

Westernizations impact on indian culture sociology essay



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Indian culture has been changing over the past few years due to the threat of western culture. Westernization is effecting one of the oldest and richest cultures and taking away the traditions, customs, and family values that were once predominant in traditional Indian culture. Modernization involves a transformation in beliefs about the way the material world functions; westernization requires an alteration in cosmological viewpoints about how one should live their life. Developed by Muslim invasion and European colonization, India's history begins with the Indus Valley Civilization. Their culture is formed by all different countries and backgrounds. Changes are being made in all areas including religion, dance, and music mostly found in the Bollywood films. Through movies watched in class and the books *The Interpreter of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri and *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry, I have found these represent most the disintegration of close familial bonds in Indian culture today.

Traditional Indian culture can be expressed in five major categories. Starting with humanity, people of India are thought of for their humanness and calm sense of being without harshness in their ways of thinking. Tolerance also plays a big part in a traditional Indian. One understands the different races, beliefs, and practices brought into their country and doesn't step back and judge. Although there are caste systems in India, unity of citizens helps create a strong bond between all people of the country. Despite their religious backgrounds, India is a secular country meaning they are openly willing to share their thoughts and opinions about their religious beliefs. Finally all families are closely knit. Grandfathers, fathers, and their sons all are said to have the same spirit, tradition, and possessions.

A strict social hierarchy system has been set in place for many years and is part of the traditional Indian culture. A joint family system is an important part of the way people live. Parents, children, their spouses, and other family members all live in the same house. This is said to help develop a close bond among all members of the family. The rules of the house are set up by the oldest adult male. The males bring in the food and money for the family in order to survive. The females or wives of these males do non educational work and are thought of as being housewives. Supposedly, Indian men and women are thought of as being equals. However, these laws are weakly enforced because women are not allowed to own their names let alone a piece of land. Leading into a more westernized setting within the city, women are allowed to be a prominent figure in society and hold jobs and the rights to their own name.

In Ancient India, women had the same status as men. They had the same educational opportunities in the Vedic period and were married at a normal age to a husband of their choosing. Venturing into the medieval period, women were given fewer rights. They started performing child marriages and women whose husbands died were not allowed to remarry. Instead of living alone or with another husband, a widowed woman has to live in a house with other widows in poor conditions. They are allowed to leave during certain hours but do not have much freedom. In parts of India, women were taken advantage of. However, even under these conditions, women were extremely well in politics, literature, education, and religion. Even in parts of South India, women were said to be in charge of villages, towns, and institutions.

Sati, jauhar, and devadasi have been banned from modern India. Sati is where the widow had to commit suicide by fire on the day of her husband's funeral. It was said to be a voluntary performance but sometimes it was forced upon the woman. The next tradition, jauhar, is when all the wives and daughters of defeated warriors committed suicide. Purdah is the practice of making women cover their skin so you can't see their body figure. It makes women not able to interact freely.

Indian families have arranged marriages in which their parents and other members of the family pick the spouse with some input from the couple themselves. Compared to the United States, India's divorce rate is very low and marriage is thought to be life. India currently has the lowest divorce rate at 1.1% compared to the top two countries Sweden and the United States in the 50% range. Most people here usually marry in their 20s or 30s, but in India more than half of the women marry before the age of 18.

Arranged marriages play a big part in the roles of children in India. The parents and other family members get to decide who their child marries based on different traits. Divorce is not found often in India and is looked down upon by the Hindu religion. The caste system plays a big part in the pickings of a spouse. It is said that you are put into a caste system based on your previous life. You have the ability to move up in the social chair when you are reincarnated, only if you do above and beyond what was expected for you. An example of this would be a group called the "untouchables", where they were looked down upon for doing petty work and earning little money. The caste system was important during the rule of the British Empire but is now abolished.

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The westernization of India has greatly affected the traditions, customs, and family values. Today, the respect for others has greatly decreased throwing away the traditional humanity Indian people. The idea of joint families is decreasing and families want to remain separate from each other. In a traditional Indian culture, one would care for the others around him and not only for himself. Also in today's situation, both husband and wife are working so there is no one at home to look after the children. Many of times a child is being watched by someone outside of the family and are not getting the rich, cultural childhood their parents have had. Slowly all customary Indian values are fading and everyone is moving onto a more western culture.

“ It is acknowledged that modernity has various distinct aspects: the rise of a capitalist industrial economy, the growth of modern state institutions and resultant transformations in the nature of social power, the emergence of democracy, the decline of the community and the rise of strong individualistic social conduct, the decline of religion and the secularization of ethics” (Kaviraj). This statement basically states that if India continues to modernize, individuals will change in their culture and beliefs in trade for a better technological economy. In trade for losing some of the past culture India is becoming a more economically stable country.

However I do believe that the modernization of India is a good thing. Even though the Indian people have improved their way of life, their principles and beliefs have remained constant. A person can alter their clothing or the foods they eat, but their deep understanding and commitment to the culture will never be taken away.

A traditional Indian family treats the guests of their home as gods and serves them even in tough times. A guest never leaves the house hungry. The respect towards the elderly is a major factor in the culture. The elderly drill ideas and pass on their stories as their grandchildren get older. The biggest age group moving towards the westernization is teenagers. Indian culture is disappearing in their lives and no longer is feeling proud to be Hindi.

A Fine Balance portrays how strong family bonds were at one time. In the story, Dina's brother Nusswan controls her because he is the dominant male figure of the house. Their father passed away when they were young and Nusswan developed into a traditional Indian man who is the "bread winner" for the two of them. His rules were very strict even to the point where he would abuse Dina in order for her to learn the traditional Indian culture.

What was so interesting about this story is that Dina had to move away from her brother and take on the challenges of working and living by herself. This would seem like a non-traditional way of living without a husband, but she made it work by hiring people to work for her and even taking in someone for extra money.

Dina lives by herself and works as a tailor. She is looked down upon by the traditional Indian culture. However since she lives in the city, they accept her for being not married and a working woman. These examples show how the modernization in India is affecting the way women live their lives. A woman in a traditional Indian culture would not work for money and would do household work while taking care of her husband and children.

Throughout the book *Interpreter of Maladies*, I noticed certain “modern” trends that were specifically placed in the stories to show how India is changing. The title of this book is meant to say how people interpret afflicting modern societies. The stories told in this book tell the lives of Indians separating from their traditional roots. The stories give multiple examples of people steering off course of the strict customs they have inherited through their ancestors.

In *The Interpreter of Maladies*, Mrs. Das for example sits in the taxi with her sunglasses and offers no one else her snacks while her family is outside touring. India is known for the sharing of food and communication within groups of people. This example shows us how Indians are growing away from the original roots. In another short story within the book, Mrs. Sen shows us the power that material objects have over people. In Indian culture, these intangible objects shouldn't take over your life or have one obsessing over them. However, Mrs. Sen keeps talking about the things she once had and was accustomed to, even if it was her vegetable cutting blade. This story shows the power that material objects holds over people in the world today.

In American culture, I think that people always want more of what they do not have. In a traditional Indian culture, a person deals with what they have and focuses more on family values and beliefs rather than objects.

“Sexy” is the next short story telling the life of a young woman Miranda and her affair with a married man. Miranda knows little of this man's Indian culture. This type of affair is not looked on upon as being right within India. Another example of culture within the story is when Miranda attempts to buy

an Indian food mix from the grocery store only to be told by the worker it will be too spicy for her. This highlights the fact that she feels uncomfortable around Dev, the Indian man she is seeing.

In the final short story, *The Third and Final Continent*, a man is telling his life story starting in London right after he left India. The story leads on to discuss an arranged marriage by his Indian Family. The woman and him are wed and eventually end up in America not knowing anything about each other; they are complete strangers. An elderly woman brings them closer as they share their first laugh and have a real conversation as they get to know each other. This story was different than the rest for me because it told a story of a couple getting to know each other in a “normal” way. In a traditional Indian culture this is how a marriage would actually work. It is interesting to see that the couple eventually had a family because I would think it would be hard not knowing who your spouse is before you make a commitment.

Even though most people may say Indian culture is slowly being ignored in the present day, I feel like everyone grows away from their traditional roots. However, I think that everyone still possesses traits of their ancestors and is interested in their culture. Just because a young person today isn't interested in the same type of things that their parents were, they will eventually want to learn things about the “olden days.” In a society where we live today, family is of much importance. They teach and shape us into the people we will become one day.

An Indian traditionalist would argue and say India citizens should learn about their culture at a young age and experience different traditions such as living

with your whole family. Indian culture is one of the oldest and richest cultures in the world today. Modernization and westernization are changing the way people look the traditions, customs, and family values that were once predominant in traditional Indian culture. However, the people of India I think are still holding true to their traditional side by blending in a new more modern era.