

The influence of the western culture on the



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Introduction Culture is a broad term which has been described by various philosophers since decades. It has been claimed by Raymond Williams to be "...one of the two or three most complicated words in English language" (Williams, 1976). Different definitions of the term, culture may have distinct descriptive ways and criterion to evaluate human activity.

It is important to define the broad base of the sophisticated term ' culture', in the sense used later in the paper, to narrow down the discussion on our topic. Culture is a word stemming from a Latin word ' cultura' which means to cultivate (Harper, 2008). It is defined by Findley and Rothney as, " systems of symbols and meanings that even their creator contest, which lack fixed boundaries, that are constantly in flux, and that interact and compete with one another" (Findley & Rothney, 2006). This is the definition of culture I would be using here on.

The authors describe culture to be a system of symbols having blurred boundaries. The curx however is to see how do we recognize these system of symbols? The answer to this question is provided by Williams who says that culture can be judged or embedded in music, literature, lifestyle, painting and sculputure, theater and film and similar things (Williams, 1976). These dimensions are common to all cultures. In the foreface of the rapid globalization and the interaction in the past, these dimensions of various cultures are often influenced by each other. The following Paper discusses the influence of the dimensions of western culture to the respective dimensions of the subcontinental culture and vice versa. The subcontinental culture, is the culture refering to the South Asian region which includes the modern day India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Sirilanka.

The major influence on the subcontinental culture came first with the arrival of the British in India in the early 1600's. The British brought with them the rest of Western culture customs and traditions. The traditional religions and cultures in the subcontinent were slowly subverted. The conversion of people from the prevalent religion in the subcontinent played an important role in the change in the traditional culture.

The converts to Christianity were encouraged not only to give up their religion but also their traditions and cultures. A fine Christian convert would dress like an Englishman and imitate English behaviour in all things. Thus the converts to Christianity were buoyant to think behave and live like the Englishmen. The English education system was introduced by the then Governor General's council in Calcutta (East India) 1 The influence of the western culture on the Sub continental culture and vice versa Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800 - 1859), aimed at producing Indians who were English in taste. This progressive system was implemented all over India providing Western education.

To the Sub continent people, this was perceived as much more of an enlightenment than exploitation as more people could go to colleges built by foreign rulers. It gave them the aura of becoming more civilized, rational and modern by acquiring the knowledge. This is also one of the reasons of no significant initial resistance to the shift in the cultural values (Sundaram, 2006). This extensive educational programs resulted into well read sub continent scholars and writers. In the late 1800's the literature started to take its turn and produced much more writings in English by local people than ever before.

It also gave birth to notable writers such as Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri. Globalization of the world has had its influence on the sub continental culture as well. In a modern day scenario people are instantly connected and communicating with each other than ever before. The products produced in one part of the world are easily available in the other part and international traveling has just become a norm.

The world is very interdependent today and we are living in an era where information travels like the speed of light. While some people might think that globalization is just about making business without any restrictions, it is much more than that. At the same time Globalization allows different cultures to combine and integrate through having common social activists, labor organizers, journalists, academics and many others (Sundaram, 2006). Music, theater and the film industry has also been broadly influenced by the increased globalization. Music has been a center stone of the sub continental background.

It has been traditionally based on the simple melodies and is regarded as one of the most well-developed systems of the classical world. The classical beats of the conventional music provide the true cultural and the traditional taste to the sub continental music. Later in the 13th Century the sub continental music remained under the influence of the Islamic presence. There is a faction who believes that the classic sub continental traditional music dates back to Amir Khusro, one of the singers in the Mughal Empire. The remarkable poetry by some famous poets brought the traditional music to new heights.

However the first influence of the sub continental music of such kind was widely evident in the 1960's when it found its way in the form of some extraordinary play of the sitar (a violin type instrument) by Ravi Shankar on the famous Beatles' album, Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. The sub continental music made its way into the west with the well known players such as Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan. This was the first time that the Sub continental music started to acquire Western students. The classical music 2

The influence of the western culture on the Sub continental culture and vice versa was brought to the attention of the western world (Manas, 2006).

Even today we see traces of the classical sub continental music in the rap songs such as the Indian flute song by Timbaland. There are other various singers who use the rhythmic Sub continental beats in their music. Ghazals, the poetic compositions that aspire more than do popular film songs to poetic qualities are also very popular among the west: the subject here is usually the loss, memory, and remembrance of love. A prime example of the influence to the west is the famous Ghazal singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. He has been the "king of Qawalis" as he is labeled in Pakistan. Mr.

Khan's popular work (Qawalis/Ghazals) has been a part of international books, series, plays and movies. His famous songs have been played in the famous movie Bend it like Beckham, the TV series Sex and the City and various other international stages. The cultural music of the sub continent has therefore influenced the western cinema and music in a subtle but obvious way (Manas, 2006). This does not end here, the traditional beats of the Punjabi Bhangra dance were/are increasingly being remixed by various

south asian Dj's to add a different intercultural flavour to the traditional Bhangara.

The traditional beats of the bhangra dance are mixed with house, reggae and hip-hop to create a newsensation to the music. These remixes became immesnsely popular in the Uk and the USA by the end of the 90's. One of the famous bands which resulted in this fusion of cultural music was the Punjabi MC, whose songs are a part of the playlists in almost all the disc clubs in the western society. It is easy to see here how the fusion of the music style in terms of other generes of raggae, Rap or hip-hop attacks the fundamentalism of the sub continental music. By producing such music the artists put the racial signifiers of being essentially sub continental or south asian at risk.

Since the bhangra music is a type of music signiyng the region of south asia (sub continent), this diffusion of the music with the integration of western elements creates disputes of identity and the ownership of the remixed music. On the other hand however, the remixed veriosn of the bhangra music offers the displaced sub continent people mainly in the USA and the UK a way to express themselves in a western society. This offers them a channel to prove that their remixed version of the bhangra has been an effort through social difficulties and is truly authentic. This does not end here, side by side the influence of the Western Music has also overshadowed the Sub continental musical industry. The Sub continental music has become under increased influence of the western " rock and pop" culture.

This is primarily true for the younger generation who prefer western music over the sub continental numbers. The entire process of making music has also been westernised. The focus now is not on live performances of talent and instruments but more on back stage artificial manipulation of the 3 The influence of the western culture on the Sub continental culture and vice versa sounds which appeal to the changing demands of the new generation (Sabharwal, 2007). According to the Times of India magazine almost 80 percent of the songs played in the sub continent today are of western influence. Aadesh Srivastava, a renowned Indian music director argues that the Indian music has been damaged by the “ cut-copy-paste culture”, whereby the directors copy the theme and the essence of the music to reproduce it with a hint of modification. This “ cut-copy-paste culture” is the reason why we see most of the sub continental music being a sister production of the western music.

The traditional and the classical instruments such as the tabla and the harmonium are being substituted by the western invented drums and violins, explains the contemporary musicians like Vineet Arora (Sabharwal, 2007). He further explains the instruments such as the drums and the Violin, “...are easier to operate and learn so we’ve never felt the need to introduce sub continental instruments in our band” (Sabharwal, 2007). The influence of the Western culture to the Sub continental culture is carried forward by the powerful media, films and theater widely active in both regions. Western media culture has created major inroads in the sub continental film industry through Hollywood influencing Bollywood and Lollywood. The sub continent

youngsters now are increasingly challenging the traditions and norms of the society.

This is the result of the trend of western elements taking part in the Sub continental films, such as Rachel Shelley in Lagaan. The sub continental films are trying to raise their production standards to meet those seen by the western films. There have also been a number of films being shot overseas and adopting English in their scripts. This trend can be clearly seen in the Films such as “ Kal Ho Naa HO”. The film has shown explicitly the influence of the Hollywood has on the sub continent culture. On the other hand the films from the biggest film industry in the world, in terms of the number of movie produced i.

e. Bollywood, are attracting great number of non-subcontinent origin viewers around the world, especially in Europe and the USA. As the number of western viewers increase there is an increased number of western investments in the sub continental cinema, especially to produce movies which interpret the sub continental culture for western viewers. Some prime examples of this are the movies such as “ Pride and the prejudice” and “ Monsoon Wedding” produced by foreign investment. The Western symbolic icons such as MTV have been swiftly accepted by the sub continent.

An example of a TV series “ Rodies” aired by MTV India is noteworthy. This TV show is an on field series of a contest such as the famous American “ Survivor” series. The western impact has also made it fashionable to wear tight jeans and have ideas such as sex before marriage which have not been portrayed before in the local culture. The concept of 4 The influence of the

western culture on the Sub continental culture and vice versa nudity is also creeping into the sub continental film industry.

Even though the sub continental films are traditionally based on the romantic story based on the idea of love, the movies in the past have been conservative on showing romantic scenes in the movies. The movies like “ Monsoon Wedding” have changed that perception. Such kinds of films are on the rise and therefore have an influence on the audience of the movies. The other source of western influence to the sub continental culture is from the Non Resident sub continent people; these are people from the sub continental origin who have lived in the West. They have been exposed to the western ideas and culture thoroughly. When Film producers such the Canadian Indian Deepa Metha produce films, they are preoccupied with the western influence.

Mr Metha produced a film “ Fire” which showed a lesbian love story. This sort of western influence, even though might be rejected by many of the sub continent population is slowly inching into the film industry and from the film industry to the mainstream sub continental culture (papers, 2005). The lifestyle of the sub continental people is also changing rapidly with the major impetus coming from the western sources. A late night walk around the multi million inhabitant city of Bombay, Bangalore or Karachi would ascertain the fact that the lifestyle is drifting from its traditional cultural way of life (Michael, n. d.

). There is a shift of the social life in the sub continent. One can easily observe youngsters mingling openly in the streets and consuming alcohol freely (Michael, n. d.

). The dress code has changed swiftly over the years as well. Saris (a traditional subcontinental dress) are being replaced with the tight jeans or skirts. The brand consciousness is common as well as the fast food culture of McDonalds and KFC among the masses in the urban areas.

The “ Public display of affection (PDA)” as Mr. Kamekish puts it, is common (Kamekish, 2007). One may argue that all this is the trickle down effect from what the media projects to the people. All the latest fashions, trends and lifestyle tips projected through the TV screens and the cinemas is reflected in the everyday lifestyle of the urban sub continental people. On the other hand the Western culture is also not far from the sub continental influence.

The western lifestyle has also been vastly influenced by the sub continental culture. The glorious influences of the designers industry has kept the western fashion industry busy. The designers such as Jean Paul Gaultier and Alexander McQueen have vastly included sub continental designs into their collections portfolio. Gaultier in fact has dedicated a whole collection called the “ Indian Chiaroscuro”, which reflects the traditional designs of the Sub 5
The influence of the western culture on the Sub continental culture and vice versa continent (Karthik, 2005). The international fashion icons such as Giorgio Armani, Valentino, Christian Lacroix and Emmanuel Ungaro are getting the services of craftsmen from India to craft their creations with the artistic hand work embroidery to vie in the international market.

The other major example of the cultural influence is the famous Pashmina shawls. These pure silk hand knitted pieces of cloth have been a desire of many women around the world. The cultural influence does not end in the clothing industry. The other fashion brands such as Cartier have also been prejudiced by the sub continental culture. The traditional carved coloured stones and the hand work on the precious jewels stemming from the persian and Indian decorative design have been extensively used in the products displayed by Cartier (Karthik, 2005).

The influence of the sub continental lifestyle in the fashion industry has cetianly produced some remarkable pieces of art and fashion. Other than this the traditional artefacts produced in the sub continent have been increasingly finding their way into the western homes. The famous Indian poterry and the traditional hand weaven carpets have made huge inroads in the shops around the western world. The cultural influence of the western world in the form of sculpture and architecture has had a long lasting effect on the sub continent. The European colonisits brought the new concept of the western sculptural art to india.

They were very affluent in the Neo-classical, Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance style of sturctural design. The initial sturctures built by the colonists were warehouses and walled trading posts aswell as fortified townships along the costline (India Net Zone, n. d.).

The St. Francis Church, built by Portuguese in 1510, is regarded as the first church built by Europeans in India. The Portuguese were first to built the forts like Castella De Aguanda near Mumbai. They added fortification to the

Bassein fort built by Bahadur Shah, the Sultan of Gujrat, in 1532 AD (India Net Zone, n. d.

). The sub continent architecture also can be seen having some Danish influence as well; the Nagapatnam church in the state of Tamil Nadu in India is the clear evidence of this. Similarly the French influence can be noticed in the Eglise De Sacre Coeur De Jesus or the Church of Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Eglise De Notre Dame de Anges and the Eglise de Notre Dame De Lourdes at Pondicherry. However the impact of the British on the architectural culture of the sub continent was the greatest. They started off by building mainly factories for business purposes but soon they started building courts, schools, municipal buildings and Dak Bungalows, which were normal buildings built by army engineers. The most well known architects of that time designed and constructed buildings all over the sub continent.

Many of the structures erected were a derivative of the famous buildings in London and other places in England. For example, the church of St. John at Calcutta, built in 1787 was a replication of the St. Stephens Church at Walbrooks, the Government House in Calcutta, built by Captain Charles Wyatt was re-sculpted on the Kedleston Hall of Derbyshire, the Indian Government Mint in Calcutta was a semi- replica of the Temple of Minerva at Athens and the Pachaiyappa`s Hall in Chennai was the duplication of the Athenium Temple of Theseus (India Net Zone, n. d.).

The Neo-Gothic style of architecture was also evident under the British rule. The Secretariat, University Library, Rajabai Tower, Telegraph Office all

adopted the Victorian Gothic style, similar to buildings in London” (India Net Zone, n. d.). Another noteworthy piece of architecture is the St. Martin`s Garrison Church in Delhi which is considered as zenith of the British architectural ventures in the sub continent and the Victoria Terminus in Bombay (Mumbai), designed by architect Frederick William Stevens followed the St.

Pancras Station, London. The Church is a huge structure with a high square tower and deeply sunken window shelves, which is a souvenir of Dutch and German architecture (India Net Zone, n. .). There has been a reciprocal impact of the Sub continental traditional architecture on that of the western world. During the late 19th century there was an adept feeling of orientalism in the western societies.

Many of the renowned architects of that time felt the need to look at what the sub continent had to offer before working on a major project. It was also common for the young architects to travel to India in search of the mystique and oriental designs the region had to offer (Pochoy, 2002). The fascination for exotic styles was foremost ignited by the considerable display of the sub continental art at various international exhibitions around the world. The various artifacts from the sub continent were according to the famous philosopher considered to be of good designs from the people who are faithful to their art as they are faithful to their religion, habits and thoughts which inspired the former (Oshinsky, 2004). Today the structures like the Taj Mahal in India still startle the eyes of most western societies. The sculptures of such magnificent buildings along with others such as the huge exuberantly decorated vases can be seen in the western homes.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-influence-of-the-western-culture-on-the/>

There are also other influences between the dimensions of both the western and the sub continental cultures which can be classified as food habits, family structures and the use of foreign lingo. The sub continental cuisine has had huge in roads into the western culture. Europe in general and England in particular enjoys the sub continental oriental food through the enormous amount of restaurants easily located all over the region. The amount of sub continental restaurant in England has risen dramatically from only 500 in 1960 to an estimated 7 The influence of the western culture on the Sub continental culture and vice versa number of 9350 in 2007 (Facts, 2008). This phenomenal growth in the sub continental cuisine in the western society such as England provides strong signals of how the western taste is being influenced by the sub continental cuisine. On the other hand the British tradition of having evening tea has been picked up by the sub continental society.

The subcontinent consumes an estimate of 900 million kilos of tea altogether which is around 30 percent of the world's total tea production (Mandal, 2003) (Hasan, 2005) (Isphani, 2003). The family structure of the sub continents is also being vastly influenced by the Western culture. Traditionally it is a norm to have large families in the sub continent. However this culture is changing and the enforcement of the family planning schemes based on the western research are changing the family structure of the sub continent.

The empowerment of the women has also influenced the traditionally subdued role of the women in the family. The traditional joint family system is slowly changing into a nuclear family system. The educated class and the new generation have certainly adopted a family structure compatible with

<https://assignbuster.com/the-influence-of-the-western-culture-on-the/>

the western culture. The influence of language usage from the west has been widely felt. English was the second most commonly reported language to be used, after the mother tongue in the sub continent according to a survey conducted by Annika Hohenthal who included all the top universities in the sub continent in his research (Hohenthal, 2003).

8 The influence of the western culture on the Sub continental culture and vice versa Conclusion: People today are linked to each other today more than they ever were. The global forces have made the developing world countries to stay in close contact with the developed world. There is a meeting of the global cultures mainly because of the connection created through the television, music, sporting events, the same news, sitcoms, soap operas, theater, corporate food chains and the same glamorous lifestyle (Hong, 2000). This is the reason why the current era can be described as “ The Era of Globalization of culture”. Western culture is the “ machine culture” (Straggler, 2008).

This is because as the historian Arnold Toynbee said that the mankind has made more progress in the 200 years since the industrial revolution than in the previous 10, 000 years. This is the prime reason that the west with its “ machines” is very attractive to the ever developing sub continent. To have a western influence on the sub continental culture is inevitable. To dress like a westerner is a part of being influenced by the “ machine culture”. A villager in the rural areas of the sub continent dresses acts and thinks differently than a person in the urban town center.

As the sub continent becomes more prosperous it would keep straying from its traditions, cultures and norms (Straggler, 2008). We should relish the sub continental culture and be prepared for radical changes in the same. On the other hand the western culture is influenced by the sub continental culture as it is something oriental and different from what they have. The aura of sensation and mystique found in the sub continental culture is appealing to the western society.

With the “ The Era of Globalization of culture” underway the influence of the sub continent culture on the western culture would also certainly take a steep flight. The influence of the western culture on the Sub continental culture and vice versa Bibliography Facts, F. &. (2008, March 3). Facts, Figures & Market Research. Retrieved April 12, 2008, from Facts, Figures & Market Research: <http://209.135.104/search?q=cache:zzhZ6LCNLGgj:www.menu2menu.com/indfact.html+total+number+of+Indian+restaurants+in+london&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1>

Findley, C. V. , & Rothney, J. A. (2006). Twentieth? century World.

In C. V. Findley, & J. A. Rothney, Twentieth? century World (p. 14). Harper, D.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-influence-of-the-western-culture-on-the/>