

Effects of Beliefs in Indian Philosophy: Paternalism and Citizenship Behaviors

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Abstract. *We investigate the effects of beliefs in Indian philosophy (karma, atma, and moksha) on paternalism and citizenship behaviors. First, we studied the relationship between self-reported beliefs in Indian philosophy and sexism by studying a group of 257 students in a management institute. Second, we studied the relationship between self-reported beliefs in Indian philosophy and supervisor reported organizational citizenship behavior by studying a group of 205 leader-follower pairs from two large Indian organizations. We found that individuals who had a strong belief in Indian philosophy displayed attitudes of benevolent sexism (specifically paternalism) towards women and some citizenship behaviors.*

As managers are expected to manage in a global economy, the relevance of local customs and cultural traditions on individual behavior become increasingly relevant. The impact of culture on organizational behavior in India is especially interesting because Indian industrial organizations represent a confluence of Western technology and Indian culture (Sinha, 2007). According to Sinha (2008), culture is similar to the air around us even though we cannot see it, it is present everywhere and is critical to our survival.

When one looks at the cultural factors influencing organizational behavior in India, one finds that there are two divergent views. One view focuses on the idealized values as they are in the Indian religious texts like the Upanishads and the Gita (Krishnan, 2001). The other view is that, in order to study the cultural influence on Indian leadership, one must study the current social environment in India as it is. This includes all the historical influences and political realities, which have made India what it is today (Sinha, 1997). In this paper, we study the impact of beliefs in the tenets of Indian philosophy on two important variables: a person's attitudes towards women and his or her behaviors in an organizational context.

THE INDIAN WELTANSCHAUUNG

The Indian worldview is characterized by three fundamental beliefs, which are common to all the six systems of Indian philosophy (Dasgupta, 1922/1991, p. 71; Prabhavananda, 1960, p. 201). First, the belief in the karma theory i.e., all actions that are done have the power to ordain for their doers joy or sorrow in the future depending on whether the action is good or bad. Often, individuals may be required to take birth in another body to experience fully the joy or suffering that is due to them because of their past actions. The second belief is in the existence of a permanent entity, the soul (atma), which is our true unknown nature, pure and untouched by the impurities of our ordinary life. The third belief is about the doctrine of salvation (mukti). Since actions lead us through this endless cycle of birth and death, if we could be free of all such emotions or desires that lead us to action, there

would be no fuel (in the form of joys or sorrows to be experienced) to propel us into another birth and we would be free of this eternal cycle.

The Doctrine of Karma

The doctrine of karma is perhaps the most widely known and misunderstood aspect of the Indian weltanschauung (Mahadevan, 1958) and is equivalent to the belief in a just world (Connors & Heaven, 1990; Hafer & Begue, 2005) which states that individuals get what they deserve (Connors & Heaven, 1990). Karma extends the concept of justice to other worlds and other births, thereby implying that all good and bad deeds of all previous lives are accounted for cumulatively. Accordingly, in every life one reaps what one has sown in one's previous lives (Radhakrishnan, 1926). Similar to the belief in a just world, belief in karma reaffirms one's faith in natural justice and makes every person responsible for his or her own well-being and suffering. Thus, positive deeds are believed to lead to good outcomes, while tragic happenings are explained as an outcome of negative deeds done in the past (Agrawal & Dalal, 1993; Dalal & Pande, 1988).

Studies have shown that the belief in karma is highly correlated with belief in God and belief in a just world (Agrawal & Dalal, 1993) and it is an enabler for psychological recovery of accident victims (Dalal & Pande, 1988). Kejriwal and Krishnan (2004) also found that the belief in karma enhanced transformational leadership.

The metaphysical explanation of the law of karma is derived from the concept of spiritual law (satya) and law in its working process in the cosmos (rita). Conformity to this law leads to material and spiritual progress, while its violation is punished with a series of transmigrations. Actions which are motivated by a sense of personal individuality or which are incongruous with the universal order create disequilibrium in the cosmos, which is then set right by inflicting the effect of action upon the doer of it. This metaphysical, ethical, and psychological regulative force is called karma (Krishnananda, 1994).

Moksha or Self-Realization as the Supreme Goal

The law of karma is not a blind mechanical framework in which man is trapped for eternity. Freedom from the cycle of karma is possible and is the ultimate goal and destiny of every being (Mahadevan, 1958). This freedom from the cycle of birth and death is termed as moksha or liberation. It results when the bonds of ignorance have been broken and is a state, which is free from all imperfections and limitations (Prabhavananda, 1960).

The Potential Divinity of Every Being (Atma)

In the Rig-Veda, the soul or self is denoted by the word atma (Ghanananda, 1958). The soul is the eternal subject, which is free from all impurities like sin, old age, death, grief, hunger, and thirst. The soul is complete and hence, it is free from all forms of desires (Radhakrishnan, 1940).

For an individual who believes in these basic tenets of Indian philosophy, there arises a sense of connectedness with all beings. This sense of connectedness is due to two reasons. First, the awareness of the inherent divinity of every being makes one rise above petty differences of appearance and social status and creates a sense of oneness or relatedness with others. Second, a strong belief in the law of karma leads to the realization that each of us is present in one's current circumstances due to some past obligation. Hence, our temporal relationships are not random but systematically arranged by a natural force to enable us to repay our obligations or to enable others to do so based on a long history of past relationships. Because of this sense of connectedness, the individual who strongly believes in Indian philosophy is likely to manifest attitudes and behaviors that display this sense of oneness with

his or her surroundings. In this paper, we investigate two manifestations of the sense of oneness benevolent sexism and citizenship behaviors.

PATERNALISM MANIFESTED AS BENEVOLENT SEXISM

In an increasingly diverse workforce an individual's attitude towards women is a key aspect of organizational behavior. The most commonly observed attitude towards women is sexism which is often assumed to be visible in the form of overt or covert hostility toward women in the form of discrimination, sexual harassment, and negative stereotypes. Glick and Fiske (1996) suggested that hostile sexism may not be the only form of prejudice against women. They have shown that attitudes towards women reflect a certain ambivalence, in which both hostile and benevolent sexism may coexist in the same individual. They define benevolent sexism as "a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver) and also tend to elicit behaviors typically characterized as prosocial (e.g., helping) or intimacy-seeking (e.g., self-disclosure)" (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 491).

Benevolent sexism is further made up of three factors -- paternalism, gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy. Paternalism suggests that males ought to protect and provide for females; gender differentiation restricts females to traditionally sanctioned gender roles; and heterosexual intimacy reflects a belief that heterosexual romantic relationships are essential to a happy life (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick & Fiske, 2002). The attitude of benevolent sexism idealizes women "as pure creatures who ought to be protected, supported, and adored and whole love is necessary to make a man complete" (Glick & Fiske, 2001, p. 109). This attitude while seeming to be favorable to women, may simultaneously imply that women are weak and hence best suited for conventional gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 2001). In other words, it may surreptitiously support individuals' attitudes of hostile sexism in the garb of apparent benevolence.

In the Indian context, paternalism also refers to the relationship between a father figure and a large joint family where the father figure goes beyond merely professional relationships and is concerned about all aspects of an individual's life. This kind of paternalism pervades Indian organizations (Guptan, 1988). The Karta (father-figure) experience is among the strongest socializing experiences of the Indian child which symbolizes the "nurturing, caring, dependable, sacrificing, yet demanding, authoritative, and strict dimensions of the father figure" (Singh & Bhandarkar, 1988, p. 6). According to Sinha (1997) nurturance and paternalism in the leader and dependency and deference in the subordinates are characteristic of Indian culture. Benevolent sexism in the Indian context is one of the manifestations of Indians' inherent preference for paternalistic relationships.

Individuals who believe in the law of karma consider it their duty to live up to the obligations of others in whatever situation they find themselves. In the context of male-female relationships, this belief may take the form of males being helpful or supportive towards females. The feeling of oneness or connectedness is when one individual completely identifies with another and treats the other as he would treat himself. It is likely that such an attitude may take the form of benevolent sexism in the context of male-female relationships.

Hypothesis 1. An individual's belief in Indian philosophy will lead to an attitude of benevolent sexism towards women.

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

In an organizational context, there are a number of prosocial behaviors like helping co-workers with a job related problem, accepting orders without a fuss, tolerating temporary impositions without complaint, helping to keep the work area clean and uncluttered, making timely and constructive statements about the work unit or its head to outsiders, promoting a work climate that is tolerable and minimizes the distraction created by interpersonal conflict, and protecting and conserving organizational resources. All of these behaviors have been collectively referred to as “organizational citizenship behavior” (OCB; Bateman & Organ, 1983). Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990) identified five dimensions of organizational citizenship behavior as altruism, conscientiousness, courtesy, civic virtue, and sportsmanship. Studies have found that OCB is an outcome of transformational leadership mediated by trust in their leaders (Podsakoff et al., 1990) and leader-member exchange (Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005).

Individuals who strongly believe in the doctrine of karma, liberation, and the potential divinity of all beings experience a strong sense of relatedness with their work and their colleagues in the work environment. They believe that they are part of a particular team, department, or organization for a larger purpose i.e., to fulfill their past obligations. The only way one can achieve liberation is through the conscientious discharge of those past obligations. Hence, they strive to fulfill all their obligations towards their organization and their coworkers.

Hypothesis 2. An individual’s belief in Indian philosophy will lead to OCBs.

STUDY 1

This study investigated the relationship between beliefs in Indian philosophy and benevolent sexism. Data were collected from a group of 257 students completing a postgraduate program in business management. The sample consisted of 180 males and 63 females (14 respondents did not report their sex), of ages ranging from 22 years to 29 years (Median = 25 years).

Measures

Based on the three fundamental beliefs in Indian philosophy, Mulla and Krishnan (2006) developed a six-item scale. The first two items measure the belief in soul viz. “Irrespective of external tendencies, all beings are inherently divine” and “While my body is subject to birth and death, my soul is eternal.” The next three items measure the belief in the law of karma viz. “If I do good deeds, I will get good results either in this life or the next”, “It is possible to grow spiritually by performing one’s worldly duties selflessly,” and “Joys and sorrows experienced by me are a result of my actions in this life or earlier lives.” The last item measures the belief in salvation viz. “The goal of life is to be liberated from the cycle of birth and death.” The scale for beliefs in Indian philosophy has been found to be reliable in some earlier studies (Cronbach alpha = .72 & .70; Mulla & Krishnan, 2006; 2007). Beliefs in Indian philosophy were measured using a six point scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The students filled the beliefs in Indian philosophy scale (Mulla & Krishnan, 2006) as well as the ambivalent sexism inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1996) -- a 22-item scale having 11 items each measuring hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. In addition, the items in the benevolent sexism scale can be further identified with the three factors of protective paternalism, gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy. The ASI has been

administered in 19 nations to more than 15,000 participants (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Glick et al. 2000).

Results

The reliability of the scale for beliefs in Indian philosophy was found to be suitable (Cronbach alpha = .80). The reliability of the scale for benevolent sexism and hostile sexism were found to be adequate (Cronbach alphas = .56 and .77 respectively).

The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between the follower’s beliefs in Indian philosophy and sexism are reported in Table 1. The relationship between the students’ belief in Indian philosophy and benevolent sexism was tested using regression analysis. The results of the regression are shown in Table 2. As expected, the coefficient of sex is negative implying that males score higher on benevolent sexism as compared to females (males were coded as 1 and females were coded as 2). In addition, beliefs in Indian philosophy are positively related to the individual’s attitude of benevolent sexism even after controlling for the effects of hostile sexism, age, and gender. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations amongst Beliefs in Indian Philosophy and Sexism

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Belief in Indian Philosophy	3.57	1.07	(.80)			
2. Benevolent Sexism	2.97	.67	.21**	(.56)		
3. Hostile Sexism	2.79	.81	-.05	.15*	(.77)	
4. Age	25.24	1.23	.00	.07	.04	
5. Sex (male=1, female=2)	1.25	.43	.09	-.14*	-.35**	-.08

N varies from 238 to 257. **p*<.05, ***p*<.01.

Figures in brackets along the diagonal are Cronbach alphas.

Table 2
Summary of Regression Analysis: Impact of Belief in Indian Philosophy on Benevolent Sexism

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Benevolent sexism (<i>Adj. R</i> ² = .06. <i>F</i> = 5.41**)	Belief in Indian philosophy	.14	.04	.22**
	Hostile sexism	.09	.05	.11 [†]
	Age	.02	.03	.04
	Sex (male=1, female=2)	-.19	.10	-.12 [†]

N=257. [†]*p*<.10; ***p*<.01

In order to investigate the relationship between beliefs in Indian philosophy and benevolent sexism further, we broke up the dependent variable into its three constituents, viz. protective paternalism, gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy. Further, we investigated the impact of beliefs in Indian philosophy on each of the three components of benevolent sexism while controlling for hostile sexism and the other two components of benevolent sexism. We also did a regression analysis to study the impact of beliefs in Indian philosophy on hostile sexism while controlling for benevolent sexism. We found that beliefs in Indian philosophy were positively related to paternalism and gender differentiation but were not related hostile sexism and heterosexual intimacy. The results of these regressions are reported in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3

Summary of Regression Analysis: Impact of Belief in Indian Philosophy on Paternalism

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	B	SE B	β
Paternalism (Adj. R ² = .10. F = 5.83**)	Belief in Indian philosophy	.15	.06	.15*
	Hostile sexism	.15	.08	.12†
	Heterosexual intimacy	.04	.06	.04
	Gender differentiation	.04	.05	.05
	Age	.00	.05	.00
	Sex (male=1, female=2)	-.63	.16	-.27**

N=257. †p<.10; **p<.01

Table 4

Summary of Regression Analysis: Impact of Belief in Indian Philosophy on Gender differentiation

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	B	SE B	β
Gender differentiation (Adj. R ² = .10. F = 4.45**)	Belief in Indian philosophy	.13	.06	.12*
	Hostile sexism	-.03	.09	-.02
	Heterosexual intimacy	.13	.06	.12†
	Paternalism	.05	.07	.05
	Age	-.06	.05	-.06
	Sex (male=1, female=2)	.66	.18	.25**

N=257. †p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01

STUDY 2

In this study, we investigated the relationship between beliefs in Indian philosophy and organizational citizenship behaviors. Data were collected from 459 respondents from two organizations. Both the organizations were in the manufacturing industry related to the automotive sector and forming part of large diversified business houses and having annual turnovers of Rs. 8.3 billion and Rs. 115 billion respectively. The respondents consisted of 230 managers, 229 subordinates, yielding 205 unique leader-follower pairs. The sample consisted of 420 males and 33 females (6 undisclosed) of ages from 22 years to 61 years (Median = 39 years) and having work experience ranging from 8 months to 45 years (Median = 16 years). The work experience of the respondents with their current organization ranged from 2 months to 40 years (Median = 12 years).

Measures

We measured the followers’ beliefs in Indian philosophy using the six-item scale developed by Mulla and Krishnan (2006). Beliefs in Indian philosophy were measured using a five point scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). We measured OCBs using a 24 item scale developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990) which measures the five dimensions of OCB, i.e., altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue. Only leaders were administered this scale and they reported on their followers’ OCBs.

Results

The reliability of the scale for beliefs in Indian philosophy was found to be suitable (Cronbach alpha = .69). The Cronbach alphas of scales for measuring the dimensions of OCB viz. civic virtue, sportsmanship, altruism, conscientiousness, and courtesy were .53, .66, .78, .71, and .66 respectively.

The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between the follower’s beliefs in Indian philosophy and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB) are reported in Table 5. The relationship between followers’ self-reported belief in Indian philosophy and leader-reported OCBs for the follower was tested using regression analysis with each of the dimensions of OCB as dependent variables and belief in Indian philosophy as the independent variable. The results of the regressions, which are shown in Table 6, suggest that individuals who have a strong belief in Indian philosophy are likely to display high amounts of sportsmanship and courtesy in their organizations. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is partly supported.

Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations amongst Beliefs in Indian Philosophy, and Dimensions of Organizational Citizenship Behavior

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Belief in Indian Philosophy	2.74	.67	(.69)					
2. Civic virtue	2.68	.62	.01	(.53)				
3. Sportsmanship	2.88	.68	.13 [†]	.17**	(.66)			
4. Altruism	2.83	.65	.08	.36**	.29**	(.78)		
5. Conscientiousness	3.26	.58	.04	.32**	.29**	.53**	(.71)	
6. Courtesy	2.82	.65	.16*	.49**	.36**	.57**	.51**	(.66)

N varies from 201 to 203. †*p*<.10, **p*<.05, ***p*<.01.

Figures in brackets along the diagonal are Cronbach alphas.

Table 6

Summary of Regression Analysis: Impact of Follower’s Belief in Indian Philosophy on Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCB).

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Sportsmanship (<i>Adj. R</i> ² = .01. <i>F</i> = 3.48 [†])	Belief in Indian philosophy _{follower}	.13	.07	.13 [†]
Courtesy (<i>Adj. R</i> ² = .02. <i>F</i> = 5.50*)	Belief in Indian philosophy _{follower}	.16	.06	.14*

N=201. †*p*<.10; **p*<.05.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The core elements of Indian philosophy include a belief in the law of karma, freedom from the cycle of birth and death as the supreme goal of existence, and divinity of all beings. These beliefs deeply pervade the consciousness of Indians and affect their attitudes towards others and their behavior in the workplace. This is evident in the high scores on the beliefs of Indian philosophy scale obtained in our study. The average scores on beliefs in Indian philosophy of the samples in Study 1 and Study 2 were 71% and 68% of their maximum values respectively and the skew of the samples in Study 1 and Study 2 was -.87 and -.60 respectively indicating that the bulk of the values (including the median) lie to the right of the mean. In other words, this means that despite various cultural and economic influences, students and executives in India widely believe in aspects of Indian philosophy such as *karma*, *atma*, and *moksha*.

In this study, we investigated the impact of beliefs in Indian philosophy on an individual's attitudes toward women and an individual's citizenship behavior in the workplace. We found support for both the hypotheses.

We found that individuals who had a strong belief in the elements of Indian philosophy also had strong attitudes of benevolent sexism -- specifically paternalism and gender differentiation. According to the *Global Gender Gap Report 2010* (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2010), India is ranked 112 out of 134 countries. Even though India is ranked low on economic participation and opportunity (rank 128), educational attainment (rank 120), and health and survival (rank 132); India's rank on political empowerment of women is rather good (rank 23). This could be one manifestation of the high prevalence of benevolent sexism in India.

Individuals who had a strong belief in Indian philosophy were also good citizens at the workplace. They were more likely to tolerate less than uncomfortable conditions at the workplace without complaining and were more likely to be proactive in preventing work-related problems with others.

This study is a preliminary effort to look at two outcomes of beliefs in the basic tenets of Indian philosophy. We find here that beliefs in Indian philosophy may lead to benevolent sexism and citizenship behaviors. It is too soon to say whether these outcomes are desirable from an individual's and an organization's point of view or not. As the workplace becomes increasingly multicultural, it is important for us to study the effects of one's cultural beliefs on individual and organizational behavior. Further studies must not only look at other effects of beliefs in Indian philosophy, they must also investigate the effects of diverse individuals having different beliefs working in teams.

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