

Changing Trends of Social and Cultural life in India: Effects of Westernization



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Abstract

Indian culture is one of the richest cultures in the world. Culture basically refers to all the ways of life including ideas, customs, beliefs, and institutions of a particular society that are passed down from generation to generation. It is an integrated pattern of human belief, knowledge and behavior that depends on the ability to transmit and learn knowledge to the next generations. The conquest of European power and British rule in India has had a profound effect on Indian society and culture. Nowadays, western culture is spreading across the population. The purpose of this article is to look at the social and cultural changes due to the effect of westernization. The analytical and descriptive nature of the paper would focus on answering changes in social and cultural life due to westernization. The required information has been collected through secondary data sources. The new technologies, values, knowledge, and patterns of living life that the British people had brought with them, transformed the various aspects of social and cultural life in India.

Keywords: Culture, Social, Westernization, Values, Behaviour

Introduction

In a secular country like India, every citizen has the freedom to follow any religious practices of their choice. So, it is seen that all the cultures are freely respected, and followed by the Indians. Indian culture is a collection of social norms, traditional customs, belief systems, value systems, technologies and political systems that are associated with the ethno-linguistically diverse Indian. Basically, Indian culture is a combination of several cultures which has been influenced by a history that is several millennia old (Mohammada, 2007). Indian cultural elements, such as language, food, dance, music, art, and religion have had a strong impact across the world.

India has 28 states and 8 Union Territories with different cultures and is the second most populous country in the world (Kenoyer and Heuston, 2005).

History shows that Indian culture has been very much influenced by religious religions. India is the place of origin of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism and other religions (Stafford, 2006). India is one of the most religious and ethnically diverse countries in the world. Religion plays an important role in the lives of its people. Because of this diversity of religious groups, India has a history of violence and terror. The influence of Western culture began in India during the 19th century. Western culture has made its presence felt in Indian culture in various forms. Westernization is used to denote the process of acceptance of the western culture, language, and philosophies. It has affected and influenced Indian society in both positive and negative ways. In India, every individual is free to adopt any culture, religion, or tradition.

Westernization and Indian Society

Culture, in India, helps in binding the country together in some form of common identification. There are diverse languages, religions, traditions festivals, and attire but the rich heritage of the culture survives! Indians even today, are highly influenced by the traditions and values of the yesteryears despite the recent movement towards westernization. India's culture has undergone many changes over the centuries, which has resulted more in modern society. However, the fundamental of Indian tradition remains unchanged tradition involving India's festivals and joint family lifestyles are practiced these days. India's Hinduism has become renowned and is practiced by people around the world Music and Dance have become one of India's greatest aspects and are immensely popular amongst the younger generation.

Famous stars & celebrities support and enhance India's fashion world and model the clothes and jewellery throughout Asia, Europe, and North America. Astrology a discipline long studied in Indian tradition and reveals the future is now being practiced with increasing frequency. India's culture has a multitude of wonderful things to offer. Western culture constitutes three major challenges to Indian society:

1. Introduced sophistication in clothes, cuisine, and manners.
2. The emergence of an open society has minimized ethical and moral values.
3. Affects on the caste system, joint family structure, marriage pattern, and other social structures.

According to Amartya Sen (Indian Nobel Laureate in Economics), modern culture is a complex mix of its historical traditions, colonialism and current Western culture — both collaterally and dialectically. Sen believes that external images of India in the West often emphasize the difference between India and the West. There is considerable inclination to distance and highlight the differences in Indian culture in Western countries from Western traditions, rather than to find and show

similarities. Important or important aspects of Indian culture and traditions are usually remembered by Western writers and the media. The deep-rooted asymmetry of Indian traditions in different parts of India has been neglected in the homogenous description of India. As Sen (2005) writes, perceptions of Indian culture, which were not born and brought up in India, are at least one of three different categories:

- **Exoticist Category:** Exoticism is a trend in European art and design, whereby artists became fascinated with ideas and styles from distant regions and drew inspiration from them. This category concentrates on the amazing aspects of Indian culture. The focus here is on understanding what is different, and what is strange in the Indian culture.
- **Magisterial Category:** This category is strongly related to the exercise of imperialist power and sees India as a subject area. With its primitive culture, India needed a sense of superiority and guardianship. While many British observers did not agree with such views of India, and some non-British people did, this is an approach that contributes to some confusion about India's culture.
- **Curatorial Category:** This category includes various attempts to see, classify and record the diverse aspects of Indian culture. Curators don't just look for the odd, are not weighed down by political preferences, and are free from stereotypes. The curative approach, however, is the inclination to see Indian culture as more special and extraordinarily interesting than it really can be.

According to Indian sociologist M.N. Srinivas, over 150 years of British rule had a major impact on Indian culture. We have seen changes in beliefs, values, technology, and industry. Three concepts- Egalitarianism, Humanism, and Secularism are the impacts on Indian culture and governance.

British rule in India brought important and far-reaching changes in the social, cultural, political, economic, and educational spheres of India. Modernization, urbanization, and industrialization,

broke down caste ideology, rituals, and barriers to a large extent. The Social status of women has been changed as social reformers helped in liberating women (Malviya, 2021).

Family is an important institution of society. There has been a prevalent tradition of joint family system in India. It is a system under which extended members of a family – parents, children, spouses of children, and their offspring, etc. – live together. Usually, the oldest male member is the head of the joint Indian family system and he makes all the important decisions and rules, and other members of the family follow them (Facts about India, 2011). We have seen a significant impact of westernization on family structure in urban areas mainly, but some villages are also westernized.

In a 1966 study, Orenstein and Micklin analyzed data related to the population and family structure of Indian society. Their study shows that the Indian joint family structure had remained the same in the period from 1911 to 1951. Subsequently, due to urbanization and economic development, India has broken down traditional joint families into more single families (Orenstein and Micklin, 1966: 314–325). Sinha, in his book, after summing up several sociological studies conducted on the Indian family, mentions that over the last 60 years, the cultural trend in most parts of India has been a quick change from joint families to single families. In the 1990s India had a small percentage of the traditional large joint family, Indian households, and on average, household income per capita was low. Due to cultural traditions and practical factors, they found in their study that the joint family still persists in certain areas and in certain situations (Sinha, 1993). Youth from the lower socio-economic classes are more inclined to spend time with their family than their peers because of different ideologies in rural and urban rearing (Verma and Saraswati, 2002: 112).

The institution of marriage has also been experiencing profound changes in Indian society. Nowadays, parents used to take the consent of the children for their marriage, and the stability of the marriage is rapidly declining. Economic

growth, technological development, and increased materialistic culture are the important factors responsible for the changes occurring in the institution of marriage. Gay/lesbian relations, live-in relationships, and DINK syndrome are new social phenomena emerging in modern society (Kaur & Singh, 2013). Yadav, Singh, & Vishwakarma in their article examined the changes in marriage patterns in northern and southern parts of India, in terms of geography, culture, and demography. It has been found that the mean age at marriage for women has increased in both Northern and Southern regions. The age gap between spouses has decreased in the Southern region but in the Northern region, it has not significantly changed. Due to modernization, education, and employment divorce rate has been increased (Yadav, Singh, & Vishwakarma, 2017).

For centuries, the majority of Indians have had their marriages planned by their parents and other respected family members. In the past, the age of marriage was early, especially in Rajasthan, but it has been increasing with modernisation and now there are laws that govern the age of marriage (Heitzman, 2012). In most weddings, dowry has been provided to the groom by the groom's family. Traditionally, dowry was considered as a woman's share of the family property, as a daughter had no legal claim over the real estate of the family of her birth. It also usually included portable valuable items such as jewellery and household items that a bride could control throughout her life. Historically, in most families, the inheritance of family estates is passed down the male line. Since 1956, Indian laws treat both men and women equally in matters of inheritance without legal will (Agarwal, 2005). Indian heritage and property are increasingly using legal will for inheritance, with nearly 20 per cent exercising legal will as of 2004 (The Times of India, 2004).

The divorce rate in India is low i.e., 1% as compared to about 40% in the United States (United Nations database). There is a dearth of scientific surveys or studies on Indian marriages where both husband-and-wife perspectives were deeply requested. Sample surveys show that issues with

marriage in India are common to trends observed globally. Nowadays, divorce rates are increasing in Indian societies, but in urban societies, the divorce rate is much higher than in rural societies. Women initiate divorces in India about 80 percent (Pisharoty, 2010). It reflects a shift in traditional views about marriage where marriage was a sacred act. Recent studies suggest that traditional arranged marriages are in the process of change. Banerjee et al. surveyed 41,554 households in 28 states and 8 Union Territories in 2005. They find that the trends in marriage in India are similar to those observed in the last 40 years in Japan, China and other countries (Banerji et al., 2008). The survey found that fewer marriages are arranged purely without consent and most Indian marriages are arranged with consent. The decision of girls and boys was equally important and parents respect their choices. In most Indian urban societies, the percentage of self-arranged marriages (love marriages) was also increasing. A 2006 article reported that 10 to 20 per cent of marriages in urban India were self-arranged (USA Today, 2006).

The Indian economy is also changing with the outbreak of new technologies. Ironically, traditional technologies have not had much of an impact on Indian consumers. For example, very few recent changes in India can be attributed to telephones and automobiles that have existed in India for a long time. These technologies have had a profound impact on western industrialized economies over the past five decades. In India, the telephone system is highly underdeveloped and operated by the government. In the case of automobiles, the impact has been minimal as very few Indians can afford automobiles. On the other hand, motor scooters, televisions and VCRs, and other household appliances like refrigerators and cooking stoves have made a difference in Indian life. Scooters and motorcycles have become universal due to their affordability and mobility. Young professionals, both male and female, use motor scooters as personal transport. Despite this, many of the revolutionary changes that have taken place in India can be attributed

to the emergence of consumer technologies. Its first effect is access to information, and electronic media for entertainment.

More specifically, it has an impact on the choices in music, popular or classical, and exposure to different entertainment forms from different cultures. This is also a preamble that one can call the development of a mass culture society. Another consequence of this change is the development of a material culture.

Srinivas (1966) discusses social change in terms of Westernization, urbanization, industrialization and secularism. Westernization results in the introduction of new institutions and amendments to old institutions. It introduces Western technology, clothing and eating practices, and scientific and rational approaches. Modernization is a general term that includes Westernization, industrialization and secularism. Countries may prefer the term "modernization" to Westernization because it does not have a negative connotation of abandoning what is good within indigenous culture. Vajpayee (1982) explored the attitudes, ideas, understandings and beliefs of the Indian elite towards modernization. Their findings suggest that Indian elites support the idea of social change through modern development until the traditional value system is negatively affected. In many non-Western societies modernization has become a value-laden term, as its main challenge lies in the pursuit of contextual ideology. The urge for modernity is combined with the urge for recognition. The economic and social status of women in the urban areas witnessed some considerable changes. For the first time, we are able to see trends that the class-based system goes beyond the caste hierarchy.

This means that the caste hierarchy is disappearing at the higher level of society. In other words, economic prosperity has touched people belonging to different castes, and educational levels are rising along similar lines. Many women from different castes attend colleges and universities—and are profitably employed. This has led to an increase in both economic and social levels. Many young women, unlike what happened, are choosing their

marriage partners directly or through some sort of consensus with their parents. Even though many marriages are still arranged today, men and women exercise the same option in judgment. The decision remains more of a family decision than a consensus rather than imposed from the parents.

Women's attitudes with respect to marriage, career and economic status, are undergoing so many changes that there seem to be inter-generational differences between women within narrow age categories. These changes are extremely lively and turbulent at the same time.

When we combine this shift in a nuclear family system with the emergence of career roles for women and their ability to generate independent income for the family, the role of women in household management and decision making is getting stronger. This does not mean that the nuclear family system can cause these changes in itself, but it is one of the facilitating factors. The other factors are-, career opportunities for women, their income-generating power, the family's compliance or non-compliance to traditional norms of behavior, and attitudes toward changes that have the potential to alienate the families from traditional patterns causing concerns in daily lives.

Changes In Social and Cultural Life

Social change means changes in social values, norms, and behavioral patterns, while cultural change involves changes in the way of life, pattern, habit, and way of life. Due to westernization, we have seen the below-mentioned changes in the social and cultural life of Indian society-

- Inculcation of the western values, ideologies, and thoughts mostly among the educated people.
- Enhancement of social and cultural reformation movements for the transformation of Indian society and cultural values. The introduction of reforms and new laws by the British led to several changes in the Indian customs and beliefs.
- New consciousness and structure of values were created by the act of westernization.
- Origin of a new great tradition of modernization. A synthesis between the indigenous and western traditions has occurred.
- Globalized the economy and created more efficient ways of producing goods and services.
- Westernization has contributed to the re-emergence of a pan-Indian culture on new grounds. It impacts education, technology, urbanization, transport, communication, etc. Yogendra Singh (1973) calls the re-emergence of these institutional activities the process of 'Cultural modernization'.
- The growth of a universalistic legal superstructure took place. Various forms of legal innovation based on the principles of universalism, individualism, and rationalism were introduced.
- The concept of purity and pollution has been changed since the people of all castes are traveling on the same bus or working under the same roof.
- Under the influence of westernization, even people living in rural areas' traditional food habit and dressing sense has been replaced by modern styles.
- Modernization of the Indian values and traditions is taking place under the impact of the process of westernization. There has been a gradual disintegration of the joint family system and the emergence of nuclear family in urban India.
- Noticeable changes in the marriage institution. Marriage has transformed into the relationship of two individuals in place of two families. Love marriage is common nowadays. Unmarried girls and boys are sharing the same apartment and stay away from their parents.
- Westernization, in the political and cultural fields, has given birth to nationalism, revivalism, communalism, linguism, regionalism, etc.
- Cable television and foreign films became widely available for the first time and have

served as catalysts in bulldozing cultural boundaries.

- Scientific and technological innovations have made life quite comfortable, fast and enjoyable.
- Exposure to other cultures through DTH or cable networks has made society more open than its earlier conservative form. Greater availability of cheap and dirty materials in the name of liberalization.
- People are less concerned about government jobs as multinationals and the private or public sector are offering more lucrative jobs.
- There is a decline in social values as evidenced by the low respect for women and older people.

Conclusion

As the 21st century is coming upon us, the constant linking of ancient tradition with modern technology will increase awareness of the wonders of this wonderful country. Nowadays, Indian culture has expanded globally by crossing geographical boundaries. It will be an Indian or a person from another country, drawn from the prolific Indian culture and traditions. Even though we have accepted the modern means of living, and improved our lifestyle, our values and beliefs are still unchanged because they are deeply rooted in our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirit that we derive from our culture. The conflict between traditionalism and modernism, or a blend of the two, is a perennial theme that is revealed when studying India, and played out in different ways, depending on social and historical contexts. From a moral point of view, one can find Indians who are traditional, or modern, or progressive, or even Western, or some combination thereof. From an amic point of view, similar labels are used by Indians to describe themselves, although the word "Western" seems to be the least preferred. Indians use this vocabulary combination to represent the

notion that they are modern in some aspects of their lives, while in some other aspects, they are quite traditional. This autocratic tension exists among many middle-class Indians, irrespective of age or gender, reflecting apprehension of a possible loss of cultural identity in moving away from their imagined notions of Indianness.

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