

# British language and culture changing customs in india history essay



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This essay provides investigation of British colonization on India over time with a research question; To what extent British language and culture contributed in change of customs in India? In order to answer this question I have narrowed down my research into few subtopics in order to easily represent facts which were source of change of India and its results. The extent of British influence to India has been dealt with. The British influenced and changed the structure of India before the colonization and still affect it even if it is not always evident. This theme studied and researched in study branches as linguistics, history and law with the main sources for this investigation being anthropological and history books and study cases. Various articles and study cases from British media have been examined as well.

Throughout the research, the influence of British colonization to India has generally been displayed more clearly from diachronic research, where in order to understand situation of India and Indians nowadays we have to go back in past and search the reason, source of situation which caused result, India as it is today. Manipulative skills of British were well known as their strategy to control colonised country not only their land but also their minds, the way of their thinking even after they had left. This British strategy/skill affected India most and it may not be seen at first when present India is being watched. However it may be seen and understood when India is studied through diachronically. This is why it may be said that there are no solid evidences of methods how the British influenced India. Seeing them depends on the angle we take.

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### Introduction

British colonization of India has attracted me since my childhood. Great Britain is a country which has always been taken as an example of a country with a great cultural heritage. On the other side there is India, a country with a great history, lot of religions, colours, music, food- a cradle of civilization. My research question has developed by reading about the books Gardens of Baldapur, Beneath a Marble Sky: A Love Story, India Passion, Diaries of Ana Delgado where the influence of the[1]British Raj on the India castes system and the behaviour of maharajahs are described.

This essay will investigate how the British colonization influenced various aspects in India with. The follows research question; To what extent British language and culture contributed in change of customs in India?

To answer it I have concentrated on a few sub topics. Firstly, I have the historical background has been explored to get a clear image of Britain and India of that time and present India. Secondly, subtopics which are evidences of British influence have been analyzed in depth. Historical background has been used to prove how British did influence India. Case studies with themes from sub topics have been examined. Books “ Colonialism and its forms of knowledge: the British in India!; “ Cultural Anthropology A Problem-Based Approach”; “ Cultural Anthropology; History” and culture of India”; and “ Five Key Concepts in Anthropological Thinking”. Study cases of Somini Sengupta,

Indian women careers and British Colonialism and its influence on Indian society were examined.

In order to answer my research question I have used encyclopaedias and essays from the internet, books and already done study cases. In essays and books critical overview of this issue is given. All above mentioned literature helped me to better know India as a country, then to examine the period of British colonization and finally to gather enough data to present influences of Britain to India.

### **Historical background:**

The colonization of Asia by European countries carried diffusion, migration, and colonialism, which created European cultural influence.

2Britain colonized India after defeating Gurkha (1816.), Sindha (1843.) and Sikha (1849.). India is specific by its complicity and mixes of different religions, customs rituals, and languages, which were product of active history, revitalization movements and cultural ecology that were present on the Indian subcontinent. Presence of colonization, Britain (British East India Company) or later British Raj wanted revitalization movements where each religious and ethnic group had to change its rituals while cultural ecology wanted respect towards cultures. India was also attractive to Britain because of its resources and good geostrategic position.

The industrial resources abundant of India are cotton, wool, tea, sugar, rice, silks, saltpetre, indigo, opium and metal. Geostrategic ally it was close to many thriving countries of that period and Europeans did not have a good

trade with China where opium was illegal India had good relations with China.

English language and Britain itself had a major influence in India where changing culture, customs, language, educational and society systems transformed. India may shortly be described by next two quotations;

Mark Twain once said: “ India is the cradle of human race, the birth of speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grandmother of tradition.[3]

„ The culture of India has been shaped by the long history of India, its unique geography and the absorption of customs, traditions and ideas from some of its neighbours as well as by preserving its ancient heritages, which were formed during the Indus Valley Civilization and evolved further during the Vedic age, rise and decline of Buddhism, Golden age, Muslim conquests and European colonization. India’s great diversity of cultural practices, languages, customs, and traditions are examples of this unique co-mingling over the past five millennia. India is also the birth place of several religious systems such as Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, some of which have had a large influence in other parts of the world. ”[4]

British culture and Indian cultures have a great contrast between each other. British culture is simpler if compared to Indian culture. Hinduism is polytheistic religion of majority of the Indian population believe in. Indian lifestyle system is formed around castes abolished in 1949. but strongly encoded in the structure of society and the thoughts of people. The

word caste is derived from the Portuguese word casta,  
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meaning lineage, breed or race. It is the agency which controls the structure of Hindu society. How did this change when the British colonized-came to India?

### **Law System:**

The law system in India under the British colonial rule and after would be explained in this paragraph. Firstly, Britain affected the previous structure of the society of India, consisted of maharajas ones who had power over states which they owned composed of Muslims, Sikhs and Hinduists and their presence changed from region to region and maharajas were the ones who were controlling religion masses and deciding about peace. They were making structure of their states so it may function best for each religious group.

Maharajas were kings which were core of society if the majority of population of one state were affiliated to one religious group for example Hinduism then structure of state is going to be organized according to rules of that religion in this case caste system but the minority is also going to live according to their religion rules but also try to adapt to rules of majority. After being under the rule of British Empire since 1858. until 1947. structure of Indian society changed a lot. British are well known by their diplomacy and when they came to India they changed structure society in order to get benefits.

Firstly, the maharajas were not kings anymore, they got lower position in the society and they became princes. The highest position had Queen Victoria and by this they were showing their power over Indians. Maharajas did not

only lose their position but they also lost their power of ruling over their states and citizens, their each action had to be consulted and permitted by the British government. British allowed Indians to live their lives as they did before only to the extent that it did not violate British customs and law. British did not encourage close relationships between British and Indians. Maharajas were not allowed to visit foreign countries especially European countries without permission of British Raj. British not only controlled their lives as princes but also their personal lives example is when[5]Maharaja Sir Jagatjit Singh Bahadur of Kapurthala wanted to marry his fifth wife Anita Delgado which was Spanish had to take permission from British to be accepted as legal wife even if she was already his legal wife according to Sikhs laws and this marriage did not have permission of British and she never was allowed to participate in gatherings with core of British government. Another example with same maharaja is when he was going on his trip to Europe he had to ask permission for taking his second wife with him and he was not allowed to.[6]

Indians have been following the British Legal system which made their business relations with British and other International industries easier. This is because Britain colonized more countries than other European countries did and by that structure of their society, governing system, language became used by most of colonized countries. This is reason why British Law System was used.

### **Language and Education:**

India is country reach in languages the number of individual languages listed for India is 452, of those, 438 are living languages and 14 have no known <https://assignbuster.com/british-language-and-culture-changing-customs-in-india-history-essay/>

speakers[7]. English has become one of the main languages in India, taught in schools and used widely in business transactions. In order to have easier communication between all parts of India, English and Hindi were chosen as two official languages. English was now a language of India as the whole country and it had broken the language barriers which were present before and also being one of the business languages of the world made and still makes trading much easier.

The British knew psychology well; therefore they used it to influence mind and the way of thinking of children rather than trying to influence their parents who had already been mature.

The first British schools in India- run by missionaries- were established around 1820, the number of British-education was growing. Indians had set up Hindu Colleges providing English education as well as mathematics, natural sciences and Western philosophy.[8]

The aim of attending a British school was often the admission to the Indian civil service. The British education was financed by the EIC and later the government and they were neither touching nor supporting the institutions teaching Indian education. As mentioned above, education was the easiest way to get Indians think like the British, because if children of five spend the whole day in atmosphere and surrounding where English is spoken and through the books, then they start behaving as British people and they are becoming British in mind.

This example easily may be seen in case of maharajas and their children who were educated in British schools in India or sent to Britain to improve their <https://assignbuster.com/british-language-and-culture-changing-customs-in-india-history-essay/>



knowledge. After child grows up and returns to his homeland it does not know much about identity and tradition of India. They only think as they are thought and that is the only way as it is.

Maharaja Sir Jagatjit Singh Bahadur of Kapurthala was one of the maharajas who sent their children to Britain for search of better education but later there arose a big conflict when his children grow up and get back to India, they questioned where they belong because they did not understand tradition of India and its complicity in comparison to Britain where they grew but again they were not accepted there also because they are the Indians. As soon as possible they would become princes they would change the laws which they thought are unimportant to everyone. But society could not function without those laws because maharaja was seeing his state as Britain and he never felt and tried to understand Indian multiculturalism and as society could not function without those laws and were reason of upcoming conflicts.

An Indian would first go to a vernacular primary school then to Anglo-vernacular high schools and then after to colleges and few universities which were available in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay.

British education produced class of intellectuals who were ready to change subcontinent India. Most of the students were Hindus and many of them Brahmins because Muslims rejected the British educational programs because of injustice which was done to them because of changing Muslim law system Sharia to British law system and before official Mughal emperors Persian language to English. But at the end they were those who lost chance

for improving their education this was one of the reasons why conflicts could not be solved.

The British rulers found the Muslims generally more suspicious also because considering them more responsible for the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857- , led to an unbalanced distribution of British education. Because of higher degree of their education Indians had more power in politics than Muslims did. From this fact it may be seen that politicians were mostly Hindus actually Brahmins highest cast and know it was controlling the political circle and that is how language affected religion and then nationalism. Brahmins encouraged religious reforms as well as political ones. From this fact it may be said that Muslims actually had no relevant class which would represent their ideas and protect their interests so they had no chance for understanding the situation in which they were and this affected much them in periods of struggle for independence. Previously education was seen as boundary between all people on Indian subcontinent but later when they understood the meaning of freedom and democracy as well as other Western ideas and values their knowledge become as the basis for later struggle for independence and human rights. Today Indians are one of the best grammatically correct English speakers and they are owners of schools with high degrees and they today have a high percentage of people finished higher educational system.

## **Religion:**

During their colonial presence the Protestant British had much religious influence on Indian society. Christianity firstly was introduced in 50 A. D. by coming of the Apostle Thomas in order to establish the Christian church.  
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[10]Lately came also with Portuguese and British. One of the aims of British was to convert Indians to Christianity it may be seen from condition of independence which was made:

“ Till India is leavened with Christianity she will be unfit for freedom.”[11]

They knew that converting of Indians to Christianity would not be easy because of influence and presence of Muslims. Hindus were very attractive to missionaries in sense that they have already inequality in their religion and imbalance which may be used as argument why they should convert to Christianity. This fact of cast system and untouchables worked because British would give everything what they need to untouchables as equality, education, freedom which they never had before. Missionaries were very successful in their converting and this was one of the reasons of [12]Sepoy Munity in 1857. Because soldiers had to fear that the Christian missionaries wanted them to be forced to touch polluted weaponry [13]in order to have them expelled from their caste and to convert them to Christianity.

[14]Missionaries demanded that the government destroy the caste system because it is barrier in between Indian Christians and rest of society. But for British government it was more important to get profit and then if it is possible convert Indians. Some of Hindus were acting that they converted in order to get benefits there are many examples how they were discovered while they children were going to school and talking about Hindu legends. So at the end there actually made Indian mosaic of cultures more complicated than before and base for nationalism in future.

## **Sports:**

Cricket was introduced to Indians via British and firstly was played by higher classes and casts. It is now in India as traditional sport and their national team is being arguably the best in the world.

## **Architecture and Transport:**

British also influenced Indian architecture and transport which was constructed mostly by maharajas which were raised in Britain. Firstly Britain made railways in India because of easier transport of cotton and other textiles. Railways not only were transport lines but they also brought fortune and misfortune to places and states where it was opened. Railways were passing through the land of maharajas so permission was asked and if there would be a railway in one state it would also mean that they are going to have strangers in their state mostly and that they are going to have to care about them. It was also issue while British representatives were coming or even passing special ceremony had to be made but that led to high costs and loses of state budget. As state is available to visitors it was also available to robbers and led to expand of infectious diseases. British introduced secular buildings in neo- classical and neo gothic styles. Their famous creations are Victoria Station[15]which was made in honour of the British Empress of India. Edwin Lutyens architect planned cityscape in New Delhi.[16]

## **Caste System:**

In the Indian social structure there are four varna or colours which are class categories in the Indian society.

Castes are groups in which membership is given at birth and which is lifelong. They are divided in five major categories (varna). Each varna has sub-castes jati. People that belong in one caste, can only marry someone in their castes and this practice is called endogamy. If person from higher castes get in touch with lower castes he becomes impure and has to go and bath in scared river Gang. Also there is Sudras a caste which is the lowest class and they are untouchable because they are considered as nothing, just sand. They are not allowed to be educated and work in anyway except remove dead bodies of animals or repair water sinks which cannot be done by the higher castes. Higher castes were the Brahmins, priests whose life purpose is teaching, and under them were the Kshattriya castes whose members could work as soldiers, politicians, and administrators.

There is sometimes a fifth varna untouchables called pariahs or dalit they are at the bottom of the class system. They work as low servants, doing jobs a Hindu is usually forbidden to do, e. g. burying bodies of animals and unclaimed dead humans.

They are considered polluted by caste Hindus and these may not have contact with them and they are also called unseen because they work at night.

Concept of purity is very important in Hinduism because amount of purity decides in which caste someone belongs. Hindu belief is when one of the higher four varna gets in touch with polluted thing or dalit is temporarily impure and impurity brings bed luck.

The main difference between the British and the Indian social values and a central point of influence creating social structure was opposite of British individualism and Indian group behaviour and hierarchy. Structure of these two societies is completely different. In Hindu Society core of society is group and individuals around are struggling to fit in that group were bigger groups are consisting of smaller ones. In period of colonialism Indian side did not have individual identity they had a group identity. Western Society core is person as individual which may be part of group or not and their individualism was always placed above a social group.

It is hard to say how strong the British individualistic influence actually was, through it seems to be very likely that it came indirectly to the people of India through the British education. Today is becoming more individualistic society and examples are going to be mentioned in further reading.

## **Hierarchy**

Hierarchy is very important in Indian society and their hierarchical composition is not common and same as is other societies is. There are three main criteria: first is belonging to one religion group, second status according wealth and profession (materialistic), and then cast system further division also may be done with gender and race. Mostly their social hierarchy over history is formed around religion it may be seen from Moghul Empire and British colonization. There is a group hierarchy then hierarchy within a family age and gender. All these hierarchies are core of their society even today when cast system is forbidden it may be said that it transformed to rigid class system. While India was hierarchical society Britain and Europe were in process of Enlightenment.

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Queen Victoria announced a declaration of non- interference, constituting that Indian religions and customs would be left alone.[17]

This statement had fundamental flaw: the British knowledge concerning Indian religion and customs was very limited. Educational programs, the British influenced the Indian society possibly the best way there is without force.

The Indians had the chance to experience a more equal treatment and learned in British schools theoretically about it. Lower casts tried to act the behaviour of higher caste people. This act is called Sanskritization in order to get upward in class and caste. Sanskritization means that people of low status adopt the behaviours and attributes of castes of Brahminical status mentioned in religious texts in Sanskrit.[18]By coming of British this act is replaced by westernization were Indians imitate the prestigious Englishmen in order to more upward in the social hierarchy. The census officials were recording a statistical data about Indians they were doing questionnaires which include gender, living condition, nationality, race, tribe, religion and caste. By results of this research they could get whole picture of Indian society.

### **Human rights:**

India is one of the countries in which this theme is spoken mostly. India has problems with nationalism, racism, gender inequality, death punishment.

British rose awareness about human rights by educating Indians. Before and in nowadays still sati ritual is preformed in rural areas that is a ritual were a husband dies his family is allowed to bury his alive wife with him. Hindus are

scarifying people for getting a grace of gods. Performance of these rituals is punishable for years but it is still present.

Gender inequality also was present but in nowadays women have her freedom and right to chose what she wants and they allowed to work. In some cases permission of parents and husband is needed. Nationalism is present since British colonized India and took maharajas their power of ruling. These problems arose because of setting laws which are not applicable for this complex society and they are given by British.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude this essay I will repeat the research question and try to answer it from here; To what extent British language and culture contributed in change of customs in India?

The British are known for their skillful and strategical ways of fighting. During colonization, many powers invested a lot of money in building memorials and other architecture that resembled their style and culture and in this way they celebrated their accomplishments and made sure everyone knew that they were the ones that are ruling that region. The British, however, did not have that kind of an approach. They invested in colonizing the country (India) when they knew that they would have benefits from that.

The British had more strategies and plans for the occupation of the colonized land. For example, the first phase was sending out missionaries that would convert the population of that region into Christians. This strategy was only possible for Sudan but not for India in which religion was the core of society and their attempts at converting were unsuccessful. Their next phase was <https://assignbuster.com/british-language-and-culture-changing-customs-in-india-history-essay/>



investing money in building railways where they would be able to export the resources from India to Europe. In addition, they have also invested in education where they would attempt at influencing the Indian's minds and their thinking. Because of all these reasons, it was very hard to say and find physical evidence that the British had an impact on India. If we research India today, it is difficult to say if the way India is today is because of the impact of globalization or because of British influence.

19 Franz Boas researched movements of people from Europe to America and he said that parents who came from Europe differ from their children who were born in America by the way they act because they did not grow in the same environment, circumstances and family background. From anthropological ideology there have to be something changed through the years in India and even if it is not seen clearly.

Also, we cannot find physical evidence of their psychological influence if we study and research the present. However, by studying India diachronically and holistically, we would be able to find evidences of British influence.

After East India Company, British Raj and all movements for independence final outcome was division of country according to their religion belonging to India Hindu believers and Pakistan Muslim believers. India chose to be a secular country. British made a base for nationalism which arose and made huge conflict between two major religious groups in India. British Raj fall affected India economically and still is affecting. It took a long time for the Indians to come out of poverty. The British looted many natural resources including cotton and wool.

Poverty is also present because of huge changes in country their core of society is no more religion and their rules are made according to democracy and human rights. At end I may conclude that British had positive and negative influences on Indian subcontinent but without those influences India would not be what it is today.