

PERSPECTIVE ON THE FEMALE EXPATRIATE EXPERIENCE: EVIDENCE FROM INDIA

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ABSTRACT

During the course of international assignment, male managers are preferred in comparison to their female counterparts. Although female expatriate prove to be successful in their management tasks, international assignments for them remains restricted. India has been attracting major companies due to higher expected rate of growth. Despite evidence for violence against women (2012 Delhi gang rape; 2014 Danish Tourist gang rape) has been found in India, female expatriates have accepted international assignment in India. The current study, explores experience for female expatriates involving security concerns, general environment, means of entertainment, social ties, major challenges, suggestions for future expatriate visiting India. Findings and policy level recommendations have also been discussed.

Keywords: Female, expatriate, India, culture

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INTRODUCTION

We live in a transformative society where things change rapidly. These changes occur as a result of technological innovative products or services. The impact of innovative products has been paramount, when we find that Apple iPhone is launched on the same day in Tokyo, Beijing, London and New York. Similarly screening of Hollywood movies takes place at the same time in Toronto as well as in Mumbai. Usage of these products is evident not only with the rich class but economically weaker sections of the society also aspire to acquire them. During the last two decades, removal of trade barriers across the world has resulted in free flow of goods and services to a larger extent.

To meet the demand of global customer, companies expand their horizons beyond the country of origin. Multinational corporations (MNC's) such as Starbucks, McDonald's, Apple Inc., IBM etc. are present worldwide. While establishing the companies, beyond the country of origin, MNC's face challenges of varying nature including cultural toughness, bureaucratic delays, infrastructure constraints, environmental issues, cost of labour etc. With an objective of establishing organisation in the overseas market senior managers are preferred by Multinational firms as they are successful in the domestic market. While manager's success in the domestic market could have been because of varied reasons such as interpersonal skills, availability of skilled labour, economic support from government, high household demand etc., these aspects lose their significance once the organisation relocates to a new market in the host nation.

Defining "culture" has been complex among researchers. For example anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1992) sees Culture as "the meaning which people create, and which creates people, as members of societies". From the social psychologist perspective, it has been defined as the "collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede, 2001). Management scholar Edgar Schein (2004) described culture as "A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems." From these definitions, it is recognized that culture has its own unique identity in each country and it varies across the globe, based upon value, attitude and behavioural norms of its countrymen. Thus adaptation to a new country necessitates learning of the local norms which are in

practice among its society. Fons Trompenaars (1998) summarizes “culture is the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas”.

Values are the foundation of culture in each country and it also forms the attributes which people want to see within their leaders. Leader’s in-turn becomes mentor for society, in whose direction people anticipate meaning for their life. Attributes for Leadership vary across societies and reflect dimensions that people find important within national context. Hofstede (2007) found leadership attributes varied significantly among four countries namely, China, India, Denmark and USA. MBA students ranked most and important least important goals which they attributed within their business leaders. Sequential ranking of most and important least important goals is presented in Table: 01. This table indicates the contradictory nature of values that people aspire to see in business leaders at different locations, for example, top ranked goals in India are among the least ranked goals in Denmark. Alternatively Denmark’s top ranked goals are among the least ranked goals in USA.

Table 1: Five relatively most and five relatively least important perceived goals (out of 15) ascribed to business leaders in four countries

China (1999)	India (1999)	Denmark (2004)	USA (1999)
<i>Most Important</i>	<i>Most Important</i>	<i>Most Important</i>	<i>Most Important</i>
Respecting ethical norms	Family interests	Creating something new	Growth of the business
Patriotism, national pride	Continuity of the business	Profits 10 years from now	Personal wealth
Power	Personal wealth	Honor, face reputation	This year’s profits
Honor, face reputation	Patriotism, national pride	Staying within the law	Power
Responsibility towards society	Power	Responsibility towards employees	Staying within the law

China (1999)	India (1999)	Denmark (2004)	USA (1999)
<i>Least Important</i>	<i>Least Important</i>	<i>Least Important</i>	<i>Least Important</i>
Creating something new	Staying within the law	Family interests	Profits 10 years from now

Game and gambling Spirit	Creating something new	Power	Responsibility towards employees
This year's profits	Responsibility towards employees	Responsibility towards society	Family interests
Personal wealth	Respecting ethical norms	Personal wealth	Continuity of the business
Staying within the law	Game and gambling Spirit	Continuity of the business	Creating something new

Source: Hofstede (2007)

In the changing world scenario, MNC's have not only created a whole new world but have also adapted to the local market conditions. To strategies the operations of local subsidiary, senior managers from the parent company are deployed– Expatriates. In order to adjust to the host country norms, organisations also provide cross cultural training. Study on women expatriates has been limited although they are often deployed for international assignments. India as host nation offers wide range of unique dimensions which the expatriates might have never heard of. Under the challenging scenario, life for a women expatriate, both in the work place and with spouse, children etc. demands lot of attention. Costs for pre-mature departure during international assignments are quite high, and companies often struggle to prevent any such happening.

BRICS economies are attracting Foreign Direct investment and are expected to remain at the forefront of the world growth. Number of companies which are entering the Indian marketplace has been increasing on regular basis. Demand for managers who could be deployed for international assignment in India has also been at the forefront. Female expatriates also play important role to carry out managerial tasks in the international marketplace for parent companies. Recently, India gained international media attention due to violence against women (2012 Delhi gang rape; 2014 Danish Tourist gang rape). These incidents created nervousness in the mind of local women and were evident in public protests against the Government. Probability of these issues affecting Women expatriates in India also remains quite high. Our objective in the paper is to look into the challenges and issues which affect female expatriates in India, observations about Indian Lifestyle, cultural difference, and suggestions for future expatriates.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Culture has been defined as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (Hofstede, 2001). From MNC’s point of view it becomes imperative to outline the key facts regarding regulations of business operations in the host nation, as it could have significant consequences upon future of the business. Since Hofstede (1980) and Trompenaar (1998) outlined the differences between nations, indicating composite mix of factors that shape the world with certain unique characteristic in each country and the way things take place, most of the research relies heavily on their index score. Trompenaars (1998) has defined Culture as “the way in which a group of people solve problems and reconciles dilemmas”. Culture includes "shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations“(House et al., 2004).

Culture plays a significant role in shaping a nation and also has its impact on various policies affecting business (Vanhonacker & Pan, 1997). Geert Hofstede (2001) conducted one of the most comprehensive studies of how values in the workplace are influenced by culture. Although differences in different countries make it imperative to learn nuances of the host nation, many companies do not provide cross cultural training to their managers, either due to cost implications or either they don’t find it workable. Hofstede (2001) indicated consequence of values accepted by citizens in different countries which not only gained popularity among the corporate world but also opened new area of research in the field of International Business. Hofstede (2001) categorised country specific index score on the basis of data collected from these countries. The index has been summarised below:-

- 1) Power Distance (PDI) refers to the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.
- 2) Individualism versus collectivism (IDV) is the extent to which individuals are integrated into groups
- 3) Masculinity versus femininity (MAS) refers to the distribution of emotional roles between the genders.
- 4) Uncertainty avoidance (UAI) deals with the intolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity
- 5) Long-term versus short-term orientation (LTO) describes societies’ time horizon.

6) Indulgence versus Restraint (IVR) indicates gratification versus control of basic human desires related to enjoying life.

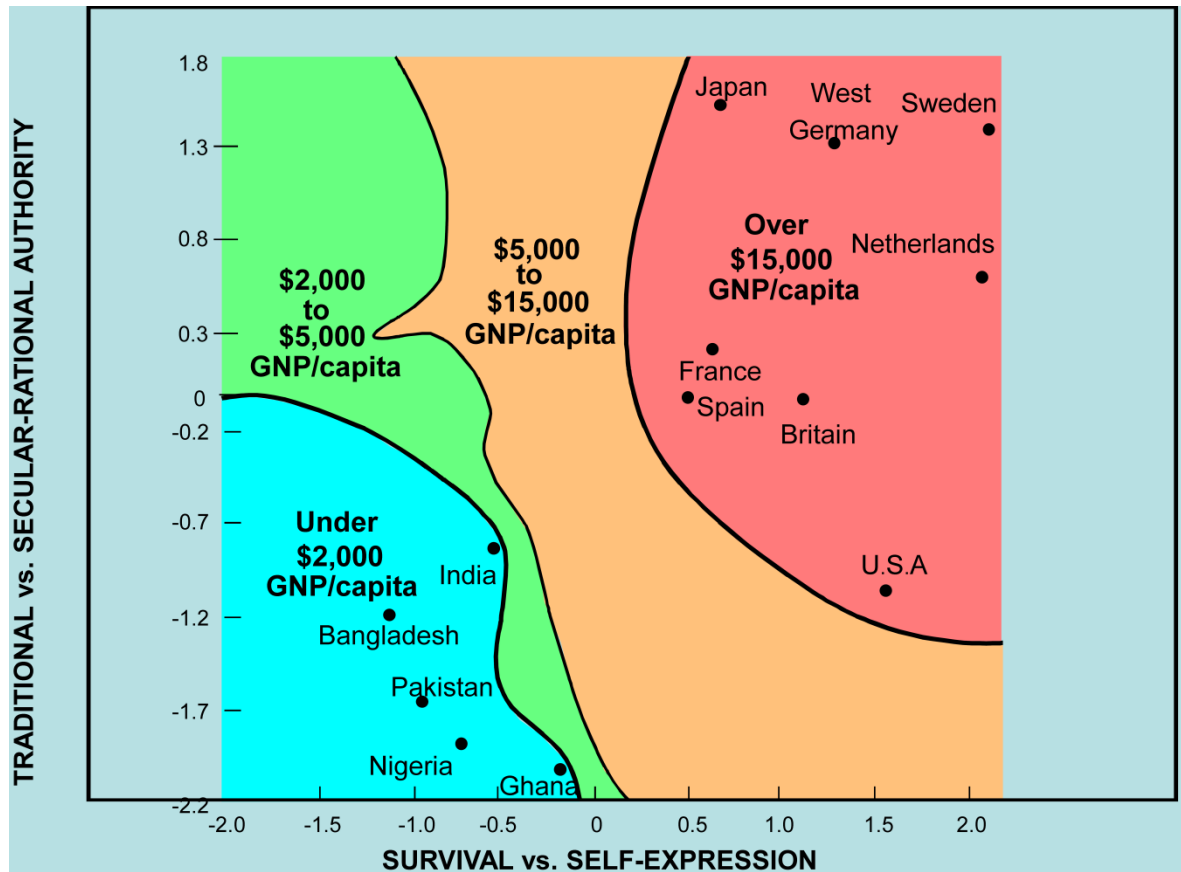
Apart from the index produced by Hofstede (2001), Inglehart and Welzel (2005) carried out another set of research project that explores people's values and beliefs, how they change over time and what social and political impact they have, named as "world value survey" (WVS). The two measures of cultural values that are main independent variables of interest are TRADITIONAL VS RATIONAL and SURVIVAL VS SELF-EXPRESSION. Inglehart and Welzel (2005) measured TRADITIONAL VS RATIONAL dimensions and found that people in country-waves with low scores tend to believe in "traditional" institutions like nuclear and extended families, informal networks of reciprocity and mutual aid, and religious organizations. High scores on TRADITIONAL VS RATIONAL dimensions indicate "secular-rational" view that favours formal institutions that function according to conventional rules, and governments that are established through open and participatory political processes and act in accordance with transparent processes. People in societies with higher scores tend to be less dedicated to family relationships and fulfilment of traditional family obligations, more likely to discuss politics with friends and more opposed to military government.

On the other hand, SURVIVAL VS SELF-EXPRESSION dimensions, measured people on the basis of their economic condition. People who are closer to the "survival" pole are financially weak, majority of the country men struggle to make their ends meet on a daily basis, and physical weakness is widespread, hence survival is foremost concern for people. Societies near the "self-expression" pole have more financial freedom, people seek to achieve non-material goals, and social norms are relaxed. World value survey has been conducted under various phases since 1981, and currently data for the sixth phase is being collected. Figure: 02 represent showing the economic zones into which these nations fall. Societies with an annual per capita gross national product over \$15,000 rank relatively high on both dimensions and fall into a zone at the upper right-hand corner. All societies with per capita GNPs be-low \$2,000 fall into a cluster at the lower left of Figure 2, in an economic zone and includes African, South Asian, ex-Communist, and Orthodox cultural zones.

Each country is positioned according to SURVIVAL vs. SELF-EXPRESSION and TRADITIONAL vs. RATIONAL dimension. Australia, U.S. and Great Britain are cultural neighbours, reflecting their relatively similar values, despite their geographical dispersion.

Similarly Pakistan, Ghana and Nigeria form their own cluster based upon values. From the expatriate manager's point of view, it could be seen that adjustment from the RATIONAL-SELF-EXPRESSION society to TRADITIONAL-SURVIVAL society would be tough.

Figure 01: Economic Zones for Societies Superimposed on Two Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Variation



Source: Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel (2005)

Based upon the Hofstede (1980) and World Value Survey (2005) index, the cultural diversity across the domain is been reflected. Female expatriate who undertake international assignments are expected to feel the difference, especially when they move from RATIONAL society to a more TRADITIONAL society, such as India. Transformations are expected to become more problematic for married women than bachelors, since they have to take care for their spouse as well as children.

METHODOLOGY

We adopted a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews to investigate major factors which has a significant influence over Female expatriates in India. These

expatriates were based in New Delhi (North Capital Region). All Expatriates were Female and total number of expatriates was 10 who belonged to European Continent. Average age of these expatriates was 35 years. In the following section, we present the experiences of European female expatriates involving, motivation behind assignment, Cultural difference, Prevailing Indian conditions, life with family in India, Realistic preview, Previous international experience, Social networking suggestions for future expatriate, Means of entertainment, Cost of living, and Delhi vis-à-vis other towns in India. Expatriate were also selected from the neighboring cities of North capital region such as, Ghaziabad, Noida, Faridabad and Gurgaon.

Austrian Female Expatriate (28) New Delhi, India

Motivation: “I was working for my job. They decided to post me in India at this office of New Delhi. Not exactly, I mean I give my wish to go abroad and they did post me in India. There were aware of other countries that I applied for like, India, China and Japan. I don’t feel that I am not secure in India but since I am from other country, so you have to know a bit and lot of things. So I have to learn, especially the cultural part.”

Realistic preview: “It was not almost new in India since I was also here, in April 2009, for one month and few days. I took time to understand the country not much but a little. And then before coming here I told my organisation to add visits to India. So I am trying to learn something about Indian culture by reading, and by watching movies or so. It surely helps. I read some letters and books. It helped a lot really! I mean if you can understand reading, I want to read a lot. And it helps to understand better, when you see something helps, if and why. The Indian culture is very rich and very fascinating, you can feel it. Not so good things about Indian Culture, I feel, are poverty and pollution sometimes. I don’t know, the rural India a lot, but would definitely like to visit as well to feel the spirit of countryside.”

Italian Female Expatriate (39) Noida, India

Cultural difference: “The main similarity is the sense of Family. I mean Italy has a very big sense of Family and we found the same thing here in India. The difference is, the way to react. I mean one thing that impresses me is the appointment. In India, time is different so it not so usual to be on time. I also had a lot of problem with my apartment, for roads and for remaining things. It’s really the people that way are, so its time, which the new expatriate could feel the experience. I have experienced a lot, personal appointment, mostly.”

Social networking: “To develop social network, I used internet and explored websites meant for expatriates. India is unusual in the sense, that you could find advice from the Indians and also like to hang around but there are something missing. Most expatriates aren’t able to attend all such meetings hence frequent contact remains a challenge. You could have very good advice and suggestions from the Indian community but bonding remains a challenge.”

“I don’t like to have a big network to interact rather I prefer to stay with limited but good people who could provide constant support and encouragement. I know some people, who suggest me with cultural nuances, but it’s not very big network. Gradually increasing social ties and knowing people for the purpose of developing close-knit bond remains significant, rather it should not just be restricted to know people. It’s the same way that I live in Rome, I have many friends unlike Delhi and it is not just limited to know them rather to endure closely united, esp. by social ties.”

“It also helps when you have developed ties with the friends who belong to host nation, for example, I met an Indian family and they live in Italy for the past ten years, so they know Italian culture, and I learned Indian culture from them. They helped me a lot in finding precise apartment in India and provided practical experience.”

French Female Expatriate (34) Gurgaon, India

Prevailing Indian conditions: “Yes sure Indian companies are growing a lot. It’s coming in a very fast way I mean its growth experience I must say. Yes we can see our life is changing and our society is growing. And India has been placed with the BRICS economy, it’s a good experience. One thing which is very-very tough is to see children and the poverty. That way India is very tough. I mean the economy is prosperous and country is wasting enough money and I’ll never get used to, see old and poor kids on the street. Country is growing but what you feel is rather a contrast. India is growing a lot, but you can see entire children, lying in the streets, so it’s exactly that, I cannot understand very well. Rich class is very less, who is having majority of power, and the number of affected people with poverty is substantially high.”

Italian Female Expatriate (25) Ghaziabad, India

Family: “I am bachelor in New Delhi. I think if you live bring your own family, it definitely helps. Rest everything is simple. I haven’t brought my family, not for their inability to adjust in Indian condition but because they have a job in Italy and they cannot leave it. In India there is something to know, to learn about something creative different things. I have a park

also in near to my apartment. I see in the morning, all people are jogging or practising Yoga, and that's wonderful, its different way. You have just to appreciate host cultural values."

Previous international experience: "I have previously visited a lot of countries. Chile, South Africa, Japan, China, even on Algeria, Europe, as a whole, I would say a lot of countries. It helped me, to a certain extent, but it wouldn't have been any more difficult, if I'd have no previous experience. I've been in another country, and travelled a lot. If you live a lot abroad, your mind opens and you start appreciating the host cultural values. You don't look for home culture, but you are ready to accept the host culture. To accept is the best way for adjustment. India is extremely rich in terms of culture; you should be mentally prepared for that. Each country is different, from another and offers whole new dimensions. In India, I had to find an apartment, once I moved, and it was pretty hard to settle down. It was difficult because I didn't knew, where to go and who to ask for help. First time I came to India, it was little bit different. In other countries, it was not a big issue, so it is easier, when you do your homework a little bit. Initial experience in other countries was much easier."

Spanish Female Expatriate (43) Faridabad, India

Suggestions for future expatriates: "I learned a lot about the Indian culture and it's the best thing that one can do is to seek for an opportunity to learn. Without adequate preparation about Indian culture, it would be difficult to survive under odd circumstances. First and foremost, thing should be to accept the host culture. Once the expatriate reach host nation they should be ready to accept the host culture. It's the best way to learn the new cultural phenomena and to have good experience. You don't have to think that everything will be done in the exact moment for you and secondly, need to be patient. Germans are very particular about time hence they may find India as thought-provoking."

Means of entertainment: "I think Delhi has lots of recreational activities to offer. If I look at the people who are jogging in the park, during the early morning that is a recreational activity. I mean it's different, and it depends upon the host nation but you have to accept different means of recreational amenities available. I was so pre-occupied in arranging everything, that I didn't have time to get involve in various recreational means. I have tried some of them like theatre, cinema, concerts etc. and completely enjoyed."

Polish Female Expatriate (30) New Delhi, India

Cost of living in Delhi: "I think, in comparison to China, since I have travelled a lot in China for work, I find Delhi as expensive. To eat in huge restaurants, it costs less in Beijing, not so

here. Also rate for apartment, are extremely high, in comparison to china. Location wise Europe is inexpensive in comparison to accommodation etc. and for me; it's relatively very high in Delhi."

Delhi vis-à-vis other cities: "I visited Mumbai and Pune, for work, and limited period. Mumbai appeared to me as more lively. But it was just an impression, because I spent there only two days so that could altogether change as well. In Pune I had a sense of a town, where as in Delhi it's comparatively too big. In Delhi streets are big and you don't get a feel of a town. Since I come from Poland I get used to everything, whether it is small town or big city. Delhi lies in the centre of the country, where it's square and there in Pune which is different from the capital."

"I miss Poland sometimes because I would have met friend relatives etc., I would say so and certainly that has influence. But, for the moment, it's okay because, it has been very short time in New Delhi. Rich historical background increases your knowledge. I spent, almost all my weekends, in visiting guided tour of in and around New Delhi. It should be useful to learn simple things, as it's the people who are representative of Indian culture. To have guidance about Indian Culture would be useful."

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although female expatriate contribute to management workforce, very few research has been conducted to capture their experience during international assignment. Some of the important findings from this study includes: - i) Pollution and poverty remains a concern for the female expatriates in India. ii) Although security was not a major concern for most of the female expatriates, this study was conducted in the metropolis region of India. iii) Other major cities such as Pune, Bangalore, and Mumbai etc. had much more preference in comparison to Delhi esp. for climate reason. iv) Means of entertainment were mostly accessible in the North Capital Reason, but it was also linked with the open-mindedness of the expatriate members. v) Cost of living was felt as too high especially in terms of accommodation availability vi) Previous international experience did not contribute significantly for expatriates, since, Indian culture was expressively different from other countries.

Above mentioned statement gets support from the fact that India scores 155 out of 178 countries, in comparison to most of the European economies which lie in the top 30, in terms of environment performance (Environment performance index, 2014). In some of the cases

women expatriate are also faced with the challenge of motherhood, hence child care responsibilities also play moderating role in the host nation.

CONCLUSION

Women are playing equally important role in the organization, hence it becomes imperative than perks and benefits to facilitate female expatriates must also be taken into account. 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 attracts most of the foreign companies. ii) In some cases, Men support their female spouse in India and take up the household activities. Restrictions has been imposed on working spouse in India, hence they have to leave their work assignment in their home nation.

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