converge the findings. Hence, four types of analyses were conducted to minimise researcher bias and touch the deeper layers of meaning. Mason (2006) has argued that multi-dimensionality of human experiences cannot be captured by studying them from a single perspective. Pluralistic approach in qualitative research brings in the plurality of perspectives in making sense of the data. The layers of meanings can be put together like puzzle cards to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Frost, 2008; Frost and Nolas, 2013).
4 Findings and discussion

The worldview of Indians is not necessarily identical to those of the respondents who participated in this study. However, we have a collective construction and a sense of their narratives.

4.1 Multi-approach data analysis

The four different analyses of the same data lend credibility to our findings and touch the deeper layers in the data. Following are the results of the four analyses and their triangulation.

4.1.1 Thematic analysis

Each paragraph of the written narratives was read to analyse the data. Excerpts from two narratives are as follows:

Respondent A

“A paradoxical culture of India: India is a country of diverse views. While this co-existence of diversity is much talked about, it is also the reason why the country is being viewed to be in a consistent flux of confusion and contradictions.

“So, an ordinary Indian moves from situation to situation and decides on his/her point of view on a case to case basis. It is this typical characteristic that makes India such an unpredictable nation. The coping strategies within an uncertain social structure suck away the energy of a common man. In his/her continuous struggle for existence, excellence takes a backseat.”

Respondent B

“People start their day with prayers. A unique thing about India is its temples. There are many temples. There are gurudwaras, temples…. People are religious and mostly believe in God. Religiosity is a major way of life. People do a lot of puja ["worship"]; Life is (a reflection of) past life’s karma. Most of the country’s population is poor and for them roti, kapda aur makaan [food, clothes, and shelter] is a daily struggle. People are dissatisfied with most of the political parties. On paper, people speaks about big achievements but, in reality, bias can be seen in offices; work is not a priority.

Nationality is missing…. Thode mein guzar aa kar lete hain [We manage with limited resources].

Movies are very popular in India and maximum numbers of movies are made in India. People like someone else solves their problems. People are physically sick. Indians do not go for trekking. Ramdev is very popular. People are not physically healthy.

Indians are argumentative, which can be seen on all television channels. We lack in action. People equate enjoyment to drinking only. They limit enjoyment to drinking among men.
Marriages are imposed. Family decides your life partner based on a horoscope match and cast match. Marriages are discontent in this country. People say something and do something else. We are worse than Westerners. We are an emerging country as things are not established. Mostly people are sexually dissatisfied because their life partners are not chosen by themselves."

From the content analysis, some bipolar dimensions and paradoxes emerge (refer Table 1). Many of these bipolar dimensions are similar to the list of paradoxes in Sinha (2014, p.160).

Table 1 Bipolar dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Care – achievement</th>
<th>Collectivism – individualism</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith in destiny – hard work orientation</td>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance – uncertainty tolerance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern - competition</td>
<td>Affection – money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity – spirituality</td>
<td>Argumentative – lack of action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2 Values, beliefs and practices

To analyse the data based on emerging values, beliefs, and practices constituting the core of a culture (Sinha, 2008) (refer Table 2), the predominant values found were belief in God, reincarnation, karma, self-centeredness, casteism, and respect for elders. The prevalent beliefs fall into both functional and dysfunctional aspects of the Indian culture (Pareek, 2001). The functional aspects are flexibility, optimism, and ability to cope with life challenges, while the dysfunctional aspects are limited ability to dream, blaming others, bias at work and home, and rigid gender roles. Other beliefs are diversity, paradoxical tendency, faith in guru, religion and god as an abstract concept. Widespread practices were *jugaad* (explained in Section 4.2.7), adaptability, aping the Western, competitiveness, contradiction, duality, religiousness, family orientation, yoga, diversity, co-existence of multiple views, contextual sensitivity, and going with the flow.

Table 2 Emerging values, beliefs and practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People are religious, mostly belief in God</td>
<td>Limited in their capability to dream</td>
<td>Jugaad; It is very situational; get it done anyway. We have no consistence way. Beliefs keep on changing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life is a past life karma’s</td>
<td>Indians become one of them when they work with expatriate. Indians are flexible</td>
<td>Flexible, adaptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents teach not to mingle with someone else matters</td>
<td>Education system churn out brilliant mind</td>
<td>Competitive and comparative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>Practices</td>
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<td>--------</td>
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<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Label person based on caste</td>
<td>Outward looking world view</td>
<td>keep aping west</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect elders</td>
<td>Blame others [external locus of control]</td>
<td>Thode mein guzaraa kar lete hain [manage with limited resources]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We must realise our own strengths</td>
<td>People like someone else solve their problems</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Everybody has its own struggle for life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>money is everything</td>
<td>increase in crime rate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People who are poor think that they should and can do anything to get money</td>
<td>Movies are very popular in India and maximum numbers of movies are made in India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich are stressed out due to work</td>
<td>Roti, kapada aur makaan is the basic struggle</td>
<td>one God for everyday of the week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men from rural background holds very poor mentality towards women</td>
<td>Dissatisfied with most of the political parties</td>
<td>On paper people say big things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect elders</td>
<td>Bias can be seen in offices, work is not priority</td>
<td>Religion in India</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People are physically sick</td>
<td>Indians do not go for trekking</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ramdev is very popular</td>
<td>Yoga is getting popular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indians are argumentative</td>
<td>We lack in action</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People equate enjoyment to drinking only</td>
<td>drinking is more acceptable among men.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marriages are imposed</td>
<td>Family decides your life partner based on horoscope match and cast match</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We are worse than westerns</td>
<td>People say something and do something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>God is an abstract concept</td>
<td>We are emerging country as things are not established.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexually dissatisfied because life partners are not chosen by themselves</td>
<td>We are diverse. Co-existence of multiple view; Multiple ideologies within same beliefs exists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deep rooted civilisation with rich history from where our cultures, traditions and customs have taken birth, grown and developed</td>
<td>What suits them they follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indians have an optimistic view</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 2  Emerging values, beliefs and practices (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect elders</td>
<td>Believe in an after-life reincarnation, the cycle of karma</td>
<td>Repressed sexuality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collective society</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A paradox culture of India.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The coping strategies within an uncertain social structure suck away the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>energy of a common man. In his/her continuous struggle for existence,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>excellence takes a back seat.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>India is a country of diverse views.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>While this co-existence of diversity is much talked about, it is also</td>
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<td>the root of the country being viewed as in a consistent flux of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>confusion and contradictions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indians are passionate and what they believe in they stand by</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of bonding towards community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We do not believe in our capabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We have issues like if I miss this bus, than when will next bus come</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We just follow, we do not apply our brains</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conservative, stereotype</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The management literature does not talk much about yoga (with the exception of Chakraborty, 1986) and some respondents pointed out how yoga is becoming popular. This is evident in the daily life in India, and ‘International Yoga Day’ is held every year. One respondent said, ‘Ramdev [a yogi in India] is very popular’. In the Indian tradition, yoga is more than a physical exercise; it has a meditative and spiritual core (Jantos, 2012; Nelson, 2009). Kauts and Sharma (2009) found that students who practice yoga did better academically.
Table 3  Emerging codes and themes

**HIERARCHICAL SOCIETY**

Hierarchical society

People are considered to be working only when they are engineers, doctors, lawyers, etc. If people choose art form as a career, people say, “Why do you want to waste your life on this?”

People are ranked across by their status, wealth

Behaviour towards other is determined by ranking of caste, ethnic group

Haves and have nots gap is high

Large number of people in urban cities do not follow traditional hierarchy

Inconsiderate towards those who are financially backward

Strata and class are clearly defined. Higher class are getting success more by money and lower class is striving to go but when they are not able to, they restore to crimes and unjustifiable means

Society is somewhere highly conservative in its approach and somewhere very modern and educated

Traditions

Respecting women, elders, and everyone around

**DIVERSE CULTURE**

Diverse culture, customs and traditions, each of which are unique. This lead to vast differences in the kind of environment they are brought up and lead to vast difference in their perspectives

Proud of their culture and tradition. No matter what happens they have to protect their culture, esp. because of effect of western culture they see a direct threat to Indian culture

Diverse culture where people of different religion, caste, and educational background lives

Vibrant culture

Customs in every corner

Diverse country where people of different religion, class, caste and educational background lives

Different religions have further added to this diversity in the culture which creates a space to appreciate new ideas and ideologies for all types of people

People from Himachal Pradesh are simple and from Punjab are wealthy and they boast it in public. Punjabis are helpful and very generous at heart. UP and Bihar people are hardworking and labourious and it is a rigid society and give high value to societal norms

Diversity thrives and grow like no other place in the world. 29 states with different culture, different languages, different ways of living. 29 states represent 29 different dimensions of one country. 29 states have millions of perceptions, outlook

Different culture of different states is dividing people.

Some part of India are most beautiful places and we have large slums

Slowly moving from collectivist to individualistic culture

People adhere to culture, however there are changes coming to that

Most diverse culture but no sense of unity unless we are abroad. Many countries within a country. People are divided on the basis of culture, languages, etc…

Very few people are able to work towards larger picture and work towards advancement of the country
**Unravelling the layers of Indian culture and worldview**

Table 3  Emerging codes and themes (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIVERSE CULTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diverse culture but groups lack ‘unity in diversity’. diversity define India and foreigners come to see this but we have to develop tourism- infrastructure and safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians are evolving and breaking barriers that existed in the past but still dominated by a typical masculine and patriarchal culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture is primarily dominated by the past, lesser by the present and least by the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vedic principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taboos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich culture but find themselves entangled in the shackles of their self-built restrictions. The same culture soon becomes a cob web of never ending restrictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion forces us to become fundamentalist and we blindfold our self towards cross-cultural harmony.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very religious and spent money at religious places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being religious is good but blaming god for everything is not good; not doing anything is bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People live more via fear of getting persuaded by God in a way or so, rather than lead a true and honest life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-cultural wherein everyone religion tries to dominate over the other so that their religion over shadow all other religion. Mutual adjustment among some [underlined by respondent] people belonging to different religion is negligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many cause discomfort and harm in the name of religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledge individuals by virtue of their birth, rather than based on achievements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caste system norm are still deeply rooted in most families, but we are changing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same religion makes us fight us saffron war against Muslim. And same religion makes us impede freedom of expression from the masses; denudes women of their right and promote patriarchal society and stands in the path of our nations growth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXCELLENCE AND HARD WORK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excel in their life everywhere and shine wherever they go [religious but….] also Indians are innovative and intelligent and working in NASA and we should prevent this brain drain and use for our nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard working, dedicated with high aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition in the work fields has started to increase in India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success is only thing that matter to them, does not matter if they are hurting others. Alternate means are taken rather than logical route, which is making country individualistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instead of 10 steps to the top, dreaming and working towards three steps to the top</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High importance on education-lot of competition due to scarcity of resources (college seats) [bracket used by respondent]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians have been focusing on increasing level of exposure in as many ways as possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuck in a rat race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rat race in everything they do it- education, business. People mover to a goal just because someone else is successful and earning well in that field, not because of their passion or interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone want their wishes to be fulfilled wherein some people forget the ethos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3  Emerging codes and themes (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FLEXIBLE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptable, flexible and welcoming to all kind of cultures and learn from others. While some resist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World view of the people of India varied as variety in what the core of India is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very diplomatic. They try to keep everyone happy around them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking up to the west</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western culture adaptation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jugaad, i.e., manage almost everything with hardly any resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being more flexible in accepting that kids can choose their life partner and make their own decisions. Despite all freedom elder’s consent is always sought.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the people learn to get their work done before the end time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First they get into problem, then they find out ways to come out of it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary solution to problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They do not plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FUN LOVING AND KIND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fun-loving who enjoy to the fullest possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun loving and dedicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest are treated like gods and presents before them the best they have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind hearted; ready to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace-loving as they avoid war and negotiate rather than 77ht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural India can be seen in villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large hearted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We must educate masses and aware them about pros and cons of following religion blindly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be nice to people and you will get all the help in the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very welcoming (though there are exceptions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cricket</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAMILY ORIENTED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marriage as an institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians priority in life will always be working towards the well being and survival of their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family pay much attention to the culture, ethics, and value of society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to close-knit families and neighbourhood the chances of people falling alone are low.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyal towards family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love their children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More family oriented, relationship are priority, attachment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint family concept- to take care as a support system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family matters more than the individual and first question is asked, “what does your father do?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value society over their individual aspiration, with numerous individuals giving up lucrative carriers to get married or take care of their parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In case of problems, discuss with family, friends and relatives, pray</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3  Emerging codes and themes (continued)

**GENDER ROLE**
Common notion is men work to get finances and women run the shores. With changing time many women are working in various fields. But it does not free them off their foremost duty, i.e. family. This notion is common among all Indians irrespective of class.

Male oriented society/rapist culture
Sexist

More women in male dominated fields, but thinking of society towards the importance of women has crooked look

Traditional male and female roles are clearly defined in most households, but we are seeing a shift in the perception with more women working

**GO AS IT FLOWS**

broad minded
Thode mein guzaraa kar lete hain [manage with limited resources]
Lehar chalti ha iaur hum uske saath behne lagte hein
We fit in and we do not complain about that

**COLLECTIVIST SOCIETY**

97. Society drives the way we live our life.

**MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS**

Indians are optimistic. They pray that the best will come soon after the worst.

Middle class children are usually brought up with mentality that they have to work very hard and follow the instructions given to them in their lives.

**POLITICS**

100. Politics and crave for money is exploiting the mindset of the people and few are contributing to development and growth, rest are restoring to the shortcut for success.

**POLITICS DISABLING**

101. One concern is how does government satisfy the needs and interest of all groups keeping in mind the belief of all the group

**POLITICS ENABLING**

**INEQUALITY**

102. some people posses large amount of wealth whereas others can’t afford one day meal

**CONSUMERISM**

Cosmetic personality/lifestyle
Consumerism
Commercialisation
15 minutes of fame
Typical crib behaviour/mentality

**NARROW MINDED**

Narrow minded in their approach

**SHORT CUTTISM**

Fanatic. They do not realise nothing will earn better result than their own hard work

Looking for short cuts

**HERD MENTALITY**

Fickle-minded

Herd mentality (tend to follow rather than having their own opinion)
Table 3  Emerging codes and themes (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APATHETIC</td>
<td>Beautiful country, people have no sense of attachment and therefore, do not believe in preservation of historical creations. The nation has lots of potential, however it is not utilised enough due to limited investment in resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATUS CONSCIOUS</td>
<td>Majority of youth is engineer/doctors/MBA. no other vocational carrier is given encouragement. Lot of professions are still not celebrated enough, teaching being one of them, vocational arts are not developed either, which compel people to follow conventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAHMANISM</td>
<td>More focused on planning than execution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESOURCE SCARCITY</td>
<td>save more, frugal in spending.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONSCIOUS OF RESPONSIBILITY</td>
<td>aware and conscious of responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYNICISM</td>
<td>casual attitude towards rules, cynical about the government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIGIDITY</td>
<td>averse to change to certain extent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POWER</td>
<td>Pushy. Tolerance. Not ready to take responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>knowledge oriented rather than action oriented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>intelligent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>salary is important consideration while evaluating a person’s worth/contribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>movie stars as gods in some part of south of India.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bias/prejudices because of person belonging to a particular state (attribution) [bracket used by respondent].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>corruption/bribery- a way of getting things done quickly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>consensus over majority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culture is based not on the first come first serve basis but on a fight who can win it. innovation very few (but a large scope is there).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chalta hai attitude. getting settled in life is more important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There are lots of social taboos, which establish norm for Indian society. Over the years due to western influence Indians are becoming more rational and question ancient practices to adapt to new changing dynamic environment and cherish the good practices from other cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indians search happiness in what they have be it poor of the poorest or rich of the richest. Indians are powerful dreamers and they like to achieve their dreams.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.3 Coding and emerging themes

138 codes were identified representing eight themes (Table 3): Going with the flow; hierarchical society; diverse culture; religion; excellence and hard work; flexibility and jugaad; love for fun and kindness; and gender roles. The data also reflect particularism, politics as a disabler and an enabler, inequality, consumerism, using shortcuts, being status conscious, herd mentality, conscious of responsibility, cynicism, rigidity, power, apathy, broad-mindedness, casteism, Brahmanism, security oriented, belief in rebirth, paradox and flow, family oriented, dependence-prone, resource scarcity, practicing yoga and contextual sensitivity. Some of the dimensions support earlier studies done on Indian culture (Hofstede, 1980; Pareek, 2001; Sinha, 1970, 2014, Sinha et al., 2010, Sinha and Kanungo, 1997; Sinha and Verma, 1987; Triandis and Bhawuk, 1997).

4.1.4 Case-wise analysis

Case-wise analysis was carried out to delve deeper into the data and explore themes. Eight themes emerged were:

1. coexistence of contradictions: hard work-laid back attitude; chalta hai – task orientation; adaptation-resistance; Western-Indian values; flexible-rigid; collectivism-individualism
2. shift in the culture: hierarchical to non-hierarchical; collectivism to individualism; ritualistic religious orientation to spiritualism
3. religion is the guiding force
4. diversity
5. relational and family oriented
6. jugaad
7. optimism
8. contribution to various fields/excellence.

4.2 Triangulation

Triangulation of these four analyses resulted in some recurring themes. These are:

1. religiosity
2. co-existence and paradoxes
3. shift in culture
4. contextual sensitivity: they follow what suits them; go with the flow
5. family orientation
6. diversity
7. jugaad
8. optimism.
4.2.1 Religiosity

One of the participants said, “Indians emphasize greatly on religion.” Most Indians start their day with a prayer at home; visit their places of worship; listen to religious discourses, fast on holy days, and follow religious rituals. Religion is a guiding force in life, which evokes faith as well as superstitions among people. Thus it stimulates us internally and externally, as well as makes them lax in their efforts. For example, *Ramleela* (based on the Indian epic Ramayana), one of the annual festivals of India depicts and reinforces the idea of victory of good over evil. Another example is the movie *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* (Run Milkha Run), based on the life of the record-breaking Indian athlete Milkha Singh who wants to improve his sprinting abilities. He puts his faith in God by writing his goal on a piece of paper and placing it in front of God and works hard to achieve his goal. Somewhere faith in God gives internal strength and stimulates the internal locus of control.

One of the respondents said, “Karma is another name of life.” On the other hand, it is often noticed in the Indian context that many religious practices such as fasting for finding a life partner, a job, getting good marks in exams without putting in the needed effort, and then blame God for that not happening. This is a sign of superstition as well as external locus of control.

4.2.2 Coexistence of paradoxes

‘Coexistence’ means happening or being at the same time and place (http://www.thesaurus.com/browse/coexistence. retrieved on 25.6.18). Many narratives pointed to the simultaneous existence of opposites and varied aspects of the Indian culture. Indians have deep faith in spirituality (Roland, 1988) at the same time they strive for material gains and indulge in worldly pleasures. Indians believe in astrology or destiny but also in the philosophy of karma. On one hand, Indians adhere to *chalta hai* (easy attitude towards work and quality) and, on the other hand, foster perfectionism and discipline. Indians display high dependence on others (Sinha, 1970, 2008) as well as venture into entrepreneurship (Kumar and Sethi, 2005). In other words, they “do not mind seemingly intolerable contradictions” [Carl Jung, quoted by Sinha and Tripathi, (1994), p.125]; nor do they experience any dissonance in having contradictory thoughts and behaviour (Bharati, 1985). Instead of replacing the old by the new, they tend to retain both simultaneously (Ramanujan, 1989).

Some narratives brought out that Indians are both individualistic and collectivist (Marriot, 1990; Roland, 1988; Sinha and Tripathi, 1994). Indians have the ability to live with contradictions and western studies are unable to capture these complex and unusual aspects of Indian culture.

In *Sanatan dharma*, there are many gods and many of them are further known by different manifestations and names. For example, Surya (the sun god) has 108 names. Origins of acceptance for co-existence can be traced back in one of the prominent Indian religious figure ‘Ardhanarishwar’, which represents the synthesis of the masculine and feminine energies of the universe (Chakravarti, 1986).

A deeper understanding of paradox can be found in the philosophy of *dwandwas* (dilemma) in the *Gita*. Pleasure and pain, success and failure, recognition and disdain, reward and penalty – these dualities or *dwandwas* – come close on the heels of each other. To tackle pain through pleasure is not a lasting response, because there are
always new ‘pains’ that could pop up once the old ones are relieved. Moreover, each objective-dependent pleasure contains within itself the reaction of pain. Thus, Indians experience an almost constantly fluctuating range of mental states caused by paradox (Chakraborty, 1986). The above discussion explains why Indians view paradox as a way of life and are more or less comfortable with the state of flux (Sinha, 2014).

4.2.3 Shift in the culture

Participants felt that Indian culture is shifting and getting influenced by West. Data indicate that we are going from hierarchical to non-hierarchical, from collectivist to individualist, from ritualistic to religious orientation and from there further to spiritual orientation. One of the respondents said, “The country is getting modern touch through its people but still such modernization cannot outdate the value system.” Another respondent said, “We are used to living in and working in hierarchical system.” In India, many kinds of hierarchy are prevalent – caste, class, economic, positional, and gender. Brahmans and other upper classes used to avoid eating with lower castes. Traditionally, the difference in the roles of gender has been clearly defined in the Indian context and women are given lower status than men. However, there is a shift in the gender role orientation and women are working in a variety of fields and exercising their choices. Still there is a significant number of cases where women do not get to make their own choice. Also if a woman is working, she is expected to manage both work and home. Sinha (2014) discussed the changing social milieu of India and the emerging trends of discordance across the society.

Similarly there is a shift from collectivism to individualism. The youth of India feel frustrated with the collectivist orientation and often complain about too much of restrictions and social norms to follow. Live-in relationships are picking up and have gained legal status. Respondents pointed out that Indians are influenced by the Western culture, language, individualistic orientation, accent, coffee, and many other things.

Another remarkable shift is in the religious orientation. The last two decades have witnessed a shift with the increasing popularity of yoga and meditation instead of ritualistic orientation attached to temples, fasting, and prayers. Sathyai Sai Baba, Sri Sri Ravishankar, Sadhguru, Sri Aurobindo, Osho, Maharshi Mahesh Yogi, Meher Baba, and others and many such spiritual leaders are emerging as influencers. However, both orientations are still prevalent.

4.2.4 Diversity

Many participants defined Indian worldview as full of diversity like language, food, people, religion, and so on. One of the respondents said, “Indians are lucky to experience a mixed culture due to lots of festivals and celebrations; it continues to remain diverse.” People are loyal to their geography, religion and other similar important social groups and lack unity. However, so much of diversity surrounding the Indians makes them open to new kind experiences and flexible and tolerant. Overall, diversity is perceived as a strength as well as weakness. Panda and Gupta (2004) pointed out that India is multilingual, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multicultural society.
4.2.5 Relationships and family orientation

Gannon (1994) has classified Indian culture to be family oriented, highly religious (see also Sonawat, 2001; Tripathi and Cervone, 2008), and value their relationships. This study shows that Indians consult their family, relatives, and neighbours while making important decisions. According to one respondent, “Emotional ties are very strong between individuals and family, and also close relations”; another pointed out, “I live in a society where family, love, responsibilities, and values play an important role”, yet another said, “Families in India are considered to be very close and thus they share a value system.”

4.2.6 Contextual sensitive

Many respondents have mentioned that, Indians follow what suits them. They have a contextual sensitivity, as pointed out in a series of studies by Jai B.P. Sinha and Verma (1987), Sinha (2001, 2002, 2010), Sinha and Kanungo (1997) and Sinha and Pandey (2007). Sinha and Kanungo (1997) described contextual sensitivity as an important cultural aspect, which reflect people’s adaptability to the current situation. Contextual sensitivity manifests a cognitive aspect and acts as a balancer, which discourages people to take extreme or aversive reaction. It also equips people to judge time and place, understand other’s mindset, and look for situations to turn them for their advantage. Panda and Gupta (2012) also endorsed that Indians are able to put together time, place, and person, and act accordingly. Sinha and Srivastava (2015) pointed out that contextual sensitivity promotes innovative behaviour at workplace.

4.2.7 Jugaad

Krishnan (2010) and Radjou et al. (2012) argue that Indians are creative and they come up with their unique ways to solve problems. Reflecting this, one of the respondents said, “Indians are improvisers (jugaadu),” Another respondent said, “Great Indian jugaadu is the primary method of doing any task. “Nothing is impossible in India, as long as one knows how to adjust.” The present study also finds support for this. Jugaad manifests Indians’ ability to adjust and reflects adaptability as an important aspect of Indians.

Jugaad is a local Hindi word that means “an innovative fix; an improvised solution born from ingenuity and cleverness” (Radjou et al., 2012). Jugaad is a way of thinking and taking actions in response to challenges. It is an art of finding solution in the most adverse circumstances. Jugaad is evident in household where every resource is utilised till it cannot be used any more. For instance, the metallic oil container is used in multiple ways till it loses its substance. In rural India one can see many makeshift tempos/trucks with a diesel engine attached to a cart. Thus, real life experiences and writings on jugaad indicate that it is an important aspect of the Indian culture; however, we intend to decipher the deeper meaning of jugaad.

As pointed out by a respondent during interview, “Jugaad comes from a word jutaana (somehow arrange something); and there is another word too jodha (compilation).” Indians were short of resources, especially after Mughal and British rule. Poverty led to inordinate saving of the available resources in Indian households. Resource scarcity, lack of infrastructure, weak political will, and an overall disabling context led the people to utilise available resources to the fullest.
4.2.8 Optimism

One response was, “Indians are viewed as the most ‘optimistic’ and ‘go-getter’ type of persons”, another, “Many Indians are contributing to the economies of other countries with their skill and knowledge”, yet another, “Indians are perceived to be very hardworking, which is reflected in the number of Indians working in the Silicon Valley.” Indians are perceived as hardworking, capable of working in diverse settings and have contributed remarkably in a variety of fields like IT, medicines, engineering, and have reached the top positions in organisations like Google, Apple, United Nations, World Bank, etc. It is noticed that Indians are optimistic because of all their achievements despite struggling with dysfunctional aspects of the Indian socio-political and economic factors, such as education system, security, bureaucracy, red-tapism, scarcity of resources, weak infrastructure, and many more. Political scenario in India is seen as unstable and unable to meet the expectations of the people. However, these dysfunctional aspects have made people tolerant. Scarcity of resources has made people learn to manage with limited resources as explained in an earlier section on jugaad.

5 Data synthesis

5.1 Multiplicity

Respondents pointed out the many facets of Indians life, which indicates multiplicity. One respondent said, “Indians are helpful, traditional, hypocrites, jugaadu, copycat, judgmental, improvisers, superstitious, collectivist, social status-driven in a male dominating society, and save resources”, another, “Multiple views, and multiple ideologies within same beliefs coexists here.”

India is known for many religions (Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and so on), multiple gods, their multiple names and manifestations. Many Indians are member of different religious groups such as ISKCON and follow different gurus as pointed out earlier in Section 4.2.3. Other unique characteristics of the Indian culture include multiple languages, different festivals and multiple ways of dressing. Moreover, strong ties between multiple roles and relationships, such as between parents, spouse, children, relatives, friends, and neighbours, are unique to India. In other words, Indians uphold multiple identities as a member of a village, or a city, or a state, and also with regard to religious affiliation. People are even known by the name of their village. Multiplicity is way of life in India because of different contexts.

5.2 Emerging unique individualism

Data indicates that culture in the rural India still upholds Indian traditions such as collectivism, hierarchy, arranged marriages, and exhibit high family orientation whereas urban India is a combination of traditionalism as well as modernism. There is a very unique Indian individualism which is different than Western individualism. Indians are becoming individualistic within the framework of hierarchy. A conflict is emerging in interpersonal, social, and economic spheres with traditional values such as inequality, power distance, family orientation, and rituals. The sources of the conflicts, as pointed by respondents, are financial disparity, caste, class, gender role overload, and women’s drive
for empowerment. Individualism and collectivism is at crossroads. On one hand, Indian worldview highlights a collectivist orientation and on another hand there is a tussle between exercising their individual choices and sustaining their collectivist tendency. Families, especially in the urban India, often experience this conflict as children continue to stay with parents and the latter advise them on several issues such as education, profession, life partner, and so on. In some cases, respondents pointed out that life choices are governed by the elders in the family. While some respondents revealed that they try to exercise their autonomy, a struggle is going on around the issue of autonomy, modernity, social norms, and practices. Thus Indians pose a unique kind of Individualism.

5.3 Not so rational worldview

One of the participants said, “Indians are hardworking and dedicated with high aspirations. Simultaneously, they are socialized to perform good selfless deeds to improve the stock of karma.” On one hand, destiny is seen as the ultimate guiding principle of life, yet good karmas are considered extremely important to attain moksha (blissful union with the supreme; Sinha, 2014) which is considered the ultimate purpose of life [Krishnan, (1997), p.25]. In religious and spiritual discourses, it is repeatedly emphasised that doing karma is the duty of a human being; however, a person should not claim to be the doer. The guiding force is the divine, the God, or the supreme power, or sometimes a guru. Many claim that visit to places of worship and devotion instil internal faith that helps to overcome hurdles. Trompenaars (1993) supports the view that Indians hold a not-so-rational worldview and feel that they have less control over their life events.

The respondents mentioned their religious and spiritual orientation along with their superstitious and astrological beliefs. This kind of coexistence indicates another unique aspect of the Indian worldview, that is, it is not so rational. Unlike many Western cultures, which exhibit a rational worldview, Indians have a tremendous faith in karmic worldview, reincarnation and they attribute everything in their life to God’s blessings and curse depending upon whether it is good or bad.

Overall, the data indicates that Indian culture is paradoxical and we conjecture the deep rooted philosophy is that of samarpan (surrender), which is a major driving force and way of Indian life. The Western literature fails to present these aspects of Indian culture.

6 Discussion and conclusions

6.1 Layers of Indian culture

Figure 1 shows the Indian culture using three layers developed for organisational culture (Schein, 2004), namely, basic assumptions, values, and artefacts. Following the logic of abduction, we conjecture that samarpan is the deep-rooted philosophy which guides the Indian values and artefacts. A few respondents said, “Indians are comfortable to go with the flow.” Go with the flow somewhere resonates with the Indian tendency to leave everything to the Supreme Almighty or samarpan.
Unravelling the layers of Indian culture and worldview

Deeper cultural layers are difficult to exhibit on surface. In the Indian context, Vedic or Upanishadic principles, and philosophical works like Gita, are the source of Indian values and practices. In chapter 18 of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna:

“Become My devotee, always think of Me, act for Me, worship Me, and offer all homage unto Me. Surrender unto Me alone. Do not fear sinful reactions.”

Typical Indian values are faith in God, paradoxical mindset, family orientation, contextual sensitivity, and tolerance. As mentioned earlier, many narratives point out the simultaneous existence of opposites and the varied aspects of Indian culture such as chalta hai-task oriented; adaptable-resistance; flexible-rigid and so on. According to Chadda and Deb (2013), Indian society is collectivist and promotes social cohesion. In fact, they pointed out that the Indian family system is an important resource for the care of the mentally ill. The physical artefacts are jugaad, adaptability, visit to temples, prayers, fasting, yoga, meditation and tolerance for ambiguity.

Based on the previous discussion, we infer that the whole belief system of rebirth and impact of karmas result into considering ‘change’ as a way of life. This seems to have an impact on the Indians’ ability to live with uncertainty and being adaptable. It also indicates an impact of the deep-rooted cultural values on artefacts. Values like religiosity and spirituality are found to have an impact on better health and wellbeing (Villani et al., 2019).

Figure 1 Layers of Indian culture (see online version for colours)

6.2 Conclusions

In fact, there is need to appreciate the Indian worldview and recognise its links with the success and contribution of Indians to the world economy. Their worldview helps them adjust with expatriates from diverse cultures (Awasthy and Gupta, 2009). Another outcome of this worldview in innovation, such as the low-cost car Nano in the automobile sector. India stands third worldwide (behind China and the US) in start-up growth.2
This article conjectures that ‘go with the flow’ or *samarpan* is a way of life in India which is an ancient, deep-rooted Indian philosophy that influences its values and practices. This mindset can inspire to look beyond and think differently. The current era is characterised as “Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous” (VUCA), which calls for a constant change. The Indians’ ability to handle VUCA era and leaders who can blend evolving consciousness and the *jugaad* mindset are highly appreciated such as the transformation of Indian public sector bank (Awasthy and Gupta, 2011). Another contribution of this worldview is that it helps one to keep calm, composed, and duty-oriented. During the terrorist attack at the Taj Hotel in Mumbai, the employees showed collective responsibility to save the guests, which is an example of the Indian worldview of *samarpan*. This article derives and supports the idea of different layers of Indian culture. The West has also gradually started to appreciate the Vedic view and some of the manifestations are their growing awareness about learning yoga and sadhna.

Given the preference for family orientation, loving fun, jugaad and karma, organisations should try to bring in these elements in their management structures and foster leaders with these traits. Pandey et al. (2009) found a positive impact of the spiritual climate on customers’ experiences with employee service and on learning in teams (Pandey et al, 2016). Maheshwari and Gupta (2018) discussed a case of Vedic leadership, where a value-driven transformative leader introduces creative and holistic techniques to boost performance and drive internal change, which would eventually help the leader build an award winning organisation. We would like to end this section with a Vedic principle called *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, whole world is one big family and we should live with caring, sharing, and harmony.

### 6.3 Implications

A contribution of the paper is highlighting the emerging unique individualism and not so rational worldview of the Indians. In order to expand beyond the Western and etic approach to study different contexts, one needs to begin by understanding the ontological perspective of the people of any society. Studies need to examine a society’s worldview in order to derive an indigenous framework in varying domains. Study findings seem to offer relevance for understanding cultural diversity in the world. As given in the proposed layers of culture, *samarpan-worldview* and contextual sensitivity would enable people to overcome many of the increasingly globalising world. An effort to develop a worldview to perform good selfless deeds would bring peace, harmony and prosperity in the world.

The study has several lacunae. First, the data was collected in only one region of India and the sample size was very small. Second, interpretivist ontology might have had an impact on data collection and analysis. Future research can do life history interviews to see how people use different kinds of jugaad and can examine paradoxes more deeply and find ways to resolve them. Research can be carried out to examine the nature of *samarpan* or surrender among Indians and its impact on their performance and wellbeing. Studies can be carried out to explore the possibility of converting individual higher consciousness into various domains of life. Empirical studies can be carried out on layers of Indian culture.
References


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Note

1 Vastu (or vāstuśāstra in full) is a traditional Hindu system of architecture (Quack, 2012), which translates as ‘science of architecture’.