Chapter 10
Organizations and Indian Culture: A Multicultural Perspective

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10.1 Introduction

Culture has been argued to be a critical aspect for the success of an organization (Golnaz and Lees 2001; Salk and Brannen 2000). It is treated as an intangible resource and is seen as the "meanings attached to more tangible aspects of organizations, such as strategies, structures, and labor management practices" (Rowlinson 1995, p. 123). Organizations being open systems are dependent on their environment. Research on organization studies argued that for their survival and prosperity, organizations must "fit" to their surroundings, i.e. they must be isomorphic with their environments (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Studies in population ecology (Hannan and Freeman 1977) assert similar theories. They argue that the environments "select in" only those organizations whose characteristics match with them and others are discarded. The "contingency school" and the early works on organization–environment make similar arguments; organization structures and practices must "fit" to the environment in which they are embedded (Lawrence and Lorsch 1967). Hence, how the organization manages the environments across its boundaries is crucial for its survival and prosperity. Santos and Eisenhardt (2005) elaborated on different types of boundaries, such as boundaries of efficiency, boundaries of power, boundaries of competence, and boundaries of identity. However, an important boundary which was not explicitly discussed by Santos and Eisenhardt (2005)

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was the boundaries of culture. Nelson and Gopalan (2003) argued that the concept of organization–environment fit can be applied to organizational culture. In fact, Goffee and Jones (1996) suggested that for an organizational culture to be effective, it should be consistent with the culture of the business environment in which the organization operates. In the context of multinational organizations, Wang et al. (2011) argued that the ability of an organization to exchange social information across the national and regional cultural boundaries might impact business of the organizations. In fact, cultural boundaries are argued to create uncertainty (Ravlin et al. 2014) and cultural distance negatively affects the exchange of social information (Vaara et al. 2012). Kymlicka (2001b, p. 18) considered a nation as a "societal culture", i.e. language, a set of social structures, norms and relationships, institutions, customs, and cultural ways. Hence, understanding national/regional culture is important for organizations in sustaining competitive advantage. There is ample reason to expect some kind of relationship between national/regional and organizational cultures. For example, researchers have studied the role of national culture on multicultural groups (Salk and Brannen 2000). It is argued that national culture defines, in part at least, the individual, and that the individual brings these collective identities and interests into the organizations. Hence, to be effective, organizations need to be aware of and adapt themselves to the national/regional culture where they operate.

The inherent flaw in these arguments is that the national/regional culture is assumed to be static. For example, culture is assumed to be "a coherent and enduring set of values that members of a nation/region carry and invariably act upon" (Boyacigiller et al. 2004, p. 140) and hence, for survival and prosperity, organizations need to adapt to the national culture. However, this stand has been critiqued by the researchers (Fang 2006; McSweeney 2002) who argue for the dynamic nature of culture. Though there are some work on cultural dynamics, the main focus is more on organizational culture change (Hatch 1993) and new culture creation in organization and team settings (Sackmann and Phillips 2004; Salk and Brannen 2000) than on national culture change. In a recent study Leung et al. (2005, p. 362) noted that "although changes in organizations as a reaction to environmental changes have been subjected to considerable conceptual analyses, the issue of cultural change at the national level has rarely been addressed". It is against the above background that this chapter has been positioned. The chapter focuses exclusively on the interface between organizational and national/regional culture. Despite the intuitive relation between national/regional and organizational culture, empirical research relating the two phenomena is sparse (Nelson and Gopalan 2003). This chapter intends to enrich the current research on cultural dynamics (Leung et al. 2005; Sackmann and Phillips 2004; Salk and Brannen 2000) in two main aspects. First, whereas most current studies look at cultural change at the organizational level, this study addresses cultural change at the national/regional level. Second, although studies on cultural dynamics are found in the existing literature (culture negotiation and cultural identity) few studies have included the role of organizations in facilitating the change in national/regional culture.

There are important practical and theoretical reasons to study the relationship between national/regional and organizational culture. Recent studies have noted that institutional forces that provoke homogeneity in practices and even reduce cultural differences between communities over time (Guler et al. 2002). Knowing how organizational cultures relate to national/regional cultures should help shed light on how organizations contribute to the developmental paths that nations take (Fang 2006). Further, a stable nation can provide a stable environment for the organizations. For sustaining stability, a nation requires not isolated islands and multiple cultural solitudes but communities living together and participating as equal partners in the national development (Mahajan 2011). To explore the role of organizations, we propose to look at this issue from a multicultural perspective. We chose the multicultural perspective for the following reasons. One, to speak of a multicultural society, is to speak of a society—a state, a nation, a country, a region, or even simply a bounded geographical location such as a town or a school—composed of people who belong to different cultures. Though many concepts such as cosmopolitan, multiracial, and polyethnic are used to signify plural societies, multicultural is still the preferred word (Watson 2009, p. 2). Second, in a study across three countries namely, the USA, Brazil, and India, Nelson and Gopalan (2003) argued that India is the most multicultural of the three countries, and hence multicultural perspective warrants attention. Third, no matter whether research on culture is conducted within cross-national comparisons, intercultural interactions or from the perspective of multiple cultures (Boyacigiller et al. 2004), particular cultures are most often classified by well-defined cultural differences, and the challenge is most often to eliminate the conflicts, friction, and miscommunication that arise because of these cultural differences (Søderberg and Holden 2002).

10.2 Multiculturalism

Though plural, diverse and multicultural are very commonly used interchangeable terms to represent different cultural beliefs, there is subtle difference among them. Plurality talks about "many" but is silent on the nature of "many"; silent about how the multiple forms are structured and how they relate to one another (Mishra et al. Forthcoming). For example, according to Furnivall (1948, p. 304) "a plural society is a medley of people … for they mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways… This is a plural society where different sections of the community live side by side, but separately, within the same political unit". Diversity is defined as the existence of "many" that are different, heterogeneous, and are not commensurable. The concept of multiculturalism endorses the idea of difference and heterogeneity that is embodied in the concept of diversity.

Multiculturalism stresses the importance of recognizing cultural diversity within the same political framework as well as proving equal chances and opportunities to diverse cultural groups (Fowers and Richardson 1996). Multiculturalism is defined in

many ways. According to Willet (1998, p. 1), multiculturalism is "…a political, social, and cultural movement which aimed to respect a multiplicity of diverging perspectives outside of dominant traditions". According to Kymlicka (2001a, p. 153), the definition of multiculturalism is: "…a supplement to, not a substitute for, citizenship". Kymlicka talked about two models namely, anglo-conformity model and multicultural model. Anglo-conformity model implies that immigrants in course of time adopt the native culture and standards. The immigrants assimilate into the mainstream culture. After a period of time, there would be no difference between immigrants and local inhabitants. In the second model, immigrants do not have to assimilate. The government became more tolerant towards immigrants. Kymlicka (2001a) has also talked about immigrants and national minorities. He thinks that these are two different terms used to highlight multiculturalism. According to him, immigrants are the people who arrive under an immigration policy which gives them the right to become citizens after a relatively short period of time. On the other hand, national minorities are groups that have in common some or all of history, community, territory, language, or culture. Each of these is sometimes referred to as a nation, people, or culture. Each of these may have become a minority involuntarily through conquest, colonization, or expansion, or it could have voluntarily by agreeing to enter a federation with one or more other nations, peoples, or cultures.

10.3   Context of India

The difference between immigrants and national minorities is the form of integration. Immigrants accept the fact that they have to integrate and adapt to dominant social culture. National minorities, on the other hand, resist integration and fight to maintain their own social culture (Kymlicka 2001a). In this chapter, we focus on national minorities for three reasons. One, the number of immigrants coming to India is limited (Mishra et al. Forthcoming) compared to other countries such as the USA, Canada, and Australia. Second, India is multicultural within the county. There are different states in India with different languages, religion, caste, etc. The 2001 Census of India reports 122 languages and 234 mother tongues. Most of the major religions of the world such as Hinduism and Buddhism, originated in this land while others, such as Christianity and Islam, though came from outside has remained and grown in it for a 1,000 years and more. Though termed as a Hindu nation, it is the home of the third largest Muslim community in the world (Census of India 2001). The profusion of linguistic, religious, and other customs and usages was associated with a multitude of castes, communities, and tribes each of which was bearer of a particular sub-culture or even sub-sub-culture which is transmitted from generation to generation (Robinson 2012). Given these multitude diversity, India faces many conflicts which are mostly based on language, religion, and caste. Third, the interstate migration is more economically motivated (mainly for better work or employment opportunities in urban areas). According to the Census of India (2001), the work/employment is a major reason of migration (accounts for about 27.5 % of the total migration). Hence, the diversity is within the nation.

The relatively common sources of division in societies around the world are class, caste, religion, language, race, ethnicity, and clan. To these other divisions are usually added: settler versus native; immigrants versus indigenous population; pastoralist versus cultivators; urban versus rural (Guelke 2013, p. 14). In the context of India, the common sources of division are: caste, language, religion. From the socio-cultural perspective, the national environment in India is very complex as it witnesses a millennial cultural heritage and longstanding ethnic, religious, and regional cleavages (Nelson and Gopalan 2003). Kymlicka (1996: 10) argued that "modern societies are increasingly confronted with minority group's demand for the recognition of their identity, and accommodation of their cultural differences, which often is phrased as the challenge of multiculturalism". This is often phrased as the challenge of multiculturalism. In this chapter, we focus on how organizations help in mitigating these challenges.

10.4   Context of the Study

Data were collected from 20 respondents comprising 6 senior Managers, 6 Middle level managers, and 4 line managers. The age of the respondents ranged from 36 to 52 years. All the respondents lived in a setting for a considerable time period. The profile of the respondents is provided in Table 10.1. These respondents are employed in a

Table 10.1 Profile of the respondents

Sl. no. (respondents)	Native state	Religion	Caste	Age (in years)
1	Odisha	Hindu	SC[a]	39
2	Odisha	Hindu	General	48
3	Chhattisgarh	Christian	SC	36
4	Tamil Nadu	Hindu	SC	39
5	Odisha	Hindu	ST[a]	38
6	Karnataka	Hindu	SC	40
7	West Bengal	Hindu	General	38
8	Uttar Pradesh	Muslim	General	45
9	Bihar	Muslim	General	37
10	West Bengal	Hindu	General	40
11	Odisha	Hindu	ST	36
12	Madhya Pradesh	Sikh	General	42
13	Madhya Pradesh	Jain	General	38
14	Odisha	Hindu	General	45
15	Odisha	Hindu	Brahmin	39
16	Punjab	Sikh	General	51
17	Andhra Pradesh	Hindu	OBC[a]	41
18	Tamil Nadu	Hindu	Brahmin	52
19	UP	Hindu	OBC	47
20	Jharkhand	Hindu	ST	48

[a]*SC* scheduled case, *ST* scheduled tribe, *OBC* other backward classes

Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) located in Rourkela, a city in the state of Odisha. Rourkela is the place where the first integrated steel plant in the public sector in India was set up with German collaboration in the 1960s. According to the census report of 2011, the population of Rourkela Industrial Township is 273,217 and Rourkela Town is 279,753 and the urban metropolitan area is 650,000 (approx.). We chose, a PSU for the present study for the following reasons. One, the public sector plays a key role in nation building activities, which takes the economy in the right direction.[1] Second, employees are selected from all over the country and hence, people from different parts of the country work here. This makes the PSU a right context to study multiculturalism. We chose Rourkela because the city predominantly thrives on the PSU and hence, the culture of this region can be greatly attributed to the organization. Given the exploratory nature of the research, an interview-based approach was adopted for the investigation. Open-ended questions were asked to the respondents as the intention was to understand the phenomena and not to verify any theory. Some of the questions were about their work, life in the organization, social life, and experiences. Subsequent questions that we asked were based on the responses to the above questions. The duration of interviews ranged from 45 min to 90 min. The interviews were written down for the purpose of analysis.

10.5 Analysis, Findings, and Discussion

While analysing the data, we found many interesting factors that might help meeting the challenges faced in a multicultural society. Some of the factors that we noticed are described below. We arrive at these factors by analysing the data and moving back and forth between the data and the literature. The literature helped us in arriving at these factors. In an attempt to minimize our biases, we shared the data with two experts and showed them our analysis.

Being a township developed by the PSU, the organization takes care of the recreational facilities for their employees. The cultural centres such as *Civic centre, Bhanja Bhawan* are the places where different cultural festivals are organized over the year. All these activities increase people's exposure towards other cultures. In addition, the workplace seems to influence people's perceptions about others and that changes their world view. For example, when someone works with others in mutual coordination as part of the role requirement, it increases their individual understanding and closeness. Being in the same locality, most often the kids of these employees go to the same schools. The schools play an important role in enhancing awareness. Being in the same school not only facilitates understanding other cultures among the students but also among their parents. All this indicates awareness about other cultures increases acceptance of others and that leads to a multicultural society.

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[1] http://www.archive.india.gov.in/spotlight/spotlight_archive.php?id=78#mf5. Retrieved September 18, 2014.

Based on a study in 24 countries, O'Rourke and Sinnott (2006) reported that people having greater exposure to other cultures would be less hostile towards immigrants. Our data found similar patterns and it indicates that exposure to others plays a significant role in accepting national/regional minorities.

In the workplace, there is no discrimination based on caste, religion, or language. While working, gradually people understand each other and that engenders mutual respect. The following statements substantiate our argument.

Initially, people do not respond to my views. After some time, they realized that I am very sincere in my work. Now I have spent almost 10 years and my people know me very well. They are my good friends. Today, if some problem occurs in the workplace, they ensure the problem is attended because they do not want me to feel unhappy. (Respondent 3)

For us everyone is same. The caste, religion, or the language is second. What matters is their attitude to work. (Respondent 2)

In our work, we get breaks (usually 15–20 min). We go together to the canteen, sit together, eat together, and enjoy together. I have never felt caste or language as a barrier. They are my best friends. (Respondent 11)

The employees are provided accommodation by the company. There are many sectors where the employees are allotted houses. The allotment is done based on seniority only. Because of the allotment process people having different cultural backgrounds become neighbours and gradually the physical propinquity strengthen the bond among people.

I think what matters is the quality of relationship. What I realized over these years is that people do not care your caste, religion, or language, what they care is your sincerity and behaviour. (Respondent 15)

I think respect and mutual help fosters these feelings over time. When my mother died, my colleagues came forward for my help and that sharing and feeling strengthens our relationships. (Respondent 20)

Employees stay in different sectors. In each sector, people celebrate festivals together. For example, every year, *Durga Puja* is organized by the communities in each sector and implicitly there is competition among different sectors. Usually, the sectors try their level best to prove that their idols, decorations are better than the other sectors. To make it a grand success, residents of each sector voluntarily contribute for the puja in their sector. People are more concerned for their sector. These activities unite the community members together. The festivals are a powerful mechanism to unite people irrespective of their caste, religion, or language. Many festivals such as Pongal, Rath Yatra (car Festival), Durga Puja, Chhat, Vaisakhi, and Eid are celebrated with equal enthusiasm.

The entire period of Durga Puja is a festive period. During this time, the company provide us the bonus. Our relatives from other cities visit us during this time. This is the period when we purchase new clothes and the entire city is in a festive mode. (Respondent 10)

During this time if you happen to be in Rourkela, you can feel the festive mood. Irrespective of the religion in every household you can feel celebration. (Respondent 7)

For example, some respondents reported that

My neighbour invites my family every year during Eid and we also feel for their fasting in that month. I like the food prepared in Eid. (Respondent 17)

I have been to Gurdwara with my friends. On some occasions, I have enjoyed the langars. One of my friends had brought a kara for me from Amritsar and I was wearing it for long. (Respondent 7)

In the day-to-day functioning of the work, the employees of a particular department have to depend on others. In the work arena, the competence matters not the other factors such as caste or religion. All this provides dignity to the employee.

In the work place, any breakdown is our problem and we attend the breakdown together. There is a lot of interdependencies in the smooth functioning of the work. (Respondent 5)

Even though I am from a lower caste, I have the recognition in the workplace. This image spills over to my personal life and people in my locality respect me. (Respondent 6)

For the kids of the employees, the company has set up schools in almost all the sectors. Kids go to the same school and are treated like others. There is no discrimination in terms of their cultures or beliefs. That provides a different world views to the students. One respondent reported that

We have never looked at others through the lenses of region, religion, or caste. This is the culture of our city. (Respondent 1)

The social identity theory argues that individuals derive their self-definitions in terms of their in-group. Through working together, they consider the others as their in-group members and the sharing and caring for each other increases the feeling of in-group membership. Thus, individuals derive some parts of their self-definition through the establishment and maintenance of collective identities. The collective identity overcomes the differences such as language, religion, region, and caste. When we looked at the literature, there is mention of these factors. For example, Bochner (1999) argued that, in a multicultural society, the interpersonal contacts between individuals and groups who differ in their ethnicity occur within a climate of tolerance and mutual respect. Our findings also validates the Contact Hypothesis proposed by Berry (2001) which postulates that intergroup contact will engender a more favourable out-group attitude in an environment, where all groups are treated fairly and with sincere, mutual respect. According to Noor and Leong (2013), this constitutes a major factor in the multicultural ideology. From the above discussions, it seems interdependence and mutual respect affects positively the attitude towards other group members and as a result it minimizes the cultural distance. Our study supports the assertion by Berry (1984), who suggested that by acknowledging and celebrating ethnic differences, the harmony, and equality between the groups can be increased (Fowers and Richardson 1996). This was supported by studies in social psychology that have found positive implications of multiculturalism for intergroup relations (Plaut et al. 2009).

The interviews revealed interesting insights into the lives of people. Though people come from different cultural background, they get closer to people with

whom they spend most of their time. When people get closer, they do not see their caste, language, or religion.

I belong to Bengaluru and before joining this organization, I had no clue about odia language (the local language), even I was not so good in Hindi. Now I know a bit of Odia language and I have picked up Hindi as well. I am comfortable working here. (Respondent 6)

I do not think language is a barrier. I do not know the local language. Nor my friends know my language. However, as long as we are able to communicate it is Ok. Most often we talk in Hindi or in English language. (Respondent 18)

All these conversations highlight closeness with other groups. From the interactions, we believed that the closeness may be due to working in same department, same batch, staying in the same location as neighbours, etc. This closeness leads to respect and love for the other group members. Because of the love for the others, their attitude towards their community becomes positive. There are some references to this in the literature. For example, Irigaray (1985) emphasized the importance of love through the lenses of the dominant and the oppressed groups (particularly among the sexes). According to her, love is something which is out of domination. For love, there is no dominant group and oppressed group. Equality prevails where love prevails. According to her, love is a positive attempt towards otherness, towards difference. All great social movements for freedom and justice in all societies are based on love. She further argued that collective development of any nation, city, or neighbourhood is rooted in the values of love. All the above discussions suggest that love for others engenders love for their community.

The organization follows similar rules for all its employees. For example, the housing policy, medical policy, leave, and other policies are the same for all the employees. The organization has set up its own hospital, where the medical facilities are provided free of cost. The tuition fees charged in the schools operated by the organization are very nominal. From providing houses, maintaining them, maintaining street lights, roads to ensuring safety of its people are all taken care of by the organization. The organization strives to make the life of its people better. Usually, people who come from other places settle down here after they retire. Because of the employee-friendly policies, acquaintance with the city, and a feeling of *my city*, people feel for this city. The following statements corroborate it.

I came to this city as a stranger and now I belong to this place. I have my friends and groups. We share among each other. It is a beautiful place to live. I do not think I will be able to live in my native state after the retirement. (Respondent 18)

Ahmed (2004) tried to put the concept love in a different way in the context of a pluralistic society. Ahmed (2004), in her book titled *The cultural politics of emotion*, argued that love becomes a way of bonding with others in relation to an ideal, which takes shape as an effect on such bonding. She asked an interesting question, in multicultural discourse whether something is done in the name of love or out of love? She argued that out of love for the country to avoid violence, conflicts immigrants are accommodated in the name of love. So love becomes crucial to promise of cohesion within multiculturalism. Extending this argument, it seems people form their friendships and relations and as a result appreciate other

cultures out of love for the place. Organizations play a significant role in creating a place worth living.

10.6   Conclusions

Growing globalization, and crumbling of boundaries between the nation states, enhanced the importance of multiculturalism. The question of whether a society should be culturally plural or multicultural is not really an issue: modern societies for the most part are simply multicultural. Not only nation states, but also most of the organizations are becoming multicultural. In fact, managing diversity in organizations is becoming more and more important and there is wide agreement on the need to actively deal with diversity in organizations (Podsiadlowski et al. 2013). Studies have highlighted the benefits of cultural diversity in the context of organizations. However, there is paucity of research that explores how cultural diversity in the organization influences the societal culture. This is important because intra-country variance in culture is huge in countries such as India. Despite the intuitive relation between national and organizational culture, empirical research relating to the two phenomena is sparse (Nelson and Gopalan 2003), and there is a felt need to study the relationships. The research in organizational theory predominantly assumes that the environment is constant and delve into how organizations can adapt to environmental demands. In a similar manner, studies on culture focus more on cultural adaptation. In fact, most of the studies on culture focus on multicultural settings, such as immigrants (or MNCs) and explore how the individuals (or the MNCs) adapt to the local cultures. To our knowledge, a very few studies have addressed how the organizations influence the local cultures. The present study throws light on these important yet neglected issues. We intend to contribute to the discussion of multiculturalism by arguing that organizations do influence the environment where they operate. Our exploratory study demonstrates that organizations play an important role in fostering a multicultural society. This is achieved by enhancing toleration for other cultures among people. This is important because most of the violence in modern society can be attributed to intolerance towards other cultures. In this regard, our study provides another answer to the question, why do organizations exist. Questions of multiculturalism and cultural diversity raise an important question, how and why do people change their attitudes towards other cultural groups. These questions are relevant where most of the migrations are within India and are related to work/employment. In addition, Salk and Brannen (2000) in their study argued that the role of culture is far more complex than past researcher and theory suggest. In their work, Sibley and Ward (2013) suggested that definitions of multiculturalism should take into account the factors such as how diversity is accommodated by individuals. Further they argued that not only national level practices are important, but also the attitudes towards diversity and willingness to engage in intercultural contact are also important. Our work focuses on the attitudes towards diversity in intercultural contacts and highlights the role of organizations in influencing these attitudes.

Toleration is often represented as a form of non-judgmental acceptance of differences. Toleration is an important ideal that is indispensable for the working of a genuinely free and democratic society (Furedi 2011). According to Rawls (1999), if different groups take the values of difference as good, toleration among differences may help in bringing equality among people and instead of assimilating in mainstream culture, minority groups can maintain their own cultural heritage. Culture is strongly associated emotionally and nostalgically with a distinctive way of life which, despite all its deficiencies, speaks directly to an individual's sense of identity and belonging. As individuals recognize in themselves the emotional charge which this sense of distinctiveness conveys, they are also prepared to recognize the significance and importance of the notion of culture in the lives of others.

Our study, based on an exploratory approach, argue the important role played by the organizations in answering these questions. Our study highlights the ways through which organizations are influencing the attitude of cultural groups towards each other. Some of the factors are workplace experiences, cultural celebrations, and enabling mechanisms such as schools, work role requirements bring different communities towards each other. Further, relationships with others and respect for one another minimizes the barriers among the groups. Organizational policies and practices engender love for the city and in the name of love it creates love for others. The study highlights the fact that mere exposure to other cultures in the presence of some enabling mechanisms fosters closeness among the members of different community and helps fostering a multicultural society.

Drawing from others work, Fang (2006) argued that when cultures interact with each other, a behavioural change process begins which, in turn, eventually ignites a value change process among the interacting cultures. As a result of that, the cultures change overtime. The present study supports this assertion and argues that in a multicultural setting, people accept other cultures, sometimes to leave in a harmonious manner. The enabling mechanisms are awareness, love, celebration, and toleration.

Hence, beyond the issues pertaining to culture, identity, and inclusion, attention should be paid to the influences of organizations on multiculturalism and intergroup relationships. The present study further supports the argument that the processes of others' adjustment involve adaptation on the part of different cultural groups. Our study agrees to Fang (2006, p. 88) who concluded by the ocean metaphor of culture. According to him, culture is like an ocean which has no boundaries, and various waters are both separate and shared, both different and similar and both independent and dependent.

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