

ISSUES FOR GLOBAL ASSIGNMENT: EMERGING VIEWPOINT EMPHASIZED IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Vineet Gupta*

Pinaki Dasgupta**

Subhajit Chakrabarty***

Abstract:

The route for globalisation has been atypical not only for companies but also for senior (expatriate) managers. Expatriates leave their home nation and get accustomed to the novel culture surrounded by different value, attitudes and behavioural norms. Degree of Foreign direct investment (FDI) through multinational companies (MNC's) entering Indian market has been on the rise. Despite offering unique situations for global managers, India has seen unprecedented allocation of foreign nationals for managerial assignments. Current study explores the facets of Indian culture through the eyes of expatriates from European origin. Issues and challenges in the challenges, cultural aspects of India, Attitude of Host country nationals, motivation for accepting international assignment, experience of family members in India, Social networking, suggestions for future expatriate, and self preparation., have also been discussed. Policy recommendation for better Human resource management practice has also been discussed.

* Ph.D. Scholar, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, IIFT Bhawan, B-21, Qutab Institutional Area, New Delhi. (Corresponding Author)

** Associate Professor, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, IIFT Bhawan, B-21, Qutab Institutional Area, New Delhi.

*** Associate Professor, Auro University, Surat (Gujarat)

1. Introduction

To create opportunity for the unemployed youth and for utilisation of the available resources “restricted trade practices” were removed; as a result diverse untapped markets were available for the MNC’s to proceed (Uchikawa 1999). Globalization led to blurring of trade boundaries, integration of economies and added faster rate of growth to the world economy (Herremans and Wright 1994). Opportunity shaped by selecting strategic location had even more impact since it served purpose to fulfil demand for more economies, as a result greater profitability generated from the respective region (Schuler et. al., 2006). India and China have been strategically chosen by MNC’s to meet the demand for larger market, as well as cost of labour in such economy is also low, as compared to developed economies. Competition from the MNC’s has also improved performance of the local company in goods and service market (Görg and Strobl 2001).

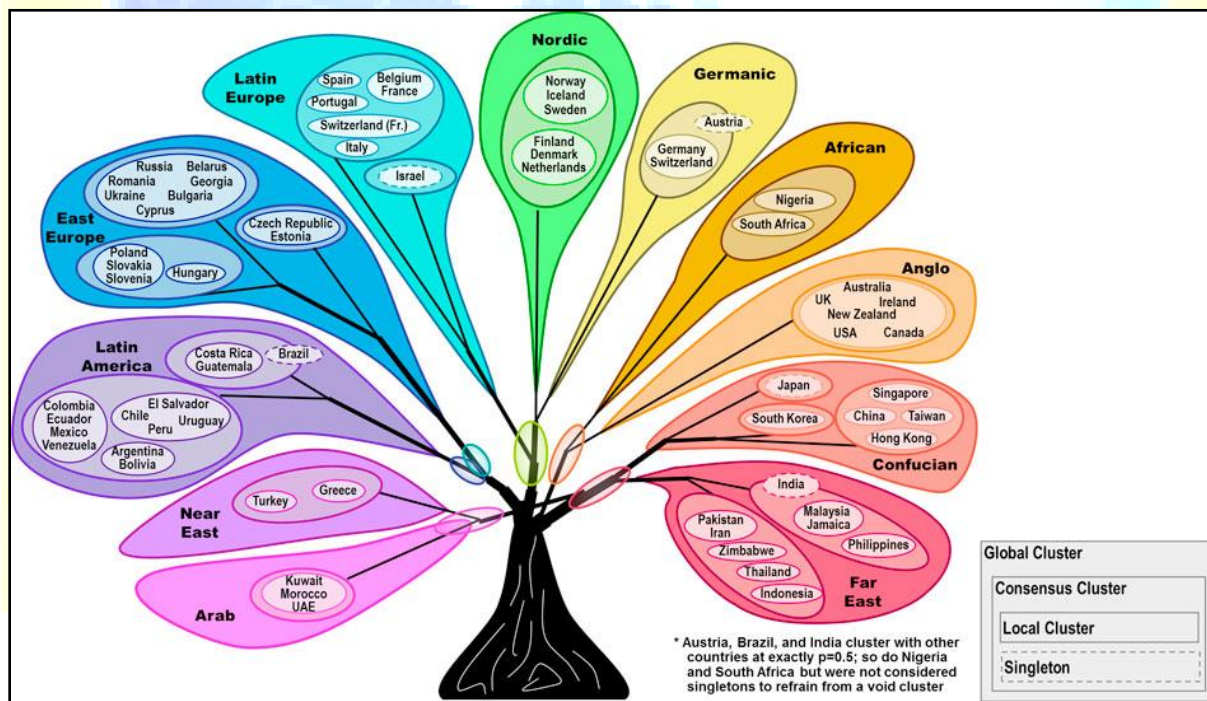
International assignment has become critical in the era of globalization, since companies have expanded their horizons, beyond national boundaries, and restricted trade practices has been removed with the emergence of World Trade Organisation (Buckley and Ghauri 2004). Although a majority of the MNC’s belongs to the developed countries (Japan, USA and Europe), companies from the developing economies esp. Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) have also become part of the rapid expansion (Gammeltoft, 2008). Worldwide presence of Multinational Companies (MNC’s) is one of the apparent symbols of globalization effect over the past 20 years (UNCTAD, 2006). MNC’s are key ingredient for successful economic growth because they adopt “best practice” across the borders (Kok and Ersoy, 2009). International assignment has become rapid in recent years, due to newly emerging developing countries esp. India and China (Mathews, 2006).

Recently in Saudi Arabia, government inaugurated a T.V. Channel, where women without burka (traditional wear to cover face) interview men. General perception towards the role of women in Saudi Arabia is changing due to the effect of Globalization (Daniels et al 2010). For a person of a new generation, certain aspects of Value, Attitude and Behavioral Norms (VABN) may not hold relevant because of changing times. VABN's are one of the important factors which changes in the culture of people and society (Maertz et al. 2009). Joint Family system has been declining from different societies and regions of the Indian family structure. Language and Religion establish the verbal and non-verbal aspects of culture. For e.g., in Japan, it is a practice among people to bow each other during meetings, but a person who is higher in rank and order, is expected to bow only after the person of lower rank order has taken a deep bow. Certain customs and traits of every culture are not visible from a different country because these are imbibed in their lives of the people living in the same country. Hence it becomes important for expatriates to learn culture where MNC's need to establish their units.

Presence of the English media in terms of T.V. Serials, British and Hollywood movies, BBC and CNN Radio etc. has given insight into the lifestyle patterns of world's two biggest investors abroad viz., USA and Great Britain. When comparing Great Britain and the USA it is often quoted as "two nations divided by a common language". Assessment of USA and Great Britain becomes critical in the context of International Business because both countries have similar language (viz. English) and Religion (viz. Christianity). Notwithstanding having many common features, there is a difference in the buying patterns of the people and different set of values which has been evident by MNC's (McCracken G. 1986). Companies often conduct research pertaining to their target economies but they are lesser inclined to explore detailed knowledge on the various factors which affect expatriate adjustment process.

To make usefulness of the world culture, Ronen and Shenkar (2013), used data based upon the previous 11 empirical cluster studies and plotted as single, synthesized cluster map. Result based upon the 70 nations indicated that 11 Global clusters appear from the entire data (Figure: 01). 15 Consensus clusters were found comprising two countries or more. Austria, Brazil, India, Israel, Japan and South Korea emerged as cluster containing only one country (singletons). To increase utilisation of their framework, data for 26 countries was also included and added to pie of clusters. All independent nations were moved to supplementary zone within origin of their global cluster. It could be understood that world cultures differ significantly from each other and adequate information

Figure 1: The new world map represented in a tree-like form.



Source: Ronen and Shenkar (2013)

National culture shape organisational culture (Hofstede, 1980). Organizational culture in the MNC's is significantly different because of different industry experience and factors uniquely associated with each country (Jaeger 1983). Senior managers are deployed, to increase organization's effectiveness in the marketplace, since they are well versed with the organisational culture and policy. Success rate of expatriates is measured in their ability to establish parent companies organisational practices, despite various cultural and competitive factors which are present in the host nation.

2. Literature Review

Scholars have examined discipline of international business with respect to adjustment of expatriate managers (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Hechanova et al., 2003). Opportunities available from the emerging and developed economies have made expatriate managers crucial factor for launching parent company in the host nation. Expatriates struggle to adopt themselves in the new setting and perform in the host country (Black 1988). When expatriate leave their home nation, they miss their family and peer group, moreover they land into host environment, which is dissimilar to their home environment (Tung, 93). Hence difference in the value attitude and behavioural norms inspire expatriate to prepare themselves well in advance (Stahl and Caliguiri 2005). Sometimes, the perks and benefits are lucrative enough for accepting International assignment however, when expatriates have first-hand experience of the host nation, they realise the consequence of their decision (Toh & Denisi 2003).

International assignment has greater implications in the world of business not only for expatriates but also to their spouse, children and parent company (Feldman and Tompson 1993). International assignment provides unique experience and requires different levels of

adjustment in the host environment (Huang et al. 2005). Spouse, on the other hand, may also prove to be successful or unproductive during the International assignment (Copeland & Norell 2002). Maladjustment of spouse has been cited as one of the most important reasons for the termination of international assignment in between by expatriates. Outcome of repatriated expatriates is also recorded by some organisations as these understanding could provide vital information, helpful in the adjustment of the future expatriate managers (Downes and Thomas, 1999).

i. Current scenario of expatriate managers

Colakoglu and Caliguiri (2008) recently mentioned that there are 850,000 subsidiaries of MNC are operating worldwide. It was also found that close to 600 French firms are operational in China with more than 150,000 expatriate employees and the number is expected to get double in the next five years. Daniels et al. (2010) suggest staffing practices are also an important determinant for MNC's which can take either of three approaches viz. ethnocentric, polycentric and geocentric. Ethnocentric approach refers to presumption that management values and workplace practices of one's company are superior to those in foreign companies. Polycentric approach accepts the importance of adapting to differences, real or imaginary, between the home and host countries. Geocentric approach assumes that all nations are created equal and possess inalienable characteristics that are neither superior nor inferior; headquarters and subsidiaries collaborate to identify, transfer and diffuse best practices. Due to ever increasing rate of expatriate failure, this area has gained importance among scholars and similarly many factors are yet to be identified to complement the adjustment process of an expatriate in family role and work role.

Landmark study on cultural differences was conducted by Dr. Geert Hofstede (1980), who founded and managed the personnel research department at IBM Europe. His research demonstrated that there are national and regional cultural groupings that affect behaviour of societies and organizations, which is persistent across time. Hofstede (1980) found six dimensions of culture in his study of national work related values. The dimensions which were adapted to differentiate nations are Small vs. large power distance, Individualism vs. collectivism, Masculinity vs. femininity, Weak vs. strong uncertainty avoidance, long vs. short term orientation, and Indulgence vs. restraint.

Transportation and digital communication have helped to make the world seem smaller, creating an environment for increased globalization. India is one country that continues to grow globally, with 2009 annual GDP growth of 7.3%, (CSO, 2010). Along with the rise in India's GDP, India's exports have also grown rapidly. Exports accounted for 54.1 % higher in dollar terms than the previous year (US \$ 12916 million) in March 2009 (Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Govt. of India). The increase in globalization results in a highly competitive environment for multinational organizations (Adler, 2002; Konopaske, et. al., 2005). To manage global operations, organizations often use expatriates (Black & Gregersen, 1999). Organizational success is dependent upon these global managers (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2001). However, little attention seems to be paid on the MNC's coming to India and their use of expatriates in the literature. Most of the literature seems to focus on North Americans, Japan and Western Europeans. Yet as India's presence continues to grow globally, the use of expatriates in MNC's within India is expected to grow as well.

Although the literature regarding the use and performance of expatriates within MNC's in India seems to be relatively new compared to the literature related to Western expatriates, the literature

does indicate that a more modern form of human resources management is developing in India. Zhu and Warner (2003) note a possible convergence in human resources management across all Asian countries resulting from environmental factors relating to the growth in globalization. As part of the development of human resources management practices and the increase in the entrance of multinational firms, a need for strong international human resources management practices, including performance interventions for expatriates, seems to exist. Expatriates face complex assignments that require flexibility and ability to adapt to the managerial practices of the environment. The cultural context of expatriate assignments dictates certain actions, because practices in one context may not work well in other contexts (Black & Porter, 1991; Ralston, Terpstra, Cunniff, & Gustafson, 1995).

Several studies conclude that expatriates' face difficulties in adjustment; as a result, performance is affected, which continues expensive to the company, and sometimes result in early termination of assignments (Black, 1988; Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Tung, 1987). In a longitudinal study, Takeuchi, Wang, and Marinova (2005) found that expatriates' work adjustment was strongly correlated to their performance. This is consistent with other research that has found a positive relationship between expatriate adjustment and performance (Kraimer, et. al., 2001; Parker & McEvoy, 1993). Kraimer et al. (2001) found that expatriates who are well adjusted and interact well with host nationals receive high performance ratings from supervisors on task and contextual performance.

Among the earlier studies, Black et al.'s (1991) adjustment model "instigated and galvanized a large body of evidence. It is the most influential and often-cited theoretical treatment of expatriate experiences, and it can be considered a context-specific reflection of the stressor-stress-strain sequence" (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Black (1988) and Black and Stephens

(1989) differentiated cross-cultural adjustment into three facets: general, work, and interaction. General adjustment refers to psychological comfort related to the host cultural environment (e.g., weather, food, and living conditions); work adjustment refers to psychological comfort related to different work values, expectations, and standards; and interactional adjustment refers to psychological comfort related to different communication styles in the host culture and to interpersonal communication with host country nationals.

3. Methodology

We adopted a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews to investigate major factors which has a significant influence over expatriates in India. These expatriates were based in New Delhi (North Capital Region). Total number of expatriates was 15 (10 Male, 5 Female) who belonged to European Continent. Average age of these expatriates was 38 years. In the following section, we present the experiences of European expatriates involving, challenges, cultural aspects of India, Attitude of Host country nationals, motivation for accepting international assignment, experience of family members in India, Social networking, suggestions for future expatriate, and self preparation. Expatriate were based in North capital region such as, New Delhi, Ghaziabad, Noida, Faridabad and Gurgaon. In some cases they drive to neighboring city for work purpose.

German Male Expatriate, 51, New Delhi

Challenges in India: “The most challenging aspects in India are infrastructure, pollution and cost of living (accommodation). Air pollution is worst when compared with china; I can’t jog because of the increased pollution. When it comes to food, over the last seven years I have seen the food and vegetable prices have gone significantly up. If you go to the supermarket, some of the food

stuffs are high for example apples are reasonably high, potatoes are cheaper. When you buy food from the road, quality is pathetic and also hygienically deteriorated absolutely no value for money.”

“I also believe that single expatriate will face much harder times as compared to expatriates with spouse/partner. The population of bachelor expatriate is also quite small in India. When it comes to taking residential apartment on rent, Delhi and Mumbai are way too high, when you look at the facilities you get in exchange for the money you pay, comparing with other global cities of the world. If I search for residential apartment in the area like Vasant Kunj or Defence colony in New Delhi, it takes 2.5 lakhs per month. The very next day, I might find that I have to arrange for plumber. The price is ridiculously high!!!”

Finnish Male Expatriate, 47, New Delhi

Cultural aspects in India:“One thing I would say that we are very linear (egalitarian) and straight forward and the Indian culture is probably more complicated in a better sense. The concept of time is very different for Indians and Finnish; we seem to plan well in advance, just to give you an example, I wanted to get somebody lunch appointment for the next Monday, and she indicated that for her next Monday is like a month away and I’d certainly NOT accept that my Monday is like a month away, because I plan two things alike.”

“Indian culture is complicated but it doesn’t have a negative connotation, it’s just that there is more bases, more people involved in decision making, more stages, and various aspects that play role in taking decisions. I believe the Indians believe more in the fun part of life, when you start working here, it teaches you, and you start going with this flow. Earlier I faced problems, but

over a period of time, I do realize that expatriates acquaint themselves with some characteristics of the working environment in India before coming here, it'll be useful.”

Swedish Male Expatriate, 38, New Delhi

Host Country Nationals attitude: “I have lived in India for 7 years. I stay here with my family and 2 kids. People’s attitude is very different from Sweden. People are more family oriented. Approach towards environment is minimal, you find garbage everywhere. Delhi is extreme, when it comes to the weather. In summer, the temperature rises to 46 degree Celsius which falls down to minus one degree Celsius in winter. Attitude toward work is important across the globe, but mostly Indians don’t adhere to the deadlines. Good food and drinks are also difficult to find and when you find it’s too high priced.”

“You have to be extremely patient in the Indian conditions, to understand the general behavior of the society. Plumber says that he will come in one hour’s time and he will reach after 2 days and things are still not fixed completely. There are unnecessary paperwork involve during the visa process and again the duration of such VISA is one year.”

Danish male expatriate,55, New Delhi

Motivation for accepting International assignment in India: “I am staying in India for more than 2½ years with wife and 3 daughters. I wanted to come to India, because of its incredible history, civilization and wide range of culture. I have earlier worked for 6 years in New York and 4 years in London. Some expatriates who are coming from developed economy such as Europe, America might have negative outlook towards India, but they should look like an ocean. Initially, it was not a culture shock for me, since I had briefing with Danish representatives of the organisation and shared their living experience in India. More than half a million population relocating from various states to Delhi on monthly basis is unbelievable. Number of people

moving to Delhi is overwhelming, and sometimes I get frustrated over traffic. Major challenges include pollution, and developing social ties. In Delhi drinkable water does not reach to more than 56% of population, this does not happen in Denmark.”

Experience of Family members: “My spouse is goldsmith by profession and mostly it’s her hobby. Indians are very fond of gold, silver jewellery etc. hence she is very much occupied and likes to stay in India. Our Organisation gets expatriate’s experience documented so that, it could be useful in future. I’d suggest future expatriates to be more patient in their approach compared to Denmark, where things happen very fast. There is escape route in the system, and public are paying very high price for getting services. When it comes to the building construction, don’t expect the same standards in India, it breaks down, fast. Not many places to move outside Delhi and pollution level are extremely high.”

“Corruption is deeply rooted in the bureaucratic delays. More Professionalism is required at the workplace and hospitals needs to be improved a lot. Before moving to Delhi, get yourself vaccinated, and adapt to the condition which is pretty hard. It is advisable to take care of yourself in these conditions before beginning the work assignment. There are lots of cultural programs and I do feel that I enjoy them very much. I have previously worked in US.”

British Female expatriate, 35, New Delhi

Social ties: “I speak a little bit Hindi, not much and I found it very useful, if you drive 1 hour on the outskirts of Delhi, you know, where there are no signs of English there are, to have a little Hindi I found it very useful, Delhi is very different from village in Madhya Pradesh, Delhi is even different from Chennai. In Delhi you can get almost anything and everything whereas some smaller cities it might be more difficult. Good Internet connection has made life living in India a

bit more easily. I'll find many Indians in the society, who are open to cooperate for good cause, but when in my social network, I hardly find anyone. Housing is very expensive, apart from that you'll find India relatively cheap compared to UK that will cost a lot. When it comes to getting admission for schooling, American schools are very difficult to get into and I am not content with the standards of Indian Schools."

"I have lived in USA for a while and I have travelled to a lot of countries. India is quite special, why do I say Special I mean it will be same like moving to Pakistan or Sri Lanka. Moving to Australia or USA, would be easy because they are very much similar to UK Culture. Whereas India takes a long time to get used to the where are the things is, and how to buy things but gradually I feel that I am an expert. I know where I need to go to buy whatever I need."

Self preparation: "We spend a lot of time in Asia before so that was our cultural training. If you are new, and never happen to be to Asia before then worse could happen, you know. It's better to get cultural insights, by an Indian, despite it won't help much. That's sound a bit rude but it's good to get some insights from an Indian person living in UK but also it may be important to get another expat who has previously lived in India. My view on India and your view on India as an Indian could be very different. And I remember going to the British High commission, where an Indian person was explaining to us how to drive in India, it's very easy same is the case with UK, very slow traffic. Actually its very-very different, and may be the Indian person can't visualize the same thing because they are so much used to the system here, whereas a British person will have a completely different view. Same is true for an Indian person went to UK."

4. Findings and recommendations

India is growing at huge pace and more companies will be represented by number of expatriates in the years to come. Limited amount of research has been conducted in the Indian context for expatriates. The current study is useful, in the sense, that it gives firsthand information of the European expatriates in India. Findings include:- i) Infrastructure, Pollution and rental apartments remains a concern for the expatriates in New Delhi. ii) Patience is the key in the Indian scenario since concept of time is very different for Indians. iii) Indians are more family oriented. iv) Approach towards environment is minimal, garbage is everywhere. v) Corruption is deeply rooted in the bureaucratic system vi) Cultural insights, from an Indian, could be useful despite it won't help much and another expatriate view is also required.

5. Conclusion

Human resource management practices could help in facilitating expatriate adjustment process. Repatriated expatriates could be useful source for providing realistic preview about Indian context. Similarly housing arrangements for expatriates could also be taken care of by the parent company, since expatriate after reaching the host nation, have to search information from all corners and pricing for rental apartments remains to be quite high. This study has certain limitations: - i) it was conducted in the North Capital Region, future studies must also include other regions in India, such as, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune etc. which also attracts most of the foreign companies. ii) Nationals from other continents may also be used for research purpose, e.g., North America, Australia, Africa etc.

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