

## Indians' Mindsets and the Conditions That Evoke Them

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*Two studies were conducted to explore the dominant mindsets of Indians and the conditions that evoke them. In the first, 47 social scientists from 17 cities in India identified four mindsets: Materialistic, dependence prone, holistic, and collectivistic. In the second study, 176 Indian managers from a variety of organizations rated the factors that evoked different mindsets and Indians' modal behaviour associated with the mindsets. The findings disclosed that while Indians manifested a materialistic mindset in multinational organizations, they showed either dependence prone or collectivistic mindset in family owned, bureaucratic, and or traditional organizations depending on whether they valued either easygoing life or stable relationships respectively. They were holistic in combining excellence in work, personalized relationships, abstract thinking, emotionality, rationality, and spirituality in those organizations that valued both performance and people. Materialistic mindset was associated with manipulative behaviour and the holistic mindset with a proactive stance that manifested in innovative and extra-ordinary performance under inspiring superiors; both materialistic and holistic mindsets were instrumental to success at work, of course in different organizational contexts.*

**KEY WORDS: Collectivistic, Dependence Prone, Holistic, Manipulative, Materialistic, Mindsets.**

**M**indsets are defined as the constellations of beliefs, preferences, and practices that the people possess for maintaining continuity in the ways they react and adapt to the changing environment. People's beliefs, preferences, and practices are in active and continuous interactions with contemporary events and emerging challenges. As the new events are acted upon and the emerging challenges are addressed to, people's beliefs, preferences, and practices are reinterpreted, their components are rearranged, and new once are incorporated into new frames of mind in order to enable them to function effectively. While this process of evolution in mindsets is universal, the extent to which the people of a given society shift the frames of their mind depends on, among other

factors, how open is the culture to incoming influences and the potency of the incoming influences in confronting and prevailing upon the existing beliefs, preferences, and practices.

Indian cultural receptivity to new experiences has its origin in the oldest of the scriptures and philosophical texts, *Rig Veda*, that prescribed, "Let noble thoughts come to us from all directions" (1.89.9). Diverse new experiences arising out of invasions and immigrations, alien rules, and more recent Western and global cultural influences, combined with a rich spiritual-philosophical heritage, created a complex plurality in Indian thoughts and behaviour, which was subjected to a "synthesizing tendency" of the Indian mind (Radhakrishnan & Moore, 1954, p. xxv). Not all of them, however, could be integrated. They were enfolded and encompassed (Dumont, 1970), and were allowed to coexist as inconsistent and contradictory thoughts, feelings, and action orientations within an overarching hierarchical mindset.

The trend still continues. The new does not replace the old, nor does it cause an inevitable dissonance or discomfort in the minds of Indians (Bharati, 1985). Indians, according to Carl Jung, "do not mind seemingly intolerable contradictions" (quoted by D. Sinha & Tripathi, 1994, p. 125). Further, "When Indians learn, quite expertly, modern science, business, or technology, they 'compartmentalize' these interests... the new ways of thought and behaviour do not replace, but live along with the old 'religious' ways" (Ramanujan, 1989, p. 57). Indians are "capable of living simultaneously and effortlessly on two mutually opposed planes" and "can make quantum leap from one epoch to another without showing any strain" (Varma, 2004, p. 43).

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Indians, for example, are collectivists (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995), but also are individualists having a well-protected secret self that contains highly personal thoughts, feelings, and fantasies (Roland, 1988). They are hierarchically oriented (Sinha, 1990), but accept different and conflicting hierarchies (Gupta, 2000) recognizing quality-based superiority (Roland, 1988). They are analytical with special cognitive skills to differentiate and classify anything and everything into minutest categories, sub-categories, sub-sub-categories, and then put them into an integrated hierarchical whole (Bhawuk, 2000; Varma, 2004). Simultaneously, they also get readily emotional (Kumar, 2004; Langauni quoted by Geissbauer, & Siemensen, 1995). Spirituality is indeed built into Indian psyche (Roland, 1988, p. 294) and yet, the *Lokayat* tradition of Charvak advocated extreme materialism (Sinha, 2005). Along with Indians' other worldliness coexists an "uncanny ability to spot value for money" (Shoba Narayan quoted by Kumar, 2004, p. 15). Money and material affluence have been the important driving force since the ancient days, as they enable people to indulge in earthly pleasures and to take care of their near and dear ones (*Arthshatra* of Kautilya, translated by Rangarajan, 1992, p. 145). Money (according to some, e.g., Varma, 2004) motivates Indians like nothing else does. Indians' Brahmanical idealism in seeking perfection in whatever they do or in "uncovering the ultimate reality, no matter how difficult it might be" coexists with their anarchical individualism, which justifies any means that serves one's purpose or allows living with any imperfections (Kumar, 2004).

The presence of a variety and even contradictory thoughts, feelings, and action orientations potentially allows Indians to evoke them selectively. Two factors seem to impact on the evoking process. First, the traditionally anchored characteristics are considered to be primary and impact more than the secondary ones that are of more recent origin. Collectivism, hierarchical orientation, emotionality, spirituality, and so on are often recognized as primary while individualism, rationality, and materialism that are considered to be secondary and acquired as a part of Western influences (Sinha & Kanungo, 1997)—the latter are getting quite potent as a result of increasing globalization in the country. However, the roots of some of these so-called secondary characteristics can be traced to the ancient Indian thought systems. Further, Indians' high context sensitivity might turn what may be primary in one situation into secondary in another situation and vice versa. Indians are likely to behave differently in different situations and persons as well as differently in the same situation and person at a different time. They take a long-term perspective to couple situations and responses to them together and view them as an ongoing flow of interactive events in which each

response is examined for its instrumentality to advance them towards realizing the coveted goal. A particular response may not look like leading directly to the goal, but may be effective in creating a more conducive ground for subsequently realizing the goal more effectively. Thus, the same intention to realize a goal might require a series of diverse actions over a time period. For example, there are studies (Sinha, Sinha, Verma, & Sinha, 2001; Sinha, Vohra, Singhal, Sinha, & Ushashree, 2002) that show that Indians realize their individualistic interests by behaving in collectivistic way if they think that to be the most effective intermediary step to eventually serve their individualistic interests. Or, they first take individualistic action disregarding their collectivist obligations, but make up subsequently by behaving in highly collectivistic ways. Thus, Indians' high context sensitivity seems to blur the distinction between situation-free primary and secondary characteristics changing them according to situational contingencies.

In light of the above discussion, it may seem worthwhile to examine the following questions:

1. Are there beliefs, practices, and preferences of Indians that are largely context-free and primary?
2. Do they form any meaningful patterns that are called mindsets?
3. Are the mindsets determined internally by person-based orientations, fostered by contextual factors, or affected jointly by both?

The questions were addressed to by following Matsumoto's (2003) suggestion of employing a consensual approach in which a small group of "cultural elites" defines the cultural characteristics of the people in a geographical area. This top-down approach is complemented by a bottom-up approach where a sample of the people identifies their cultural characteristics. The first two questions were addressed by the top-down approach in Study 1, and the next two by the bottom-up in Study 2.

## Study 1

### Sample and Measure

Forty-seven social scientists, located in 17 different cities in India<sup>1</sup> were approached by emails to participate in the study. All of them had a Ph.D. degree, and most of them had long experience of conducting research. They were requested to judge the extent to which the 25 cultural characteristics (listed in Appendix 1), which

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1. Ahmedabad, Allahabad, Bangalore, Gauhati, Gurgaon, Irma, Jamshedpur, Kanpur, Kharagpur, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai, New Delhi, Panji, Patna, Pune, and Ranchi.

were culled out of the literature quoted earlier, were, by and large, appropriate to describe Indians overriding the possibility of situational variations. They were provided with a 5-point scale ranging from *Least Appropriate* (1), through *Somewhat Appropriate* (3), to *Most Appropriate* (5). All those who received the request rated the characteristics. The responses were obtained in the month of May 2005.

## Results

The most appropriate stand-alone characteristics (having mean scores of >4.00) indicated that Indians are reported to prefer personalized relationships, power, prestige, and status. They are emotional and indifferent to standards, norms, or quality. To a lesser extent but still highly appropriate (mean scores varying from 3.55 to 3.99) way was to describe Indians as dependence prone, changing with situations, spiritualists, controlling, and conflict avoiding. These are the characteristics, which were reported to have primacy over the attributes such as Indians being idealists, enterprising, individualists, and striving for excellence (Mean scores <3.00). The high standard deviation scores (>1.00) hinted that there exist greater disagreement among the social scientists in describing Indians being elusive, analytical, selfish, spiritualists, abstract in thinking, enterprising, role bound, and controlling.

The characteristics were factor analyzed using the principal components method and rotated to a varimax solution. Four distinct configurations emerged explaining 48.40 percent of variance. The factor loadings are given in Appendix 1. The mean factor scores, standard deviations, percentage of variance explained by each of the factors, alpha coefficients, their inter-factor correlations, and paired t-ratios are given in Table 1.

The four factors had acceptable levels of reliability having alpha coefficients ranging from .75 to .64. They were by and large orthogonal having only one inter-factor correlation being mildly significant at  $p < .05$ . The fourth factor, collectivism, had the lowest, although still above the mid-point, mean score, which was significantly lower than the rest three factors, which did not differ significantly. The four factors have the following configurations:

**Factor 1: Dependence prone** Indians are those who are unsure of themselves, suffering from inferiority complex, submissive and docile to the authority, elusive, and indifferent to standards, norms, and quality.

**Factor 2: Materialists** are those Indians who are selfish, oriented to acquire power and enjoy prestige, controlling others to get what they want, enterprising, changing with situations, and lastly individualists.

**Factor 3: Holistic** are those Indians who have the capability of abstract thinking and preference for personalized relationships. They are emotional as well as analytical, spiritual in not being fascinated by material gains, and are the ones who strive for excellence in whatever they do.

**Factor 4: Collectivists** are those Indians who are role bound in relationships, submissive and docile to authority, and are not elusive. They lack individualistic orientations, propensity to change with situations, and analytical skills.

## Discussion

The highly endorsed characteristics indicating that Indians are personalized in relationships, status conscious, power and prestige oriented, emotional, and indifferent to quality of performance are some of the typical ones that are frequently attributed to them (Sinha, 1990). They hold primacy over the characteristics such as Indians being idealists, enterprising, individualists, and driven to realize excellence. Except for the first one, idealist, they are the

**Table 1**

*Means and SDs of Factors, Percentage of Variance Explained, Alpha Coefficients, Coefficients of Correlations, and t-Ratios*

Factors	Mean	SD	% Variance	Factors			
				1	2	3	4
1. Dependence prone	3.45	0.58	17.25	<b>.75</b>	.13	-.16	.00
2. Materialists	3.42	0.58	10.94	< .100	<b>.73</b>	0.03	-.30*
3. Idealists	3.39	0.56	10.70	< .100	< 1.00	<b>.67</b>	-.14
4. Collectivists	3.01	0.57	9.51	3.72**	3.05**	3.08**	<b>.64</b>

Note: N = 47. Alpha coefficients are given in the diagonals, coefficients of correlations in the cells above the diagonal, and t-ratios in the cells below the diagonal.