

# The Homogenization of Indian Culture: A Post-Liberalization, Post-Traditional Paradigm Shift in Urban Agglomerates

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## The Homogenization of Indian Culture: A Post-Liberalization, Post-Traditional Paradigm Shift in Urban Agglomerates

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### Abstract:

<sup>19</sup> This study examines the impact of globalization on cultural diversity in urban India, particularly in the post-liberalization era. The influx of global media, technological advancements, and transnational corporations has created a cultural paradigm that prioritizes homogenization over heterogeneity. The dominance of Western cultural narratives has resulted in the marginalization of indigenous cultures, leading to a loss of cultural diversity.

The research explores how communities in urban India are redefining their cultural identities in response to globalization. It analyses the intersection of post-liberalization and post-traditionalism in shaping cultural homogenization. The study also investigates the implications of cultural homogenization for the urban populace and how cultural diversity can be preserved in the face of overwhelming global influences.

The findings suggest that while globalization has brought about unprecedented economic opportunities, it has also <sup>2</sup> led to the erosion of traditional cultural practices and values. However, many communities in India are resisting homogenization and maintaining their unique cultural identities. The study concludes that there is a need to promote cultural diversity and preserve traditional cultural practices in the face of globalization.

**Keywords:** Homogenization, Post-traditional, Post-colonization; Paradigm shift; Urban; India

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## Introduction

The advent of globalization has brought about unprecedented transformations in India, particularly since the economic liberalization of 1991. Globalization, often misconstrued as a benign force, has been instrumental in perpetuating Westernization, thereby threatening the cultural diversity of India's smaller communities. The influx of global media, technological advancements, and transnational corporations has created a cultural paradigm that prioritizes homogenization over heterogeneity.

Globalization has facilitated the unfettered flow of ideas, cultures, and values across geographical boundaries. However, this has also led to the dominance of Western cultural narratives, which often supersede indigenous cultures. The proliferation of social media, the World Wide Web, and other digital platforms has further accelerated this process. As a result, local cultures are facing an existential crisis, as they struggle to maintain their distinctiveness in the face of overwhelming global influences.

<sup>2</sup> The impact of globalization on Indian culture is multifaceted. Cultural homogenization has become a pervasive phenomenon, where local traditions and customs are being replaced by globalized norms. The dominance of Western cultural narratives has resulted in the marginalization of indigenous cultures, leading to a loss of cultural diversity. Furthermore, globalization has led to an increase in consumerism, with global brands and products becoming increasingly popular, often at the expense of local businesses and traditions.

<sup>5</sup> This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in urban agglomerates, where the confluence of globalization, technological advancements, and demographic shifts has created a unique cultural landscape. India's urban agglomerates, such as Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore, have become melting pots of diverse cultures, where traditional practices and modernity coexist in an uneasy alliance. The urban populace, particularly the younger generation, is increasingly embracing globalized cultural norms, often at the expense of their indigenous heritage.

As a result, a cultural identity crisis has emerged, where individuals are struggling to reconcile their traditional roots with their modern aspirations. This has led to a sense of disconnection from their cultural heritage, as they navigate the complexities of a globalized world. In this context, it is essential to explore the impact of globalization on the cultural diversity of urban agglomerates in India. How are other communities in these urban centres responding to the challenges posed by globalization? What are the implications of cultural homogenization for the urban populace, and how can we preserve the cultural diversity of these communities in the face of overwhelming global influences?

Moreover, the post-liberalization era in India has ushered in a new paradigm, characterized by the increasing influence of global capital, technological advancements, and the proliferation of digital media. This has led to a fundamental shift in the way individuals and communities interact, consume, and produce cultural goods and services. The post-liberalization paradigm has created new opportunities for cultural exchange, innovation, and entrepreneurship, but it has also raised concerns about cultural homogenization, the loss of traditional practices, and the erosion of cultural diversity.

In this context, the concept of post-traditionalism becomes particularly relevant. Post-traditionalism refers to the decline of traditional social structures, institutions, and norms, and the emergence of new forms of social organization, identity, and culture. In the post-traditional paradigm, individuals are no longer bound by traditional norms and expectations, and are free to create their own identities, choose their own cultural practices, and forge their own paths in life.

The intersection of post-liberalization and post-traditionalism has created a unique cultural landscape in urban agglomerates. On the one hand, the post-liberalization paradigm has brought about new economic opportunities, technological advancements, and cultural exchange. On the other hand, the post-traditional paradigm has led to a decline in traditional social structures, institutions, and norms, and the emergence of new forms of social organization, identity, and culture.

In this context, the study of cultural homogenization in urban agglomerates can be approached from a new paradigmatic perspective. Rather than viewing cultural homogenization as a straightforward process of cultural loss and domination, researchers can explore the complex and nuanced ways in which individuals and communities are negotiating

and redefining their cultural identities, practices, and traditions in the post-liberalization and post-traditional era.

### Review of Literature

Globalization, which is often touted as a harbinger of economic prosperity, has also led to the homogenization of cultures. The Western cultural paradigm, which is rooted in the values of individualism, consumerism, and capitalism, is increasingly being adopted by the smaller communities in India. According to Manuel Castells, a renowned sociologist, "the globalization of culture is a process of cultural homogenization, where the dominant culture, in this case, the Western culture, is imposed on the rest of the world" (Castells, 1996). The cultural homogenization is further exacerbated by the rapid spread of Western media, such as television, films, and music. The Indian media, which was once dominated by regional languages and cultural programs, is now increasingly being influenced by Western content.

Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian philosopher, predicted that the advent of technology would lead to the creation of a "global village" (McLuhan, 1964). According to McLuhan, the global village would be characterized by the instantaneous transmission of information and the collapse of geographical distances. However, McLuhan's concept of the global village has been criticized for its failure to account for the power dynamics involved in the transmission of information. The global village, as it exists today, is largely dominated by Western cultural and economic interests.

Anthropologists and sociologists have long been concerned with the impact of globalization on smaller communities. According to anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, "the globalization of culture is a complex process that involves the creation of new cultural forms and the transformation of existing ones" (Appadurai, 1990). Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has argued that the globalization of culture has led to the creation of a "liquid modernity" (Bauman, 2000). According to Bauman, liquid modernity is characterized by constant flux and change, which has led to the erosion of traditional cultural practices and values.

Several theoretical frameworks have also been proposed to explain the impact of globalization on smaller communities. One such framework is the concept of "cultural imperialism" (Tomlinson, 1991). According to this framework, the dominant Western culture is imposed on the rest of the world, leading to the erosion of traditional cultural practices and values. Another framework is the concept of "glocalization" (Robertson, 1995). According to this framework, globalization is not a one-way process, but rather a complex interaction between the global and the local.

From an ontological perspective, the cultural paradigm and heritage of smaller communities in India are facing an existential crisis. The rapid cultural homogenization through Westernization is eroding traditional cultural practices and values, challenging the very existence of these communities. As the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard argues, "the simulation of reality is more real than reality itself" (Baudrillard, 1994). This means that the simulated reality of Western cultural values and practices is becoming more real than the traditional cultural practices and values of smaller communities.

This ontological crisis raises fundamental questions about the nature of reality, identity, and culture. As Indian philosopher and cultural critic Ashis Nandy argues, "the survival of traditional cultures depends on their ability to resist the homogenizing forces of globalization" (Nandy, 2003). In this context, the concept of "cultural ontology" (Escobar, 1995) becomes essential, as it refers to how culture shapes our understanding of reality and our place within it. The cultural ontology of smaller communities in India is rooted in traditional cultural practices and values, which are now under threat.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. Examine the impact of globalization on cultural diversity in urban India
2. Analyse the intersection of post-liberalization and post-traditionalism in shaping cultural homogenization
3. Investigate how communities in urban India are redefining their cultural identities in response to globalization

### **Research Methodology**

A comprehensive <sup>10</sup> review of existing literature was conducted, including academic journals, books, and reports from reputable sources. The content analysis involved a systematic examination of texts, identifying patterns and themes related to cultural homogenization, globalization, and cultural identity in urban India. A comparative study approach was also used to analyse the intersection of post-liberalization and post-traditionalism in shaping cultural homogenization, and to investigate how communities in urban India are redefining their cultural identities in response to globalization.

By leveraging existing research and data, this study aimed to provide <sup>1</sup> a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics between globalization, cultural diversity, and identity in urban India.

### **Globalization, Consumerism, and the Homogenization of Indian Culture**

Cultural homogenization, a phenomenon that has been unfolding over the past few decades, has been significantly accelerated in the post-liberalization era, particularly since the 1990s. The spread of consumer culture, fuelled by <sup>1</sup> the rise of global brands such as Apple, Nike, and Reebok, has created a global consumer culture characterized by the desire for standardized products and services, often perceived as symbols of modernity and sophistication. As Baudrillard aptly noted, "the consumer society is a society of simulation, where the simulation of reality is more real than reality itself" (Baudrillard, 1994). In the Indian context, <sup>13</sup> this has led to the simulation of Western cultural values and practices overshadowing local cultural practices and values among certain urban <sup>16</sup> populations, particularly among the younger generation. Over time, this has resulted in a gradual erosion of traditional cultural practices and the homogenization of Indian culture, as globalized cultural norms and values become increasingly entrenched in urban India.

#### **Examples of Changing Trends**

1. From Traditional Indian Sweets to Western-Style Desserts - The popularity of desserts like cheesecakes, brownies, and cupcakes among Indian youth, particularly in urban areas, driven by social media influences showcasing visually appealing desserts.



2. From Indian Classical Music to Western Music - The emergence of Bollywood pop, blending traditional Indian music with Western influences, gaining immense popularity amongst youth through social media platforms.
3. From Traditional Indian Clothing to Western-Style Clothing - Increasing inclination towards Western-style clothing, driven by fashion influencers and the showcasing of modern trends on platforms like Instagram.
4. From Indian Festivals to Western-Style Celebrations - The growing popularity of celebrations like Halloween and Valentine's Day, perceived as more modern and "cool," especially among the youth.
5. From Traditional Indian Cuisine to Western-Style Fast Food - The proliferation of fast-food chains like McDonald's and KFC, offering convenience and a modern dining experience preferred by the youth.
6. From Indian Languages to English - Increasing reliance on English as a dominant language, particularly in urban youth culture, facilitated by social media use.
7. From Traditional Indian Sports to Western Sports - The ascendance of Western sports like football and basketball, which are gaining popularity over traditional Indian sports like cricket and kabaddi.
8. From Indian Art Forms to Western Art Forms - A rise in interest in contemporary dance and music among urban youth, reflecting a shift from traditional Indian art forms.
9. From Traditional Indian Architecture to Western-Style Architecture - A trend toward adopting Western architectural styles in urban development, perceived as more prestigious and modern.
10. From Indian Values to Western Values - A shift in values, with increasing acceptance of individualism and romantic love, challenging traditional Indian values like arranged marriages and collective systems.

Likewise, the shifting trends in consumer behaviour, including the transition from Maggi noodles to Buldak Ramen (which can be contributed to trending Korean culture rather than marketing success) or transitioning from Parle-G biscuits to Oreo in supermarkets or adopting branded clothes like H&M and ZARA over traditional clothes especially among large sections of English speaking Indian urban youth; prompt significant ontological reflections on the nature of reality, identity, and culture. Martin Heidegger wrote, "the question of the meaning of being is the most fundamental question of philosophy" (Heidegger, 1927). In



cultural homogenization, the question of cultural identity and tradition becomes central: are they defined by local customs or global trends?

The economic liberalization of 1991 in India had profound consequences, including cultural homogenization—where local cultures increasingly adopt global cultural trends. Studies reflect that liberalization resulted in increased foreign investment and growth of multinational corporations, thereby propagating Western cultural values (Kumar, 2001). The consumption of Western products surged, leading to a decline in traditional goods (Mazzarella, 2003; Dutta, 2008). This spread has redefined marketing practices in India (Kumar, 2008), altering the cultural landscape.

Enculturation—the process of learning and internalizing cultural norms—faces disruption amid cultural homogenization, which can create disconnection between cultural heritage and identity (Hong, 2010). This disruption illustrates a paradigm shift, ultimately leading to the homogenization of cultural practices (Tomlinson, 1991).

Cultural roles—social expectations associated with specific statuses—are rearranged as new cultural norms challenge traditional ones (Lamont, 2000). Cultural homogenization, therefore, significantly affects enculturation, cultural roles, and overarching paradigms, often creating cultural disorientation.

### **Post Liberalization as a Leading Factor for Cultural Homogenization and consumerism**

The 1991 economic liberalization policies marked a significant turning point in India's economic and cultural trajectory. The policies aimed to integrate India into the global economy, leading to rapid economic growth and increased cultural exchange and influence from Western countries (Bhagwati, 2004). Globalization has facilitated the flow of ideas, cultures, and values across borders, with multinational corporations, media, and technology playing significant roles (Appadurai, 1990).

Consumer Culture and Westernization - The growth of consumer culture in India has sparked increased demand for Western-style products and services, resulting in the emergence of Western-style shopping malls and restaurants as symbols of modernity and aspirational lifestyles (Varman & Belk, 2012). According to a study published in the *Journal of Consumer*

**Research**, "Indian consumers are increasingly embracing Western-style consumption patterns, which is leading to a homogenization of cultural practices" (Dwyer, 2011).

Media and Cultural Influence - Since the 1990s, the Indian media landscape has evolved with satellite television, the internet, and social media, where Western media content has gained popularity and shaped local cultural tastes (Punathambekar, 2010). A study published in the Journal of International Communication found that "Indian youth are increasingly influenced by Western media, which is leading to a decline in traditional cultural practices" (Kumar, 2015).

The Advent of social media - The widespread adoption <sup>11</sup> of social media apps such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat have further accelerated the process of cultural homogenization. Social media platforms have created new avenues for cultural exchange and influence, allowing Western cultural norms and values to penetrate deeper into Indian society (Kumar & Sharma, 2018). According to a study published in the Journal of social media Studies, "social media has become a key driver of cultural homogenization in India, with young Indians increasingly embracing Western-style cultural practices and values" (Singh & Kumar, 2020).

The advent of globalization and social media has made Western and Eastern thoughts, ideas, ideals, beliefs, culture, taste, lifestyle, and aspirations increasingly accessible to the Indian population, particularly among the younger generation. This has been particularly significant for a population that has historically harboured a wary post-colonial mindset, suspicious of Western cultural influences and mindful of the need to preserve Indian cultural identity. However, with the proliferation of social media platforms, online content, and global cultural flows, Indian youth are now exposed to a diverse array of cultural influences, from Western ideals of individualism and consumerism to Eastern philosophies of Buddhism and Confucianism. Moreover, trends and fads now emerge and dissipate at a global level, rather than being confined to regional boundaries. As a result, Indian youth are swept up in a constant cycle of consumption, with the latest global trends in food, clothing, accessories, and vacationing becoming the ultimate status symbols. The emphasis on spending and consuming has created a culture of instant gratification, where the value of goods and experiences is often measured by their Instagram-worthiness, rather than their intrinsic value or cultural significance. This has led to a homogenization of cultural experiences, where regional

identities and traditional practices are increasingly being supplanted by a globalized consumer culture.

### **Redefining Cultural Roles in a Seemingly Post-Traditional Society**

As India continues to evolve, its cultural landscape is undergoing a significant transformation. The increased exposure to Western cultural values and practices has led to a redefinition of "Indian-ness" among young Indians. Many are embracing Western-style lifestyles and values, while still trying to hold on to their traditional roots (Brosius, 2010). This negotiation between traditional and modern cultural identities is leading to the creation of new cultural forms and practices (Kumar, 2015). According to a study published in the *Journal of Youth Studies*, "young Indians are navigating between traditional and modern cultural identities, leading to the creation of new cultural forms and practices" (Kumar, 2015). This cultural shift is also reflected in the way young Indians are redefining traditional cultural practices, such as arranged marriages and festivals, to suit their modern lifestyles.

**Language and Identity: A Delicate Balance** - The dominance of English has become a concern, as it threatens to erode traditional languages and identities. This is particularly worrying, as language is a vital part of cultural heritage (Sonntag, 2003). Research has shown that the use of English as a lingua franca is leading to a decline in the use of traditional languages, particularly among young Indians (Lauring & Klitmøller, 2015). According to a study published in the *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, "the use of English as a lingua franca is leading to a decline in the use of traditional languages, particularly among young Indians" (Lauring & Klitmøller, 2015). This language shift has significant implications for Indian culture and identity, as traditional languages are often closely tied to cultural practices and traditions.

**Changing Family Structures and Urbanization** - The post-traditional paradigm in India is also characterized by changing family structures and increasing urbanization. With the growth of the Indian economy and the increasing influence of Western cultural values, traditional family structures are changing, and urbanization is on the rise (Kumar, 2015). According to a study published in the *Journal of Family Issues*, "changing family structures

and increasing urbanization are leading to new forms of social organization and identity in India" (Kumar, 2015).

### **Cultural Hybridity: A New Indian Identity?**

The intersection of traditional and Western values has given birth to new cultural identities. The "Desi" culture, for example, blends traditional values and lifestyles with modern attitudes (Maira, 2002). This cultural hybridity is a key feature of contemporary Indian culture, as individuals navigate between traditional and modern cultural identities (Gupta, 2012). According to a study published in the *Journal of Cultural Studies*, "cultural hybridity is a key feature of contemporary Indian culture, as individuals negotiate between traditional and modern cultural identities" (Gupta, 2012). This cultural hybridity is reflected in the way Indians are redefining traditional cultural practices, such as music and dance, to suit their modern lifestyles.

Despite the prevalence of cultural homogenization, many Indians are seeking to reconnect with their heritage. There is a growing interest in traditional Indian crafts and practices, particularly among young Indians who are seeking to rediscover their cultural roots (Tarlo, 1996; Scandin, 2017). According to a study published in the *Journal of Material Culture*, "there is a growing interest in traditional Indian crafts and practices, particularly among young Indians who are seeking to reconnect with their cultural heritage" (Scandin, 2017). This renewed interest in traditional culture is reflected in the way Indians are reviving traditional cultural practices, such as yoga and Ayurveda, and incorporating them into their modern lifestyles.

However, the rate of change in India is accelerating exponentially, driven by technological advancements, globalization, demographic changes, and growing environmental concerns (Rosenau, 2003). This rapid change is likely to continue, with significant implications for Indian culture and society (Dator, 2009). According to a study published in the *Journal of Futures Studies*, "the current rate of change is unprecedented, and it is likely to continue to accelerate in the coming decades" (Dator, 2009). This exponential change is reflected in the way Indians are adapting to new technologies, such as social media and e-commerce, and incorporating them into their daily lives.

### **A Paradigm Shift?**

The last significant paradigm shifts in India occurred during British colonial rule. Since then, cultural paradigms have continued to evolve, influenced by Nehruvian socialism, globalization, and the rise of Hindu nationalism (Khilnani, 1997). The post-independence period has seen significant cultural shifts, particularly with the rise of globalization and Hindu nationalism (Bose, 2004). According to a study published in the Journal of Asian Studies, "the post-independence period has seen significant cultural shifts, particularly with the rise of globalization and Hindu nationalism" (Bose, 2004). This paradigm shift is reflected in the way Indians are redefining their cultural identity and negotiating between traditional and modern cultural values.

**Characteristics of the post-traditional Paradigm** - The current cultural paradigm in India is marked by de-rationalization, consumerism, globalization, individualism, changing family structures, and increasing urbanization (Giddens, 1991). This post-traditional paradigm is characterized by a decline in traditional social structures and institutions, and the emergence of new forms of social and the emergence of new forms of social organization and identity (Appadurai, 1996). According to a study published in the Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, "the post-traditional paradigm is marked by a decline in traditional social structures and institutions, and the emergence of new forms of social organization and identity" (Appadurai, 1996). This paradigm shift is reflected in the way Indians are redefining their cultural identity and negotiating between traditional and modern cultural values.

The post-traditional paradigm in India is also characterized by de-rationalization and consumerism. With the rise of globalization and the growth of the Indian middle class, consumer culture has become a dominant force in Indian society (Brosius, 2010). According to a study published in the Journal of Consumer Culture, "consumer culture has become a key driver of cultural change in India, as individuals increasingly define themselves through their consumption practices" (Varman & Belk, 2012). Globalization has also led to the rise of individualism in India. With the growth of the Indian economy and the increasing influence of Western cultural values, individualism has become a dominant ideology in Indian society (Giddens, 1991). According to a study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, "individualism has become a key driver of cultural change in India, as individuals increasingly prioritize their own needs and desires over traditional social norms" (Triandis, 1995).

## **Recognizing Diversity in the Face of Globalization**

While globalization and modernization trends may be prevalent in urban areas and among certain sections of society or of population age, it's essential to recognize that not all communities are uniformly adopting these trends. In fact, research has shown that the impact of globalization and modernization can vary greatly depending on factors such as geographical location, socioeconomic status, and cultural background (Appadurai, 1996; Bhabha, 1994).

For example, migrant workers may be using mobile phones and social media to stay connected with their families and communities back home, but they may not be adopting Western-style consumer culture or values (Kumar, 2015). A study published in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* found that "migrant workers in India are using technology to maintain transnational connections, but they are also maintaining strong ties to their traditional cultural practices" (Rajan, 2017).

Similarly, rural communities may be adopting modern agricultural technologies, but they may not be abandoning their traditional farming practices or cultural values (Sharma, 2011). A study published in the *Journal of Rural Studies* found that "rural communities in India are adopting modern technologies, but they are also maintaining strong ties to their traditional cultural practices and values" (Singh, 2013).

Indigenous communities in India are also experiencing the impacts of globalization, but in complex and varied ways. On the one hand, globalization has brought new economic opportunities and access to modern technologies and services (Xaxa, 2016). However, it has also led to the loss of traditional lands, cultures, and ways of life (Kumar, 2010).

A study published in the *Journal of Indigenous Studies* found that "indigenous communities in India are experiencing significant cultural and economic changes as a result of globalization, but they are also resisting and adapting to these changes in creative and innovative ways" (Kumar, 2010).

### **Resisting Homogenization**

Despite the forces of globalization and modernization, many communities in India are resisting homogenization and maintaining their unique cultural identities. This resistance can

take many forms, from the maintenance of traditional cultural practices and languages to the creation of new cultural forms and identities (Bhabha, 1994).

A study <sup>22</sup> published in the *Journal of Cultural Studies* found that "communities in India are resisting cultural homogenization by creating new cultural forms and identities that blend traditional and modern elements" (Gupta, 2012).

## <sup>20</sup> **Conclusion**

This study has examined the impact of globalization on cultural diversity in urban India, particularly in the post-liberalization era. The findings suggest that globalization has led to cultural homogenization, where local cultures are adopting globalized cultural norms and values. However, despite these trends, many communities in India are resisting homogenization and maintaining their unique cultural identities.

The study highlights the importance of recognizing diversity in the face of globalization. While globalization and modernization trends may be prevalent in urban areas and among certain sections of society, it's essential to acknowledge that not all communities are uniformly adopting these trends. Indigenous communities, rural communities, and migrant workers are all experiencing the impacts of globalization in complex and varied ways.

The research also underscores the need to promote cultural diversity and preserve traditional cultural practices in the face of overwhelming global influences. This can be achieved through policies and initiatives that support cultural education, community engagement, and cultural exchange programs.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that cultural diversity is a vital component of Indian society, and it's essential to preserve and promote it in the face of globalization. By recognizing and valuing diversity, we can work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society that celebrates the unique cultural identities of all its citizens.



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