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From Communal Duties to Individual Rights:
The Migration of Indian Social Workers to England

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From Communal Duties to Individual Rights: The Migration of Indian Social Workers to England

Abstract

The demand for social workers in England has been outstripping supply for more than a decade. As a result, social work continues to be on the UK Shortage Occupation List, ensuring the migration of social workers will continue. While several studies have examined the experiences of migrating social workers, these studies largely neglected the impact culture plays in this transition. This article will focus on the experiences of social workers who were trained in India and migrated to England. It is part of a much larger study that used a mixed method approach to explore the migration to England of social workers from eight different countries. Indian social workers highlighted the significant differences between the individualistic character of English culture and the much more collectivist Indian culture. This difference shaped a range of attitudes towards the family and parenting, the distinctions between what is 'public' or 'communal' and what is 'private'. Other differences raised were regarding communication resulting from the more hierarchical tendencies of Indian society. In the final section, implications for practice are discussed and recommendations are made for the induction required to help future migrating social workers make a smoother transition.

Teaser Text

- This article focuses on the experiences of Indian social workers who migrated to England, and on the impact of culture on their migration.
- Participants highlighted the significant differences between the individualistic English culture and the much more collectivist Indian culture. This difference shaped a range of attitudes towards the family and parenting, the distinctions between what is 'public' or 'communal' and what is 'private'.
- Other differences raised were regarding communication resulting from the more hierarchical tendencies of Indian society and culture.
- The implications for practice are discussed in the final section and an induction programme to help future migrating social workers make a smoother transition is recommended.

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Introduction

The social care sector in England has been experiencing an ongoing shortage of care professionals. In some countries, including England, "recruitment of internationally qualified social workers has…become an important strategy to meet staffing demands and to fill shortages" (Pullen-Sansfaçon *et al.,* 2012, p.1032). About 10 percent of the total number of social workers registered to practice in the UK completed their qualifications abroad (Hussein et al, 2010). England's demand for social workers has created opportunities for transnational social workers with the "assumption that the principles, values and theoretical approaches [underpinning] social work are sufficiently common…" (Bartley and Beddoe, 2018, p.2) to 'ease' these migrants into their new environments without difficulty. For over 10 years, social workers have remained on England's 'shortage occupation' list, with no apparent change envisaged. Bartley and Beddoe (2018) describe Social Work as "an increasingly transnationally mobile profession" (p.2); highlighting some challenges that migrant social workers have to navigate personally and professionally, including "the complexity of [a] new socio-political and cultural environment" (ibid.). While scholars such as Bartley and Beddoe (2018) have pointed out some potential challenges of migration, studies that explored the migration experiences of social workers did not pay close attention to culture and, more particularly, to the ways the culture social workers internalise in their countries of origin shape their interactions within the country they migrated to. This article will help to close this gap by exploring the experiences of Indian social workers who migrated to England.

Context:

Indian Culture and Social Work

India is the second most populous country in the world, with approximately 1.39 billion people, representing 17.7% of the world population (Worldometer, 2021). Europe came to India through trade and for almost 200 years India was under British rule, resulting in revolutionary changes in its social, political, and economic life. Indian military troops helped the British to control their empire and played a key role up to the 20th century (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2006). On August 15, 1947, Britain withdrew from India leaving two separate independent nations – India (largely Hindu) and Pakistan (mainly Muslim).

While great diversity exists in India, there are also major commonalities shared by our participants. Some of these cultural preferences create tension with the English culture: India's caste system makes it one of the most hierarchical societies worldwide, and according to Hofstede (2021) this hierarchy is significantly more accepted and embedded compared with England. Also, in comparison with England, India is much more community oriented. A third major difference between the two countries according to Hofstede (2021) is regarding 'indulgence' defined as the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses. India scores very low on this scale compared to England meaning that Indian culture emphasises restraint much more.

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Gandhian Philosophy

Gandhian Philosophy in Indian social work emanated from the religious and social ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and is based on the "twin cardinal principles of…truth and nonviolence" (Murphy, 1991, p.23); where "nonviolence [a.k.a. love] is regarded as the highest law of humankind" (ibid.). Gandhi believed in "self-sacrifice, *Satyagraha* [insistence on truth]...*"* (p.307). Known to abhor India's caste system, Gandhi acknowledged that to thrive, society needs all types of labor, street sweeper through to prime minister, and only equality of wages will 'free' men to choose whatever work they desired or were fitted for. Only then will men be truly 'equal' (Nikam, 1954). Indian social work practice therefore evolved as an act of free, selfless service based on Gandhi's social-activist ~~Gandhi's~~ philosophy - a (simple) life dedicated to serving humanity. *Gandhian philosophy* became an integral part of the Indian social work curriculum and is still very relevant to today's local practice.

Professional Social Work in India

~~1936 was the year~~ ~~t~~The~~at~~ ~~"~~professionalization of social work in India began~~"~~ in 1936 (Nadkarni and Joseph, 2014, p.71)~~. W~~ with ~~the help of American missionary Clifford Manshardt, social work entered India as~~ a diploma course in the newly established Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work, Mumbai, (present-day Tata Institute of Social Sciences, TISS). American social work had a heavy influence on social work practice in post-colonial India. Today, although more contextually adjusted to India and local practices, students in India are taught using the United States' National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) code of ethics. When "professional social work was 'imported' to India from the West" (Nadkarni and Joseph, 2014, p.72), like in other nations, the profession was evolving from voluntary and charitable work rooted in philanthropy led by certain Indian social reformists; a culture of philanthropy as old as the nation's 2000-year history (Kamat 2013, pp.5-6) that "existed in the form of almsgiving and charity to the poor and needy, creation of shelters and kitchens, and institutions for orphans and elderly people, the destitute, and beggars" (Nadkarni and Joseph, 2014, p.72).

By 1936, Christian missionaries who accompanied the British colonial masters had started important work with native Indians, especially those of the lowest castes. However, it was during post-independence India that the "herculean task to address the multiple dire needs of people" (Soundari, 2018, p.25) began in earnest. Soundari (2018) noted that only in the last eight decades of freedom did the "wellbeing of the poor and less privileged" (p.25) begin to take professional centre-stage. Nadkarni and Joseph (2014) also recorded a "very significant paradigm shift" (p.74) in Indian social work education influenced by the 1995 World Summit on Social Development, when social development issues became the focus for the UN. Accordingly, the Indian curriculum moved to a much greater focus on community development projects in deprived areas. This was reflected in the work experiences of our research participants before emigrating.

Theoretical Framework

Most of our participants emigrated from the southwestern Malabar coast of India (particularly from Kerala) and were strongly connected by social capital (Massey et al., 1993; Percot, 2012). Massey et al. further described such 'connection' or network as "sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-

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migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin… lower[ing] the costs and risks of movement and increase[ing] the expected net returns to migration" (1993, p. 448). Our research participants have drawn heavily on the support, advice and guidance provided by their England-based professional network. India's 'community-oriented' culture meant that most participants migrated also because there was already a group of trusted forerunners, leading to "chain migration" (Arango, 2018, p.292).

Bourdieu's Habitus

~~Garrett (2018), Q~~quoting Pierre Bourdieu, Garrett (2018), wrote: "Habitus is 'society written into the body': the body 'does not memorize the past, it *enacts* the past, bringing it back to life'" (pp.126-127). Understanding our body, therefore, helps us to understand the 'life-games' and social dilemmas that we find ourselves in; including the subtleties associated with class and gender. Bourdieu's *habitus*, which originally explained the lack of class mobility in the French school system, is the 'flair' for what has been culturally developed in us through exposure. He noted that having 'the feel' for a particular activity/thing is not a *natural* bent however, but culturally learned over time. Garrett (2018) also notes in this regard:

> "we are not automatons or mindless vehicles of our governing habitus. Rather, habitus acts as a very loose set of guidelines permitting us to strategize, adapt, improvise…to situations as they arise" (p.128).

~~Therefore, the~~ The question we ask, therefore, is how has the national *habitus* Indian migrant social workers internalized while growing up and studying in India shaped how they perceive, interpret, and respond to the English culture, including the professional culture, they encounter once they migrate?

Methodology

Data collection employed a mixed-method design, incorporating an online survey completed by 41 contributors, a focus group with 10 participants, and 10 individual, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 90 minutes each. All participants are Indian social workers aged over 21 who qualified in India before migrating to England, and in social work practice until no later than a year before the research commenced. We 'hand-picked' (purposive sampling) participants from an existing migrant network, used 'referrals' (snowball sampling) from participants to balance out the gender ratio and got some participants through the online survey (voluntary response sampling). Invitations, which included the Participant Information Sheet, were sent to participants directly or through the initial referral sources. The focus group was enabled at the migrant network's annual general meeting. Key demographical data about those responding to the questionnaire is presented in table 1. Most of our participants are members of a professional network originating from Kerala. Over 95% of the membership of this network are Christians. As table 1 shows, most of our participants arrived more than 10 years ago and more than 80% of them were male. Interestingly, most of the male members are married to female nurses and arrived based on their wives' work visa (Percot, 2012).

Total number of participants	41
Female %	17.1

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Years in the UK (Mean) %	
• Under 1 year	9.8
• 1-5 years	0.0
• Over 5 years	24.4
• Over 10 years	65.9
Areas of Practice %	
• Children and families	22.2
• Adult services	55.6
• Mental Health	11.1
• People with disabilities	5.6
• Other	5.6

The main qualitative data set focused on issues around personal and professional integration into the English culture and adjustments made. The first interview and focus group were conducted face-to-face. Following the outbreak of CoronaVirus, nine interviews were conducted online, between May and June 2020. To gain additional insight into the current social work education and practice in India, we conducted an online interview with a social work academic teaching in one of Kerala's leading institutions of higher learning. The qualitative data were scrutinized using thematic analysis and themes focused onrelated to cultural issues were closely explored and will be at the centre of this article.

It is noteworthy that we and our research participants are migrants from minority ethnic backgrounds. Also, we are all bound by the same professional ethics and value base. We felt that these gave us instant affinity with the participants; we were seen as 'safe', 'insiders' and this gave us 'access'. Moreover, having received most of our initial education abroad, we could relate to most of the frustrations and/or limitations expressed by our participants. The research received approval from XXX University's ethics committee. All participants gave their informed consent to participate and for their data to be analysed and presented. To protect anonymity, all identifying information have been removed.

Findings and Discussion

The Individual, the Family and Wider Society

We now present and discuss our findings. While India is the second most populous country in the world and comprised of many different ethnic and religious groups, it has a collectivist tendency as a whole, certainly compared to England in which the individual plays a much stronger role, (Hofstede, 2021; Rakesh and Sinha Deb, 2013; Ramamoorthy et al., 2007). As part of that difference, the characteristics, values, rights, responsibilities and almost every other aspect of family life, as the migrant Indian social worker knew it, was challenged in their new English environment. One participant remarked: "It's totally different, I can't even compare. I needed to learn what's right and wrong here and based on that I have to practice".

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Below are some of the key issues our participants highlighted as related to these differences.

Defining the Family and its Values

Considering the diversity of cultures and religions in India, generalizations are difficult. However, and despite the changes Indian families go through and the differences between rural and urban families (Jacob and Chattopadhyay, 2016), across many sociological studies, “Indian families are considered classically as large, patriarchal, collectivistic, joint families, harbouring three or more generations vertically and kith and kin horizontally” (Rakesh and Sinha Deb, 2013, p. 300). This is opposed to what a focus group participant described as “a pretty narrow definition of family” for the English. For the Indian, the ‘ideal family’ includes both the nuclear and extended family structures. Medora (2007) described the desirable joint/extended Indian family:

> “A joint family includes elderly parents and their children’s families often living under one roof. It includes kinsmen of two or three generations, including uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, and grandparents living together in the same household. The joint family is generally composed of a number of family units living in separate rooms of the same house. These members eat the food cooked at one hearth, share a common income, share common property, are related to one another through kinship ties, and worship the same idols. The family supports and takes care of the elderly, widows, never-married adults, and the disabled; assists during periods of unemployment; and provides security and a sense of support and togetherness” (p.173).

In sharp contrast, the average English family is a nuclear family that includes a couple and their children. According to Jenkins and Pereira (2009: 5), due to the relaxation of societal attitudes in Britain in recent decades,

> “It is no longer seen as unusual to be involved in a ‘complicated’ family structure. Families are no longer just made up of married parents living with their children. Although seven in ten households are still headed up by married couples, this proportion has been declining… Families are now a mix of cohabiting parents, stepfamilies, single-parent families, those living apart…and civil partnerships, as well as the traditional nuclear family”, (Jenkins and Pereira, 2009: 5).

Whatever the structure, in predominantly individualistic English culture, the small family unit is preferred. Participants also highlighted related differences in ‘language’ use: for example, in “collectivistic” India, “we are all connected”, everything is “we” (not ‘me’ or ‘I’); “there is no ‘I’ in family” vs. “individualistic” England where “I” rules; “I” decides, and in the process “I sometimes forgets its responsibilities” which are rarely mentioned. Whereas in England, one’s individual rights take centre stage, in India, one’s responsibilities towards their family and community take that place. One participant shared her surprise, when she realised that so many of her colleagues eat on their own. Here is how she responded:

> When I started working in this local authority, I never ate on my own… Before anything, I would ask: 'have you had your lunch? Have you brought anything for lunch? Do you plan to go out to get anything?' I had a tagline that ‘if you sit

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> at a desk with [me], she will ask you about your life. If not, she will share her lunch…' The lads sitting across (kind of joked) if you're sitting with [me], 'you will have Indian lunch today...' How can you eat when your neighbour is sitting hungry? Isn't that a kind of a responsibility on you to sort of look after your next-door neighbour type of thing?

This is a good example of the adaptability and flexibility of our habitus. Our participant realised her communal approach was not the common approach in her workplace, but instead of conforming to the new culture, she decided to challenge it and maintain the approach she brought from her home country. Our participants thought the English culture is "far more liberal". One participant was convinced that the Indian family "survives because of kinship, the shared or communal caring role" where English "families are not complete, they are dissolving [because there are] no mutual responsibilities". The Indian family places "responsibility over rights" whereas the opposite is true in England, probably also due to the rights-based social security system in England which somewhat reduces the need to lean on one's family. In India, parents' caring role/responsibility is reciprocated in old age by their children; in England, care responsibility for older/vulnerable adults rests with the State. Another participant suggested that in England, any discussion about 'responsibilities' and 'values', which originate in religion, is replaced by a 'rational' and secular discussion about rights.

'Sanctity' of Marriage

Despite an increase in 'cohabitation' and 42% of English marriages ending in divorce (Martin 2016), the institution of marriage is still dominant and highly valued (Cultural Atlas, 2020):

> *"[English] people remain committed and dedicated to partnership. Emphasis is placed on a couple's intimate love for one another, rather than the social expectations of a marriage contract. The average…couple will be in a relationship for multiple years and live together before getting married"* (ibid.).

In comparison, India has one of the lowest rates of divorce globally and marriage is still a universal norm (Dommaraju, 2016; Jacob and Chattopadhyay, 2016). Medora (2007) writes: "Divorce was not even a remote possibility or …thought of until recent times in India; there is a cultural, religious, and social stigma associated with divorce" (p.184). And while things are also changing in India, less than one in every thousand marriages ends up in divorce (Jacob and Chattopadhyay, 2016)

A divorced research participant shared how her mother stopped her from attending a major family event because "she was embarrassed that she'd have to tell people that her daughter is divorced [yet] wearing nice clothes, looking happy. They expect me to sit and cry". Corroborating research participants' views, Medora writes that Indians believe that marriage is a "sacred and sacramental union" (2007, p.181) and, if need be, parents and/or the extended family will 'source' one for their adult children (who cannot find a partner by themselves). Marriage is essentially between two 'families', **not** just two individuals (Medora, 2007).

Research participants also described differences in terminologies - "Husband" or "wife", "Spouse" or "parents" (India) vs. "Partner" or "My mom's partner but not my dad" (England). Indian families will do whatever is necessary to get the 'right' spouse

for their children, including consulting astrologers and placing matrimonial adverts "in major national and international newspapers that are likely to attract wide readership" (Medora, 2007, p.182). However, "many modern youths want to break away from the custom of having their marriages arranged" (2007, p.183). An interviewee added: "[It may be] helpful to know that a major reason for rural debt in India is the expenses incurred when daughters get married and when someone dies in the family! They have to invite the entire village for a meal on both occasions and the debt is often inherited by future generations!"

Another aspect of the 'sanctity' of marriage in Indian society is the very negative light in which stepchildren are viewed compared to England. One participant explained that a "stepchild is 'taboo', a very dangerous thing" in India, and is likely to tarnish the family's reputation. Whereas "stepchildren are accepted as part of the family and are very welcome" in England.

Our participants also shared their knowledge of family life in India, where children live at home free of charge until they marry and have their own children if they so desire. English parents in comparison "stress over their 16/18-year-old still at home, not going out, not paying rent". Clearly there are major differences between these two cultures in their relation to the family.

Discipline and punishment

A research participant's failure to spot a safeguarding risk during an assessment, was a cause for concern for his manager. This participant did not see 'anything wrong' with corporal punishment of a child. This was a good example of maintaining a perspective rooted in the habitus internalised in the participant's home country and not being aware that it stands in contrast to local perspectives. In India, despite legislation from the last decade forbidding corporal punishment in schools, it is still a very common practice. A UNICEF study found that among children aged 8, over nine in ten children in India reported witnessing a teacher administering corporal punishment in the last week (Ogando, Portela and Pells 2015). Another focus group participant wondered how this cultural difference may impact practice; especially with Asian parents who, out of ignorance, think it is "okay to beat their kids in this country". A survey contributor admitted: "…my society does not accept State's interference in family life and corporal punishment is very common".

Privacy-Rules and Space Perceptions

One central aspect of the different relations between the individual, the family and wider society are the boundaries formed between those. An understanding of the English 'privacy rules' and the "obsession with privacy" (Fox, 2014, p.18) may help to throw some additional light on the negative attitude of the English to anybody who 'invades' that privacy, as experienced by Indian migrant social workers who, for example, needed to conduct home visits. Fox (2014) describes that a disproportionate number of English 'social rules' have to do with safeguarding their privacy: "we are taught to mind our own business, not to pry, to keep ourselves to ourselves, and never wash our dirty linen in public" (Fox 2014, p.18). These 'negative politeness' rules make the English intolerant of any uninvited intrusion.

But whereas the English is identified with the saying 'my house is my castle' and the English code of polite behaviour requires never turning up at your friend's house

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without pre-arranging it, Indian politeness emphasise hospitality. Baldridge (2001) describes the values reinforced (usually by the elders) in India's extended family structure: "…[we were] taught that every visitor to our home should be fed.…Even if you have nothing, offer them water." (p.1519). When the speaker Baldridge cited left a "salesman…on the porch for a few minutes" (ibid.), she was scolded by her grandmother. In England, we leave uninvited/cold callers in no doubt as to what we thought of/about them (assuming we opened the door to them at all).

In India, another participant explained, there is no expectation that [guests] *"contribute to food, drink, or snacks, unless it was pre-arranged. It is unthinkable to invite people and ask them to pay for their own drinks, like at English birthday parties".* And although culture, class/social background play a part, Indians generally prefer to socialise at home, as opposed to the English's preference for public places; plus, "there's greater acceptance for people to 'casually' drop by, without prior arrangement/invitation".

Regardless, research participants' views amply highlight a context that is indigenous to the English social worker, but which required a lot of adjustments on the side of the Indian social worker. Serving in the English 'welfare state' generally takes them out of their 'comfort zone' and, ideally, would require a process of re-learning and adaptation from the concept of *charity/respect for all* to England's *welfare/rights-based* social work. Valentine (1996) wrote that:

> *"cultures exhibit varying degrees of interactional sociolinguistic [and] studies show that a difference in pragmatic conventions such as politeness can lead to breakdown in intercultural and interethnic communication and [lead] to cross-cultural conflict"* (p.281).

Valentine's claim perhaps explains why an interviewee would find it "traumatic" that her manager suggested that a service user might be lying about needing "emergency fund" to tide them over the weekend. This concept of "lying" to get welfare money was "incredible" to this Indian migrant who saw things from a different viewpoint, where lying would endanger one's honour which, in a community-oriented society, would be highly risky and therefore less conceivable.

The 'Indian Credit Check'

Where the English would go to lengths to safeguard their privacy, the 'Indian credit check' is how an interviewee described the extent to which Indians will go to solicit information, disregarding many of the English personal space/privacy rules. Whereas the English emphasise privacy, the extended Indian family structure allows "no clear defining boundaries between *mine* and *ours*" (Medora, 2007, p.181). To highlight the importance of the English 'privacy rule', Fox cited Paxman who wrote: "The importance of privacy informs the entire organization of the country, from the assumptions on which laws are based, to the buildings in which the English live." (2014, p.19). For the Indian however, "the need for psychological and physical space and privacy is not as important…The notion of privacy, the need to desire it, to value it, and the thought of intruding on another person's privacy is not understood by most Indian[s]", (Medora, 2007, p.181).

Research interviewee confessed that she would have returned to India years ago, but she developed health challenges and rather cherishes the privacy and "super

independence" the English health service affords her. In India, her health issue would be "a family drama, a community event". She explained:

> *"…there's a different sense of one's personal space, confidentiality is very different. So, if I was unwell…I would have my [medical] file with me and every auntie/uncle/their dog/cat visiting would want to see and give their opinion, whether they were medics or not. …Suddenly, as an 'unattached' woman, your family thinks they're responsible for you…[No], I value my [English] independence too much."*

Participants agreed that in India, one's personal space is much more limited than in England. People can "walk right up close, even touch you, without your consent" explained one participant. There is also the other 'space': "how much credit you are given…to handle your own affairs". This is gendered; "as a woman, it's okay for people to meddle, ask very poky questions", explained another participant. So, England gives this participant *"a lot more space…a sense of confidentiality. In the English office/professional environment, no one will ask for the gory details [of my life]; no need to endure the Indian Credit Check".* Contrary to a previous example, in which a participant decided to maintain her communal practices of sharing lunch with her colleagues - a part of her Indian habitus - this participant much preferred to remove herself from that habitus and adopt local practices offering her greater autonomy.

'Family Knowing'

Another key aspect of the different way in which boundaries are drawn, and which attracted the attention of our participants is what interviewees described as the very strong and rigid emphasis on separating 'personal' from the 'professional' in English social work. Indian social workers introduced us to the concept of "Family Knowing": practices which allow social workers, who often live and work in the same rural community as service users, to develop much more informal and outside-of-work relationships/rapport with them, with a view to better understand their situation. "Family Knowing" involves going to service users' homes and attending family events and celebrations even if outside of working hours. Whereas "here [England], it's only working relationship, during work hours..." Our interviewee was "really shocked" at the lack of "family knowing" and it caused him to "struggle" initially: "I want that connection with people…I want to settle with them very well." He also confessed that even now, 14 years on, he tries to encourage members of the team he now manages to offer just that little bit of extra support whenever they can: "I try to leave the real me outside the gate (at work), but it is still inside" he explained, referring to the tension between much stricter professional boundaries accepted in England and the looser version he was familiar with in India. The emphasis on strict boundaries separating the professional from the personal in English social work is strongly linked to its modern and 'scientific' attempt to ensure 'objectivity', and the fear that developing closer relations with service users will obscure professional judgment. It is potentially also connected to the profession's middle class and colonial heritage where 'us' – the middle class (i.e., charity worker, social worker or someone taking part in the colonial enterprise) and 'them' had to be sharply separated (Wing Sue, 2016). Other possible influences relate to the "risk society" and the public's growing awareness of risks, some of which are caused by professionals (Beck, 1992).

The Social Worker as a Public Servant and the State

Adapting to the very different social worker-service user relationship in England was another major challenge, as declared by several research participants. One focus group participant put it this way:

> *"(In India), you are going into the society as somebody who is kind, benevolent…the service user will accept you as someone who is genuinely coming to help them… So, there is an aura of being helpful and…selfless and empathetic and all that…There was a nice burden of expectation. Whereas here…We come to a welfare state – that in itself is a strange concept for us, you know, because it is surprising to think, why would somebody pay you (benefit) to look after your own child(ren)?...That's strange. Then from that…everything is free – education is free, health is free. So, because the state gives citizens the right to access that, and you are going in to ensure the welfare of a child from that rights-based approach…the child(ren) have the right to be protected from a child protection (CP) point of view and you are going in as the long arm of the state, an enforcement officer… Therefore, you are an enemy, treated literally like dirt – 'I don't want you knocking on my door; f-off! … go away.'…It perplexed and shocked me… why? ..."*

The Gandhian philosophy mentioned previously, which shapes the image of the Indian social worker as a selfless public servant whose community's interest is at the centre of what they do, helps to explain why social workers in India are seen in a positive light. This selfless devotion as a professional ethos is accompanied by the impact of major statutory differences. In the absence of social security legislation in India, the State is not obligated to provide welfare. Any support provided is therefore seen as an act of charity, a gift that must be returned by the citizen in the form of compliance with the political order and remaining indebted to the State. Unlike charity, social justice does not position the beneficiary in an unbalanced relationship. Hakak and Anton (2020) remarked that a system built on principles of social justice is not based on the gift, therefore minimizing social interactions around it:

> *"The gift is replaced by social benefit… defined as an expression of a fundamental right. The one who receives social benefits is not the subject of a favour. …The gift [becomes] a kind of moral and financial reparation; an act of justice done to its beneficiary. This approach is based on a philosophy that implicitly recognises the unjust and arbitrary nature of this world and tries, through the tools available to it, to mitigate the consequences of the fundamental injustice of the world. …Social justice is not institutionalised mercy, nor compassion managed by the state, but a radically different approach to human relations which emphasises the rights of the one who receives, not the virtues of the one who gives"* (p.5).

In India however, for the same foregoing reasons, the image of social workers creates "a nice burden of expectation". The English social worker functions within totally different legislations. Our rights-based social security turns the social worker, in the words of our participant, into "*the long arm of the state, an enforcement officer*" who ensures that such rights are maintained. This often requires social workers to enforce certain decisions on families and/or individuals, making them so unpopular that they are "treated literally like dirt". Our participant explained these major

differences they encountered following migration, the bafflement they felt at the time, and the difficulty in adjusting. Based on our participant's comment one might think that, back in India, social workers are always perceived positively. However, as mentioned earlier, India is a highly stratified society with a long-lasting caste system. Assuming that access to higher education will more likely be available to those from groups at the higher end of the social stratification, and that their service users are more likely to be from the lower end of it, we can ~~assume~~ suppose that tensions exist on this basis.

The issue of Parental Responsibility (PR) also perplexed participants and connects directly to the rights-based social security approach. It makes the 'State' responsible for safeguarding and protecting the vulnerable. Research participants found it difficult to adjust to the idea that parents in England may not be 'legally' responsible for their offspring and that PR is not automatic to the child's father/mother: "how can you be parents but have no PR?" Many saw this as an extreme example of State intrusion into areas which would be out of bounds in India.

Some of our research participants described the top-down procedural social work practice they encountered in England and its impact on professional autonomy. A focus group participant bemoaned the "loss" of their "Indian freedom" of 'genuine' direct work with families where they had the 'autonomy' to create "localized solutions" for service users' issues. Another participant stated, "One main weakness is that the English systems are very hesitant to learn from others, be flexible in their approach... it is an arrogant system".

A survey contributor followed a similar line and expressed his frustration at the lack of autonomy and the drastic reduction in the role of social workers in England, where they often mainly act as case managers. From this participant's perspective, social workers in England are not authorized to "try to fix" anomalies unilaterally; *"rather you bring it back to the office [and] ask someone else (to fix it) or [you] tell the police, tell the psychiatrist. Then you bring in the whole paraphernalia; what is that about?"*

Other research participants bemoaned the narrowing focus on risk assessment and its mitigation, and the rising thresholds for accessing services. This means that resources are directed only at those at the greatest levels of risk, and no funding is left for working with individuals and communities at much earlier stages before things escalate. One survey contributor compared the situation in both countries*: "social work is more action-oriented and preventative back home. Here in England, it is more about addressing problems…once they have reached an unsafe situation"*.

Conversely, other contributors were especially positive about the legislation existing in England ensuring equality to minority groups and safeguarding vulnerable children and adults. One participant thought that it was *"hugely worrying"* that India did not have any *"formalized system to minimize risk to vulnerable groups… or anything remotely comparable to DBS checks, registration and fitness to practice tribunals".*

Hierarchies and the 'Unspoken' Language

All participants approved of what ostensibly appeared, compared to India, to be a 'non-hierarchical' office set up characteristic of English local authorities. An interviewee thought that it was "quite refreshing that everybody sat on the same floor" and were on first-name terms, different from "very stratified" India where

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participants could not "imagine" calling their superiors by name. In the same breath, however, the interviewee announced, "within a month [of starting] it was pretty clear… I understood the rules of the game: that there's a lot of language that gets spoken here, but the old set of structures are pretty much intact." She felt there was "a lot of lip service", bordering on hypocrisy, in the English 'system'. According to Hofstede (2021) India scores very high on the power-distance dimension measuring attitude toward social hierarchies and indicating high level of acceptance of hierarchies. The English, despite their renowned class system, score much lower on that scale (Hofstede, 2021).

Notwithstanding the hierarchical debate, there is also the culturally different ways of addressing senior colleagues and ~~the~~ elderly people in India compared to England. Our participants agreed that regardless of their title or socio-economic status, an Indian would never address an older person by first name; "it is culturally inappropriate". Valentine (1996) referred to this issue when she wrote: "in Indian languages, politeness is defined in terms of structural and cultural appropriateness" (p.282). An utterance cannot by itself be culturally polite/suitable or otherwise without viewing it in the context of the speaker's position in that social situation and society's expectations of the speaker in the relevant context. So, your 'position' decides what spoken 'language' you can get away with or not, and with who. Different from the English's use of 'negative politeness', Indians use *honorifics* which Valentine (1996) describes "as a pan-Asian feature of showing deference and politeness in Indian languages" (p.290). The English do not have this "hierarchical structure…or strategies to soften…possible disagreement" (Valentine, 1996, p.290). Hofstede (2021) also provided a possible explanation for this issue; he wrote that in societies, all "individuals are not equal" (no page) and the 'less powerful' must accept that power distribution is unequal.

One participant who initially came to England to study for his 2nd Master's degree told of how his (English) lecturer "reminded" him numerous times to stop calling him "sir"; in India you dared not call your lecturer by any other name/title. Plus, he "found it very strange" that his teacher wore "half trousers" and carried a bottle of Coke to class: this differed from what he was used to "back home".

Another gesture that may be more specific to the Keralites was greeting people with a smile, which differed from what some participants experienced in England and as expressed her by one of our interviewees:

> *"When we [Indians] meet, I come with a smile…That is how we actually greet people. If it is an official one, a* **Namaste** *will be the best. …There are also some gender issues ...if it is male to male greeting, it will usually be smiling or shake of hands. But if it is a male to a female,* **Namaste** *will be the greeting".*
> Then he added, *"There's no smile here [in England]".*

Kate Fox (2014) explained that the English emphasis on privacy is often perceived as arrogant, cold, and unfriendly. She described it as a symptom of 'social dis-ease' and connected it with negative politeness. Hitching (2013) expatiated on this when she stressed that the restraint, cautiousness, and contact-avoidance of, for example, English public-transport passengers that foreigners often complain about, are all features of negative politeness which emphasize not intruding or impinging on others' space, time, or privacy.

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Conclusions

Our findings highlight ~~explored~~ some of the key cultural tensions experienced by our participants after migrating from India to England. They spoke about the tensions between India as a more community-oriented society compared with the stronger emphasis on individualism in England and the many implications such difference had on a wide range of spheres of life and practices. They highlight the differences in perceptions and attitudes towards the family, marriage and parenting, and the differences in the boundaries between the individual, the family and community, the private and the public, and the private and the professional; they also spoke about differences resulting from the more hierarchical character of Indian society and from differing concepts with regards to politeness and hospitality. These differences have direct impact on the interactions social workers have with service users, colleagues, and managers, and becoming aware of them is therefore of great importance. Most of our participants are from Kerala, India, and considering the size of the country, social workers coming from other regions might experience other challenges. Regardless, this study has highlighted an issue that needs further exploration. The importance of understanding how cultural differences between India and England impact migrant social workers ~~professionals~~ cannot be overlooked or overemphasized. ~~As a nation, England stands to gain from familiarizing itself with the cultural capital/habitus that Indian social workers bring to practice and leveraging that to its advantage. And for the migrants, a~~An understanding of the impact of the culture and habitus they have originally internalised and of the culture and habitus of the country they migrated to, as well as the implications of these for their practice, will support their successful transition and help them improve their practice. Such understandings are likely to require more time and effort currently provided for induction purposes. The findings in this study will not only contribute to learning but also provide evidence for further studies, including workplace education and adaptations that will influence future social work policies.

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