

Ethnoscape-Financescape Interface: Work Space Experiences for Indian Guest-Workers in Germany*

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This paper revolves around the experiential journeys of Indian guest-workers in Germany with reference to the financescape¹-ethnoscape² interface. By 'journey', I aim to explore two main areas, namely the ethnic profile of the subjects and their professional profile which entangles the issue of their being part of the global economic exchange. Also, these two profiles of the guest workers are not mutually exclusive, insofar as these profiles interact with one another and often interject in the functioning of one another. Within this context, the aim of this paper is to examine how the guest workers perceive their work spaces and behave in the environment; how their perception and behaviour shape their experiences of working in an unfamiliar environment and how their counterparts from the host society accept them as part of the mainstream work force. The paper consists of primary data collected through face-to-face interviews of Indian guest workers in Germany.

The paper is divided into two sections: the first section chronicles the actual experiences at work space for Indian guest workers in Germany, whilst the second section evaluates how the ethnic specificity of the subjects, coupled with their universal attributes of labour, are perceived and accepted by their German colleagues and bosses in the workplace.

Work space experiences of Indian guest-workers in Germany

Work space experiences for Indian guest-workers in Germany largely entail how they interact with their Indian and German colleagues in an environment apparently 'foreign' to them. It is important to keep in mind that Indians in this context are not a monolithic category but are characterized by their own multiplicities of social locations including gender, class, place of origin and caste. However, each of these locations takes a back seat when they are interacting with people from other countries and in fact other continents. In that light, it would not be wrong to see the 'Indians' as a composite group of people sharing habits and values with their counterparts instead of locating each of the respondents in terms of her/his specific social locations.

Social composition of the guest-workers in Germany – Among the 120 respondents that I engaged with during field work, 90 were men and 30 were women. Out of the 90 men, 53 were single and 37 were married; out of 30 women 14 were single, 12 were married and 4 were single parents.

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Majority of the respondents hailed from Eastern and Southern part of India. Most of them received their school education in their home towns and higher education in the big cities. I found a balanced composition of men and women having regional and urban backgrounds i.e. whilst a big section were found to have semi-urban backgrounds in India, a visible number of respondents also came with quintessentially urban backgrounds of English medium school education followed by Indian Institute of technology (IIT) or equivalent engineering degrees and MBA's from elite management institutes. Those with semi-urban/regional backgrounds also migrated to big cities for engineering and specialized degrees. This trend was observed more in men than women i.e. more men with regional backgrounds migrated to big cities in India for higher education in comparison to women. As for the women, the majority had urban backgrounds and received all their professional degrees from big cities. This differential trend accounts for the fact that men are more encouraged and have more access to opportunities than women in India, especially in terms of education and career building.

Among the 37 married male respondents, 31 of them were accompanied by their wives, 4 of them were expecting their wives to join them once the spouse's visa process had been completed and the remaining two respondents informed me that their wives would not join them since they have their independent careers in India. Among 53 single men, 19 of them were engaged to be married to women in India chosen by their parents, 6 of them had their girlfriends working in India and they expressed their desire to marry them in near future, whilst. 12 of them said that their parents were looking for a match for them, back in India.. 8 respondents said that they would not prefer arranged marriages, but would however like to choose Indian girls for marriage over a foreigner and the rest of the 7 respondents said that marriage was not a priority for them at the time of the interview. Among those accompanied by their wives, 13 had children, out of which 10 went to school in Germany. The rest of the male respondents did not have children, either in Germany or in India.

Among the 14 single women, 4 of them were engaged to be married once they finish their on-site term and go back to India, the rest of the 10 opined that they did not have immediate marriage plans, though they have family pressure to marry and more specifically not to marry foreigners. Among the 12 married female respondents, 7 of them also had their husbands in the host society with 4 of the husbands also pursuing similar kind of jobs and 1 husband still trying to have full employment in Germany. The remaining 5 women had husbands residing in India in full time employment. Among the 4 single mothers, 3 of them had their children living with them in Germany and 1 had left her children in India with her parents as she was not confident of raising them on her own in the host society.

The majority of women were found to be in the banking and IT sector, while finance was dominated largely by men. Among 53 men, 7 of them expressed a desire to stay back in Germany, 9 of them said that they would not mind going to another country after completing their on-site tenure in Germany, and the rest of them opined that they would definitely prefer to go back to India and continue working there. Among the women, those who had their husbands in Germany opined that they would stay back in the host society if their husbands would, all 4 of the single mothers said that they would prefer staying in Germany with their children than going back to India, and 4 out of the 14 single women said that they would like to stay in Germany.

Most of them are in IT, finance and banking sectors – In view of the pattern of economic globalization, in which multinational and trans-national companies depend hugely on outsourcing international cheap labour, the majority of the temporary guest-workers all over the world, including Germany, are employed in IT, banking and finance sectors. Since 1999, Germany's IT industry has struggled with a lack of sufficiently skilled and specialized workers and an estimated 75,000 job vacancies (Welsch 2001) have, since that time, been created. Demand for labour paved

the way for new migration policies to widen the possibilities of admitting skilled labour, based on the green card model (DPA, 2001 b). The Green Card Scheme was introduced in Germany in August 2000, under which 20,000 IT workers from outside of the EU were permitted to work and stay in the country for a maximum period of five years. A bar on their period of stay was introduced from the beginning to restrict permanent settlement of these technical experts in Germany, which nevertheless happened with around 25% of the guest workers (Vertovec 1996).

This paper considers five kinds of Indian guest-workers in Germany. Firstly, many Indian "techies" in Germany have availed of the special 'green card' scheme that was formulated by the German government to attract technical expertise. However, this scheme is quite restrictive; only highly qualified engineers can apply and they have to be earning salaries above the average German salary. Those who have lived in Germany for five years, the scheme's upper limit, face uncertainty about their future, especially if the scheme is revoked for them. Secondly, there are many Indian techies in Germany who are employees of the Indian software development centres of German companies such as Siemens and Robert Bosch who migrate to Germany for a few years as part of the outsourcing process. Thirdly, many multinational companies from the IT and finance sectors have their branches in India and in Germany, among other countries. This enables many IT professionals to go on-site and work. Fourthly, Indian banks e.g. State Bank of India have their overseas branches in Germany, their Headquarter being in Frankfurt for example. Lastly, German Banks like Deutsche Bank, Commerzbank and the like have branches in India and often transfer Indian employees to Germany on a temporary basis.

Cultural sensitivity training – One of the first things that Indian guest workers joining IT, banking or finance sectors in Germany are introduced to is cultural sensitivity training and workshops. These are largely aimed at addressing the cultural gap between two countries within organizations. The Human Resources (HR) team of every organization attempt to deal with the behavioral and attitudinal distinctiveness of the guest workers and settle any differences between foreign workers and workers from the host society. This also includes cultural sensitivity training for the Indians to learn about the cultural nuances of the host society. It also aims at increasing soft-skill development for the Indians in terms of social etiquette, language, and the cultural peculiarities of Germany. Apart from such general training programs, a few organizations also delve more deeply into inter-cultural communication theory and personality development. They recognize the cultural gap between offshore workers i.e. the Indians, and workers from the host society (Germany) needs to be addressed and negotiated in order for the smooth functioning of multicultural teams.

These training programs are being initiated by companies in response to a growing number of Indian guest workers reaching Germany for onsite work and concomitant reports on 'intercultural difficulties' between Indian and German employees including 'power distance', task-oriented Germans Vs. relationship-oriented Indians, explicit/implicit ways of communication, and so on. However, my respondents opined that though both German and Indian employees take part in the trainings, Indians are far more expected to learn German ways of working and adapt and not vice versa. One of my respondents shared that Indian employees are given training to be more creative and less process oriented in their approach within a team, however their German counterparts, although they attend such training programs, are not expected to adapt themselves to the Indians as much as the Indians have to adapt the German way of working.

Neel Madhav, a Senior Software Engineer with Wipro, Munich said,

"Initially it was both us Indians and our German colleagues but gradually I started realizing that the program was oriented more towards the Indians learning... Germans would also sometimes skip attending the sessions whereas we were expected to not only be regular and also had to pay closer attention than our German co-workers."

Ways of functioning for Indians and Germans – In spite of such training programs mentioned above, at a functional level the cultural gap between Indians and their German co-workers remains visible enough to put them often at odds with each other in the workplace, especially when working in a team (which often is the case).

The respondents in this context would work mostly in teams and often hold higher positions than their German colleagues. The majority of them opined that work ethics is the defining factor in which the Germans and Indians are at odds with each other. They added that it is well-known that Germans are obsessed with planning; right from the commencement of a project up until its completion. The German way of working would enable one to plan every step along the way. However, this elaborate planning system, breaking down a project into minute details, does not go down well with the Indians. According to the respondents, the Indian way of working would be to have a tentative plan for a project with a timeline of initiation and completion; however, they would be more prone to innovating steps in between. In this way, sometimes they are able to produce more than the initial target output. When it was suggested that digressing from the initial plan might lead to under-production of the output as well, my respondents disagreed. According to them, they can enjoy their work better if there is scope for innovation instead of set goals. As they pointed out, this is one of the biggest differences they have to experience in terms of working together with the Germans.

Shelly Batra, a middle level banking professional specialized to deal with clients seeking loans from Commerzbank said,

”In the beginning it was quite difficult for me to comprehend the planning mechanism. In India also we maintain timeline but here even the breaks between two deadlines are planned out in terms of basic details. Although I could catch up with the work system here but I still find such detailed planning at times overbearing.”

Carol Upadhyay (2001) in her paper on Indian IT workers in Germany identified few areas that pronounce the difference between Indian and German high skilled workers in Germany. This paper found few of them quite relevant vis-à-vis the guest workers in general (including banking and finance sectors). The ones relevant are mentioned in the following section along with the ones the researcher identified through primary data collection.

Firstly, it was observed that the Indians themselves identify Indian work culture to be hierarchical and feudal, as opposed to the more egalitarian culture in Germany. Such a work culture, as the Indians insisted, makes it difficult for them to say no to their bosses and colleagues. They cannot treat their bosses as equals and always tend to maintain this structure super-ordination and subordination. This attribute is known in cross-cultural management theory as 'power distance'. Geerte Hofstede (1980), a Dutch social psychologist defined power distance as a concept imbued in cultural specificity. In other words, the relationship across a hierarchy at the work place is subject to certain super- and sub-ordination in a traditional bureaucratic system which often translates into an unequal power relationship and concomitant behavioural protocol. Traditionally, both India and Germany have experienced a bureaucratic system in work places with a well-defined hierarchy. However, the emergence of the knowledge economy has brought forth certain fundamental alterations in the way work is done within a multinational organization today. At this level, organizations aim for restructuring power relations with more egalitarian attributes and often prefer a bottom-up, rather than a top-down approach. In this light, often it is opined that Indian employees are still coping with this global approach towards work relations and would prefer bureaucratic power distance to calling their bosses by first names.

Secondly, Indians feel that their German colleagues are better at time management than themselves. As they opined, and as I observed. German co-workers would not work for extra hours, they would come and leave right on time and therefore are better able to maintain a work-

life balance (Upadhyaya, 2006). The Indians observed that their German colleagues are distinct from them because the latter take their leisure time as seriously as their work. According to the Indian respondents, this difference in attitude stems from the overall economic and social structure of the two countries - since Germany is economically developed and the state provides social security and other benefits (including labour friendly laws), their working population can maintain a better work-life balance and do not have to stress over their everyday existence. On the other hand, India as a developing state can hardly provide such social security to its citizens which often translates into its young work force remaining under a constant condition of performance anxiety. Not all respondents, however, attributed positive value to the German habit of working limited hours and going on long vacations.

Thirdly, somehow related to the previous point, Indian guest workers feel that the Germans can maintain a strict separation between their working and non-working lives. Whilst Indians tend to form strong social networks at the office that extend beyond working hours, Germans do not socialize with their colleagues beyond office hours and office events. From the Indian point of view, this suggests a complete disregard for the personal lives and problems of fellow workers. Many of my respondents opined that their working structure demands them to stay at work for long hours and home is mostly where they just go to sleep (especially on week days). As a result, they end up spending more time with their colleagues than with their families. This also gives them an opportunity to bond with their co-workers. While they say that they would not mind social interaction outside work with their German colleagues, the scope for such exchanges is quite scarce because the German co-workers leave office after a stipulated time (unlike the Indians) and so long as they are at work, they prefer restricting conversation to professional talk only. On the other hand, as my respondents said, they can bond easily with the Indian colleagues over a shared culture, language (sometimes) and individual experience of being an Indian guest-worker in Germany. Here it is important to note that by shared culture I do not imply that all Indians constitute a common culture (which would undermine the multilayered cultural space of Indian society).

Fourthly, German people have a direct and forthright communication style in both their professional and social relationships, which can be understood both as honesty and rudeness. Differences in communication style may lead to misunderstanding between Indian and German colleagues. While working in a team, my respondents shared that they would often find it difficult to handle the way of communication of their German colleagues. Biswajit Roy from Deloitte who is working in Dusseldorf for two years now opined,

”I have still not been able to adjust with the typical German way of communication. While I am now okay with the German colleagues telling me something on my face, I can never do the same with them. This is not how I learnt to converse; so I will respond or answer them, in such occasions, in an indirect fashion.”

They added that they felt discouraged at times by the way a German colleague or boss would negate their work or project plan; however, they also said that such direct way of communication sometimes also helped in understanding what the German colleagues wanted without beating around the bush. However, most of the respondents opined that it was initially more difficult to adjust with the German way of communication; later when they knew what to expect out of their German colleagues, it was easier.

Adapting to the German workplace – Given the hegemonic construction of differences in the ways of working between India and Germany, Indian guest workers remain highly conscious of the German stereotypes about them. The majority of my respondents said that while adaptation is not easy, once they adjust themselves in the new work structure, they start considering the

new learning as a part of their overall skill enhancement. Typical German skills of organization and precision are often considered positively, which my respondents claimed would help their overall performance in the future. There exists a fine line of differences between imbibing a way of functioning and being asked to imitate a work culture. Therefore, training and sensitivity programs augment adaptation and learning of necessary work skills for the Indian guest workers comparatively better than a one time diktat from management and HR to work the "German way". Indian guest workers, those in particular who have to deal directly with clients like in banking software, opined that their soft skills have improved over the years while working in Germany. Also, they have learned gradually to be more clear and direct about their expert opinions in a team that they would otherwise be hesitant of.

They are often conscious of the fact that they represent their country at the work place. This consciousness helps them perform better and make a fair impression of Indians in Germany. In general, as already mentioned, the common stereotype goes that Indians are not as organized and meticulous as the Germans. Once going through the training programs, Indian employees are exposed to both the existence of such ethnic stereotypes and the necessary skills to overcome the stigma and break the moulds (adaptation to German work culture through training programs). Therefore, they are both eager and able to adapt their work methods so that they can be in sync with their German co-workers. However, that does not imply that Indian guest workers in Germany always have a smooth sailing, even after such programs. Nevertheless, such trainings help them overcome the initial hesitation and orient them in the work environment in the host society. Such trainings are more like crash courses since it is neither feasible nor desirable for the companies to invest major work time on training alone.

The biggest shortcoming of the training programs is that they cannot transform and replace cultural traits learnt over the years in few sessions of sensitization. Although culture is a part of the social construction of behaviour, the time dimension involved is crucially important as well. In other words, the environments within which Indians and Germans have been brought up are culturally distinct and thus Indians carry their cultural specificities into the work place. As a matter of fact, India is also characterized by regional sub cultures. Therefore, it is not possible for the Indian guest workers to completely mould their ways of functioning in the host society. Moreover, adaptation is a mutual process but it has been observed that the Indian guest workers are expected to adapt far more than their German counterparts. Work space experiences for Indian guest workers in Germany, therefore, is a negotiation between the subtext of their own cultural patterns and that of the host society; it provides a space for conflict, adjustment and team work. It also involves, among other things, dealing with and breaking the stereotypes for both the Indian guest workers and their German counterparts.

Visas for a limited period – The fact that my respondents stay in the host society for a stipulated period of time ranging from two to five years (with possibilities of extension), makes a significant difference in terms of perception and experience of socio-cultural inclusion and exclusion for them in comparison to unregulated migrants. The certainty of returning to their homeland works as a disincentive for them to take any effort towards assimilation in the host society's language, food habits and other cultural nuances. This also does not encourage them much to adapt to the German way of working because they know that it is only for a certain period of time and that they are not going to stay and work in Germany forever. As a matter of fact, the majority of Indian respondents expressed their desire to go back to India after the end of their term in Germany. Consequently, these Indians would try more to cling on to their original mode of operation and adapt insofar as it is necessary for smooth functioning in the socio-professional environment of the host society.

Team work – In many occasions, my respondents would have Germans working under their leadership in a team. While this formalized scale of super- and sub-ordination carries a potential for complicating the perceived ethnic superiority-inferiority dynamic, none of my respondents answered affirmatively when asked if they faced any hostility or antagonism from their German junior colleagues. The majority of my respondents opined that they found the Germans thoroughly professional. Some in fact opined that their impersonal attitude helps them remain objective while Indians sometimes become personally involved with their colleagues which can hamper their work relations. So when a German co-worker is working under the leadership of an Indian in a team, according to my respondents, the former is generally not interacting with the latter in terms of ethnicity but with reference to the professional position held by the Indian.

Said Vijender Bhatt, a senior manager at State Bank of India Overseas Branch in Frankfurt:

”A lot of German employees work under my supervision, but none has ever talked to me in any manner that I can say I found racist or derogatory.”

Many have related that it is also due to the equivalent (if not higher) professional rank of the Indians that their German colleagues treat them as equals. However, working in a team is often met with problems as German and Indian working hours come at odds with each other.

Linguistic incompatibility and learning German – As per the respondents, English is the formal language of communication in the workplace. This makes it comfortable for them to reach out to their German colleagues. However, they added, that outside the formal work environment, say in the cafeteria or while crossing one another across the hall, the Germans would talk in their own language, which the Indians would feel uncomfortable with. They explained that since they do not follow German well, they would feel a bit threatened by what exactly is being discussed among their German colleagues on such occasions. I pointed out that Indians would do the same when they gather with fellow Indian colleagues, to which most of my respondents answered that that is different because Indians are small in numbers compared to Germans here. Therefore, the Germans might feel awkward under such circumstances, but not threatened.

However, in some sectors like sales and marketing that involve direct communication with the clients, the Indians have to learn German. Such lessons are arranged by the company itself and happen after regular office hours. These lessons usually happen twice or three times a week after work hours with mandatory attendance for the Indian employees. Also, those working for German banks like Deutsche Bank, Commerz Bank and alike are expected to complete level B2 of German language proficiency. Those working in the finance sector and having to directly deal with on-shore clients are expected to have basic conversation skills.

Ajit Singh, a 32-year old a middle level re-insurance professional from Dehradun relates,

”I had to take proper 12-weeks language course when I came here. It was arranged by my company and would happen twice a week for an hour each. It was intense, since German is a difficult language. However, I had to finish the course since it was compulsory and also because I have to interact directly with my clients. So it is important that I can speak German fluently. Otherwise, our potential customers will not have faith in our company where the employees do not speak the native language.”

At a personal level, Indian employees do not show much enthusiasm for learning German primarily because, as they opine, it is a difficult language and needs lot of homework and practice and thereby is time consuming; and secondly, the Indian guest workers (at least the majority of them) are certain of going back to India after completing their tenure in Germany and will not need the language professionally once they go back. These are the two major reasons for which my

respondents did not show a personal interest in learning Germany. However, for their professional purposes they sometimes have to and in which case they do.

Ranadeep Dhar, working with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) in Berlin asked,

”Why do I need to learn German! I am here only for few years and not forever. Also, everything is automated here so I can easily avoid speaking to people in the streets.”

Soccer as a space of social interaction – I received one unanimous answer in terms of soccer being the most significant and one of the very few spaces where Indians bond with the Germans and vice versa. My field work overlapped with the soccer World Cup 2014, which gave me the opportunity to witness this myself. While they would not hang around after work otherwise, Germans and Indians would be enthusiastic in grabbing a beer over the soccer games. In Munich, this sentiment, as a matter of fact, runs through the year as Indians, especially from West Bengal, Goa and Kerala try to identify with FC Bayern as 'their' team in Germany. Colleagues who would only exchange basic greetings at work would otherwise meet at biergartens for the matches and bond over soccer.

Shared Aniket Sengupta, a finance professional from Munich,

”If there is a game tonight, my German colleagues would definitely ask me to join after work. They know I love football and we have strong football teams in my state (West Bengal). Here I support FC Bayern.”

They also added that they would play occasionally with their German colleagues on weekends. On the other hand, some of my respondents have even tried their hands at teaching the Germans a thing or two about cricket.

Different labour laws – At the workplace, what my Indian respondents felt most uncomfortable about is the fact that they are subject to Indian labour laws that are starkly different from the German labour laws that their colleagues in the host society are subject to. Under Indian labour laws, the Indian guest workers work for longer hours with less leave and it is often insisted that they take their work home with them. My respondents explained that such a situation would never occur for their German colleagues; they are entitled to more holidays and would work only for stipulated hours daily. They would never work on weekends whereas Indians would have to be in the office sometimes on weekends, or otherwise would have to take their work home with them. The majority of my respondents, whilst accepting the fact that these differential working conditions would always be a part of their work life in the host society, find such a discrepancy annoying:

”It is frustrating to see your German colleagues leave soon after working hours while you are still slogging. Although formally we are also bound by local laws but ultimately we are still working longer hours. The system is such that even if I do not want to, but sometimes feel resentful towards German colleagues.”

Said Urmila Kumari, a 28-year old IT professional from Jharkhand working with IBM, Cologne.

Social location specific experiences – Before entering the field, I had distinct presumptions in terms of encountering narratives of experiences of Indian guest workers in Germany with a heavy tone of social locational specificity. However, at the end of the primary data collection it was observed that social locations do not play pivotal roles in shaping the experiences of Indian guest workers apart from the larger ethnic identity of being an Indian. Unlike blue collar Indian guest workers who are entering the international labour market with the existing disadvantage

of class position and poor exposure to urban ways of living, Indian white collar guest workers in Germany enjoy the social capital of education and occupation, and they also earn on par with their German co-workers. This definitely puts them in a position of advantage. Also, as part of the international migration of labour due to economic globalization, these Indians are primarily seen as Asian and Indian; their caste and regional identities become secondary identities while larger ethnic identities become primary identities. As a result, they are not subject to caste specific behavioural hazards or benefits from the German co-workers.

Says Rajeev Venkaiyah from Chennai, now a project manager and team leader with Sapient, Munich,

”This is my last year in Germany after which I am going back to India. My experience and observation of working among the Germans in Germany for last five years is quite peaceful. May be that is because I hold higher authority and position at work. But, essentially I think they see us as Indians and not in terms of who belongs to what class or from which state in India. Rather, it is among ourselves that we are curious and sometimes even biased in terms of caste, religion and state.”

Their secondary identities have the potential of becoming relevant among themselves as colleagues if some caste or region enjoy numerical strength as compared to others e.g. the team I interviewed in Deloitte office in Munich, there were 7 Indian employees in a team of 11, out of which 3 were from the southern part of the country, 2 were from eastern part and 1 was from western India. Among the 3, 2 were from Karnataka and 1 was from Kerala and out of the 2 from eastern India, 1 was from West Bengal and another from Orissa. The Indian employees from Kerala opined that they enjoy talking to each other in Telugu (Andhra Pradesh’s state language) while the third employee speaks Kannada (Karnataka’s state language). The ones from West Bengal and Orissa speak with each other in Hindi and English since they do not speak each other’s native language (Bengali for West Bengal and Oriya for Orissa). In that light, social location becomes relevant more for the fellow Indians and not so much for their German counterparts, the same way that Indian guest workers usually can hardly make the distinction between a Bavarian dialect and a Hamburgisch dialect of German and their cultural specificities.

How German colleagues and bosses perceive Indian guest-workers in Germany

While this paper focuses on the experiences of social exclusion and economic inclusion for Indian guest workers in Germany, their experiences need to be analyzed within the immediate context i.e. their German counterparts in the workplace. The social environment of the workplace is constituted of both Indian guest workers and their German colleagues and bosses. Therefore, how the Germans perceive the Indians and how that facilitates their mutual interaction needs to be identified.

Social composition of the German colleagues of Indian guest-workers – Among the German co-workers of the Indians, I interviewed 75 people with 44 male and 26 female co-workers. Both female and male co-workers were between age 25 and 45. They hailed from Berlin, North Rhine-Westphalia, Bavaria and Baden Wuerttemberg. Out of 44 male colleagues, 14 were at junior level, 19 were at middle ranks and 11 were at higher ranks. Among the female co-workers, 7 were at junior level, 10 were at middle level and the rest of the 8 were at higher positions. 34 male co-workers identified with Christianity as their religion and rest of the 10 men said that though they were born within Christian families they did not consider themselves particularly religious

and almost never attended Sunday Mass. Among the female colleagues, 19 of them identified themselves as Christian, whilst 6 of them said they did not identify with any religion. Caste system at the societal level in Germany is not pronounced.

Culture vs. structure – Cultural difference in the workplace is not only a factor affecting the Indian guest-workers in Germany. German employees are also subject to a minimum level of training and sensitization and have to adjust themselves with their Indian colleagues in a team. Both German colleagues of the Indian employees, and the bosses opined that they were subject to multiculturalism in the work place and had gradually learnt to deal with that. However, cultural difference is also often used against both Indian and German employees cutting across the ranks in the company to cover up the structural shortcomings of a corporate work system underscored by exploitation of cheap labour from Asian countries e.g. long working hours for Indians is often camouflaged as their inability to finish work on time. In that light, cultural differences between Indian guest workers and their German counterparts work as a shield to keep the structural crisis of the capitalist work system under wraps. Standard notions of national difference (Indian or German) feed into corporate discourses about work and underwrite the development of strategies to manage high-skilled Indian temporary workers. While negotiating their cultural distinctiveness, Indian guest workers and their German counterparts are responding to a structural crisis within the work system of multinational corporations which tends to attribute all problems and conflicts in 'multicultural' work situations to cultural difference. Communication gaps or the inability to deliver on time, for instance, are attributed to inherent cultural barriers (different communication styles, different attitudes to time management) rather than to organisational or any other such problems. Thus, the discourse of cultural difference, when articulated by both Indian and German managers appears to function as a management tool in helping the corporate world to understand and manage its workforce.

Differential value attributes – German colleagues and bosses perceive the Indian guest workers largely through the existing stereotypes e.g. being disorganised and inefficient, which means that they spend long hours in the office but are still relatively unproductive. However, gradually they start seeing their positive sides as well i.e. hard-working, technically sound, fast learners and adaptable. German managers opined that they were impressed with the extent to which the Indian guest workers are willing to go in terms of sacrificing personal and family time to please the customer or boss. However, this propensity for hard work is seen by few German employees and bosses as an outcome of 'Indian work culture', which is characterised as feudal and hierarchical, making Indian employees subservient and too respectful of authority. From the standpoint of a global and German work culture, Indians in this context are seen as passive, lacking motivation and in constant need of instruction and guidance. In that light, what is perceived as a positive trait ('respectful of authority') within Indian context, becomes a negative trait to be overcome in the global or German workplace that values autonomy and equality.

Klaus Bohnert, a 41-year old manager with Deutsche Bank, Frankfurt, relates:

"I share extremely healthy relation with my Indian colleagues. However, sometimes I think some of them miss the energy level and motivation that our German colleagues show. When our frequencies do not match, work suffers. However, I think the training programs are helpful to solve such issues."

Mediated stereotypes – Germany's cultural exposure to India is limited and started proliferating only with the immigration of the latter after World War II. Therefore, Germany as a social space is still evolving in terms of its understanding of Indian cultural norms. Much of what they know so far about India is derived from popular Bollywood cinema. In many occasions, I came

across enthusiastic Hindi movie lovers among the Germans, familiar with names like Shah Rukh Khan and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan. The majority of them still think of India only in terms of exotic travel destinations and a society run completely under strict gender norms. Part of this is of course, undeniable. On the other hand however, such preconceived notions run the risk of not acknowledging the professional efforts of the Indian co-workers in the work place.

Othering – When it comes to discrimination, what Germans practice is 'othering'. They are cordial, but do not however embrace 'Ausländer' (foreigners). I did not find any space for symbolic violence or direct exclusionary practices that Germans carry out against the Indians I interviewed. This has a direct relationship with the social location, and social and cultural capital of the Indians and the attitude of Germans towards them. When I interviewed some irregular migrants, their narratives were strewn with unsavoury experiences in Germany. Many of them worked in petty jobs receiving meagre pay, whilst many had become 'Asyl' or political prisoners. Their stories bring out a starkly different picture of the hardships faced for Indians in Germany. However, these irregular migrants are better integrated and often assimilated in the host society than the guest workers mainly because their existential imperatives are far stronger than the latter. However, coming back to the Indian guest workers, Germans opine that they lack visibility in the social spaces which eventually translates into non-recognition of their social existence for the former.

Barbara Gerhard, a middle level finance professional from Baden Württemberg and working in Munich said, (in response to me asking her that does she spot Indians on the street?)

"Now that you ask me, I have to tell you apart from work, I hardly see Indians on the road...I mean there are students in LMU (Ludwig Maximilian Universität, Munich) who can be seen at English Garten or Staatsbibliothek area, but other than that, almost none...I mean very few."

Germans, especially the young ones who speak English, add that they would like to interact more with other cultures as they are better travelled than previous generations. Though they mention that they do not like English as a language and thereby would speak it as little as possible, they are interested in learning about other cultures, specifically Indian culture. Curiosity about Indian culture among the Germans also emerges from the visibility of increasing number of Indian students in German universities. However, these young Germans opine that Indians would shy away from speaking to them. The latter also have lot of preconceived notions about Germans especially in terms of their food and drinking habits. Many Germans pointed out that drinking alcohol like beer and wine are social practices for them, whereas the Indians would often see it as an aberration. In the worst cases, some Indians have had more drinks than they can hold. Such situations would rather be avoided by the Germans. Also, the majority of Indians are vegetarians; those who are not would largely stick to chicken and lamb. Only a few of the Indians would have eaten beef and pork and also feel comfortable about other people eating beef or pork at the same table as them.

Analysis

Stereotypes regarding Indian work culture have a certain amount of truth to them insofar as the traditional 'old economy' is concerned when Indian companies were built with strict bureaucratic, hierarchical and 'feudal' components (Upadhyaya, 2006). However, in terms of the present day situation, major Indian companies claim to have broken away from this traditional 'Indian' culture, importing in its place the American model of informality in the workplace and open management practices. But the fact is that several of the older companies still retain elements of the 'feudal' Indian corporate culture. Their employees naturally absorb the appropriate behaviour patterns

in these companies before going onsite, and as a result may reproduce 'feudal' behaviour patterns there as well until they have absorbed (or have been trained in) German work culture. For instance, Indian guest workers shared that they were aware of how they were perceived by German colleagues and made efforts to adapt to the local culture by being more direct and forthright in their communication style, or more professional and organised and so on. However, more important than this cultural explanation of differences in behaviour and perception is to search for underlying structural reasons that may be linked to the outsourcing situation itself.

Nature of work and concomitant stereotypes

Firstly, their nature of work demands most Indian onsite white collar workers in Germany to cater to the client's needs and demands and leaves little room for them to argue with their German colleagues and bosses if they have to meet their clients' expectations. Secondly, onsite workers have to negotiate between what the Indian employers want and what the German and other international customers would expect them to perform. As a result, they are unable to satisfy both ends e. g. adhering to local office timings as required by the client on one hand and pressure from the boss to complete the work on the other. In these circumstances, leaving aside issues of 'culture' and unfamiliarity with local social norms, one would not expect to find very assertive behaviour from Indian guest workers. Moreover, the discourse about work culture becomes a rationalisation for problems or practices that may have other causes.

As a matter of fact, it is not so much poor planning on the part of Indian engineers as demands from management that are responsible for long working hours - a fact that is camouflaged by such cultural justifications. For example, Germans would come up to the Indian workers in case of any last minute deliverance that would need extra working hours. Although they would make it sound like a request the Indians are structurally not in a position to say 'no'. Under such circumstances, whilst it would seem that Indians could not finish their work and therefore are stuck in office, in reality they are shouldering a task that was meant to be shared with their German counterparts. However, Indian respondents added that they would still appreciate the attitude of their German colleagues who would pose an order as a request. On the other hand, they seemed to detested the attitude of their Indian bosses who think that their subordinates can be asked to do anything at any point in time.

The following opinions shared with me by one Indian and one German colleague are almost reciprocal in content:

Sebastian Hacker, a young 29-year old software professional from North Rhine-Westphalia working with IBM in Cologne said,

"We in Germany can never imagine ordering, even our juniors directly...I mean you cannot be rude and insensitive to a person just because s/he is working under you! So on occasions when we have to give out order to people, we would try to remain as polite as possible."

Ramachandran N., also a software professional from Hyderabad working in Tata Consultancy services, Berlin opined,

"At least my German boss is not rude when he wishes I overstay and finish some work arrived at the last minute! Nor are my German colleagues. Had it been in India, most of the time the bosses would be like...'you have to finish this before going home'...it affects your productivity when your boss is not nice to you."

The idea that Indians work longer and harder than Germans because they are badly organised and careless appears to be deeply internalised by many of them. Still, most do not see this as an

outcome of the way in which the corporate capitalist structure itself is organised. Moreover, while there is scarcely any regulation of labour conditions and working hours in the Indian companies, such regulations in countries like Germany are strict and well enforced. But despite the fact that Indian guest workers in Germany are supposed to follow local practices and office timings, it could be observed that in many cases their working conditions are different from the Germans colleagues, especially with regard to working hours. Indian IT and finance sectors are known for long working hours, averaging 10-12 hours a day and often six if not seven days a week, amounting to 70-80 hours per week. Although Indian workers have naturalised long working hours as endemic to their work, when they are working in Germany, they see that their German counterparts are guided by limited working hours. While this is posed as a matter of cultural difference between the two countries, in reality it is an issue of differences in labour laws and HR management policy of the companies in their branches in India and Germany.

Interestingly, local representatives of Indian companies often claimed that Indian guest workers have to comply with the norms and regulations of the client company, including working hours. However, such a claim was contradicted by many of the respondents. They said that they usually work longer hours than their Germans colleagues, and that their Indian employers expect them to do so because of deadline pressures. Enforcement of labour laws is particularly strict in Germany. Nevertheless, the Indian guest workers were often found to be spending long hours at work, much beyond the maximum prescribed. Also, they themselves tend to believe that long working hours are part of the job and that they are being paid well for this time commitment. Moreover, there is little awareness about labour issues or even labour laws among the Indian employees, either in Germany or India since they do not see themselves as 'workers' in the classical sense of blue collar work; they rather consider themselves as 'Elite Migrants'; even when they feel they are being overworked or exploited they do not perceive this as a labour issue. This in turn leads them to place excessive emphasis on their social and professional identities.

Additionally, because the Indian guest workers are expected to learn and adapt to the German work culture far more than the reverse, any digression from the expected norms of behaviour is stereotyped as 'Indian work culture' marked by inefficiency. However, the majority of the Indians have opined that even if their German colleagues insist upon a pattern of egalitarian interaction, at a functional level this definitely boils down to a hierarchical structure and creates situations that are otherwise marked by addressing each other by first names and other such 'global' corporate work cultural traits, but this inherently puts the Indian employees in a disadvantaged position. Thus, the very structure of these 'multicultural' virtual teams implies a hierarchy that tends to follow the lines of 'culture' or nationality. Yet when managers analyse and attempt to solve problems in such teams, they invariably take recourse to cultural differentiation theory and attribute such problems essentially to Indian work cultural shortcomings. This is not to deny that genuine cultural and linguistic differences do exist between Indians and Germans that can give rise to miscommunication or misunderstanding, but it is striking that the structural reality of the multinational companies in handling a multicultural workforce is usually not considered to be a relevant factor.

Whilst interviewing the Indian guest workers and their German counterparts, I often came across or heard about situations where team work faced difficulties due to structural reasons that were termed as cultural gaps. Such occasions typically would entail a team consisting of both Indian and German employees catering to an international client from a head office based out of India. Under such circumstances, should there be a situation of conflict, the German teammates would often define it as a lack of understanding and delayed deliverance from the Indian guest workers. They would opine that the Indian guest workers would hardly communicate their problems and progress which leads to miscommunication within the team and translates into lack of understanding between what the clients are expecting and what the company can provide.

However, it was observed that the majority of such situations arise when the team is headed by a German boss whom, given the structure of project and the nature of work as already discussed, the Indian employees cannot say no to. In that light, a tacit hierarchical structure is already established that is augmenting the miscommunication. Moreover, miscommunication may be a deliberate strategy on the part of team members to avoid confrontation, rather than an outcome of a cultural gap. In such situations, the German team mate or the boss was often found to be implicating the Indian employees to be in need of constant micro-management. On the other hand, the Indians were upset because their German colleagues and bosses were micro-managing them rather than letting them do the work in their own way.

Said Neel Madhav,

”It is difficult to work if every step of your is under constant surveillance. However, I do not have much say in this case...the system is such....they (German bosses and co-workers) think that we will upset the project if not looked after.”

This kind of conflict clearly stems from the asymmetry that is inherent in a team of this type. Since the headquarters lie outside of India, it is expected that the Indians, irrespective of their ranks would only follow the rules laid by the German counterparts and not bring their own opinions to the table. Interestingly, one of the Indian team members blamed even this conflict on an Indian cultural deficiency as he opined that Indians are taught to accept everything which is often taken for granted by colleagues from other countries as their weakness.

Lastly, many respondents also mentioned that learning the local language and interacting at informal levels might help bridge miscommunications, others also shared that knowing German and learning to play by the local rules of the game do not necessarily guarantee success, for there are mechanisms of exclusion from informal networks of information that operate against 'outsiders'.

In this light, work space experiences for Indian guest workers in Germany are informed to a significant extent by their ethnic specificity. In other words, the construction of cultural difference in the workplace is that of ethnic discrimination in actual terms, as Indian guest workers constitute a part of cheap international labour for multinational organizations. As a result, their work conditions are structured in ways that reinforce the disadvantage already posed within the financescape - presented as an inner crisis of the ethnoscape. In short, work space experiences for Indian guest workers in Germany are conditioned by their ethnic denominator that places them at a lower scale than their co-workers in the host society. The result is a differential level of exclusion and inclusion i.e. the financescape rewards Indian guest workers in Germany with a higher salary and benefits for the same reason that it exploits them for being cheap labour outsourced from the 'east'.

Conclusion

Therefore, the salient points of the paper can be summarized in the following points. Firstly, the ethnoscape-financescape interface shaping the work space experiences for Indian guest workers in Germany is dominated by the logic of the financescape covered by the veil of ethnoscape. In other words, it is the structural demand of corporate capitalism guided and monitored by the framework of economic liberalization that enforces cultural stereotypes on the perception of Indian guest workers by their German counterparts for sustenance and proliferation. Secondly, Indian guest workers, at the functional level, are definitely subject to Indian labour laws irrespective of what the HR teams of the companies claim officially. This makes them work for longer hours, thereby reinforcing the cultural stereotypes and also affects their professional relationships with

their German co-workers. Thirdly, differential value coding of the Indian guest workers acts as a restraining factor for the former to interact with their German colleagues and bosses, especially with reference to the boundaries of 'social' interaction in 'professional' spaces. Here, the issue of personal space vs. public space becomes crucial. German ways of behaviour are well known to be characterized by strict thresholds of the private and the public. They maintain this distinction with diligence and often feel visibly annoyed or at least uncomfortable with any potential blurring of the threshold. This also is linked to the epistemology of the social structure which is essentially individualistic for Germany and collective for India. India largely being a collective society, the pattern of social interaction does not demarcate the private and the public with as much precision as is the case in Germany. As a result, the outcome is a series of negotiations and adaptations on the part of the Indian guest workers in Germany before they learn to stop asking their German colleagues about their families and concomitant issues in the workplace. Thus, the cultural stereotype between the 'east' and the 'west', together with a work structure that manipulates the former for desperately covering up its own shortcomings, characterizes the ethnoscape-financescape interface for Indian guest workers in Germany.

Needless to say, the interface often turns into a binary creating a dichotomous space for the Indian white collar workers to receive the benefits of economic globalization but not being able to enjoy the fruits of their labour in the host society. In other words, between the binary opposites of the universal principle of capital defining the financescape and ethnic particularities epitomized in the ethnoscape, Indian guest workers in Germany are subject to differential levels of social exclusion in which they are monetarily compensated for their labour contribution at the work space but socially excluded from holistic participation and interaction with their German co-workers.

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