
CULTURAL EROSION IN INDIA : CULTURAL LOSS AND A THREAT TO THE NATION'S TRADITIONS AND ETHNICITY

Senjuti Ghosh

M. Sc in Economics (The University of Burdwan)

B. Ed – Pursuing (Government College of Education, Burdwan)

Junior Teacher at Pratibha Cultural Centre

Visharad in Odissi Dance

DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2024.v09i04.014 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2024.v09i04.014>

Received: 14 April 2024 / Accepted: 25 April 2024 / Published: 30 April 2024

ABSTRACT

In Babu's words, a nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people, but when the people themselves arrive at a compulsion that cultural traditions and customs are obsolete, then it raises the red flag towards the beginning of cultural erosion. This paper revolves around the theme of Cultural Loss and how it may arrive at a loss of the identity of a nation. Bharat, a meeting land of diverse cultures, has been losing its roots in the urge of its people wanting to become modernized. Modernization, according to the present society is the abandoning of one's native culture and plunging into the pool of others. This is, by not an inch, an example of modernization, but is a gateway towards grave erosion of native cultures and traditions. Not only is this Cultural loss affecting the roots of Bharat, but also bringing about societal and economic degradation in the country, as the culture of a nation is intertwined with its society and economy. Now there is dire need to resurrect what has been lost to regain back the identity of the nation. The government is trying at its best to restore India's cultural heritage, but from our end, for the sake of India and Indians, we should also take a deeper look into the factors of this degradation, and try our best to raise concern about and maintain traditional culture and customs.

Keywords : Bharat, India, Culture, Tradition, Cultural Loss, Cultural Erosion, Globalization

Introduction

Culture is considered as a very important aspect as it is a reflection of the community or the nation. This means that culture is an extremely vital shaping factor in how a particular

community responds, reacts, and grows, both individually and together. How people of a nation live their lives in society is also largely determined by cultural factors. Culture creates a great sense of belongingness amongst the people of a nation. Culture also provides a sense of stability towards the people of the nation, creating an instant connection between strangers who have never met before and provides an initial foundation for them to build a strong relationship. But, the identity of our nation is fading away as Bharat is going through a phase of Cultural instability and erosion. Majority of the people out in the nation are at the urge of instant 'modernization', terming the basic traditional practices of Bharat as obsolete and backdated. Some people laugh at others when they see them in a dhoti, if they eat in a banana leaf, if they spend time reading some great old books like Bhagavad Gita, thirukural etc, instead of partying. If a person is seen coming around the tulasi plant every morning, and providing prayers, he/she is termed as 'people from old generation'. Eating with spoons is in practice just because a place in high class society has to be maintained. Brushing the teeth with natural neem sticks is considered as 'village culture'. In the urge of becoming a 'pro' in GEN - Z, the nation is losing its roots. Traditional values and practices are considered 'low class practices'. Even mixing the intra-national cultures is in high practice, ranging from use of Mehendi, Lehanga and Sherwani in Bengali weddings, instead of Alta, Saree and Dhoti. This in little amounts is natural as India is a diversified country but when the general traditions of a place gets obsolete and other cultures overrule the traditional ones, it raises cultural erosion. When people of the nation prefer Zumba, Aerobics, Salsa, Ballet over Indian traditional Indian dances such as Odissi, Bharatnatyam, Kathak and so on, just to get prominence in the society, it leads to cultural loss. The choice of Pasta and Pizza over Rice and Chapatti; and attaining fluency in English while none of the traditional languages is well spoken, is also a part of Cultural loss.

Objectives of the Study

- To understand what "Culture" actually is
- To understand how diversified Indian Culture is
- To create a clear understanding of Cultural Loss
- To enumerate thoughts upon how Cultural Loss is affecting the Society and Economy
- To learn how Cultural Loss is becoming a global issue and how the loss itself is an effect of globalization.
- To take a look at what the Indian Government is planning to preserve the native Cultures

- To generate a basic understanding on how we, on our end cooperate to resurrect our culture

What is Culture?

Culture can be defined as the way in which particular groups of people do things. Different groups may have different cultures. Culture is a word for the 'way of life' of different troops of people. The set of cultures includes language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, and ceremonies, among other elements. While analysing the concept of culture, we may come across various definitions of culture, which are as follows :

- A 19th-century English anthropologist named Edward Burnett Tylor in the first paragraph of his *Primitive Culture* (1871), defined the classic definition of culture. It quoted, “Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”
- In *Anthropology* (1881) Tylor, made it clear that culture is possessed by man alone.
- U.S. anthropologists A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn cited 164 definitions of culture in *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (1952), ranging from “learned behaviour” to “ideas in the mind,” “a logical construct,” “a statistical fiction,” “a psychic defence mechanism,” and many more.
- The conception of culture that is cited by Kroeber and Kluckhohn and also by many other great anthropologists is that – Culture is an abstraction or, more specifically, “an abstraction from behaviour.”
- In 2001, Culture was defined by UNESCO as “the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs”

In a real sense, Culture can be defined as a system of values and beliefs which we share with others, all of which gives us a sense of belongingness or identity. Culture can be material as well as non – material. Material culture is the inclusiveness of physical objects and belongings of members of a group of people. Examples of material culture include money, machines, clothing, ornaments, utensils, art, tools, weapons, buildings, and monuments.

Non-material culture includes ideas, beliefs, norms, rules, ethics, and attitudes of a society and does not include any physical thing or artefacts. Examples of nonmaterial culture include

languages and dialects, words, dress codes, etiquette, rituals, religion, laws, punishments, business and social transactions, values, and ethics. Many of these elements of culture are learned.

India's Cultural Diversity

As stated by famous novelist Mark Twain, "India is, the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grandmother of tradition. Our most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of men are treasured up in India only." Therefore we can say that our motherland carries a very rich cultural heritage. We can regard India as a country with a very broad outlook. People from different caste and creeds, bearing different norms and customs and following different styles of living are all confined in a 32,87,263 square kilometre area! They may follow different cultures and may have different outlooks, and this is the diversity that makes India vigorous. But above all, there remains a sense of 'Unity in Diversity' among every heart of the people residing here. Unity in Diversity resembles a sense of oneness amidst the varied practices of the country. Unlike, the other countries of the world, India does not hold any significant national language, as different people from different sections of the Indian society speak varied languages according to their choice. To maintain unity in such a diversified nation, it had adopted the term of a multilingual nation, which includes eminent languages like Hindi, English, Urdu, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam, Kannada and many, many more. Not only is it the case for language, but also for varied norms and customs celebrated all over the country. Some celebrate Pongal, so some celebrate Diwali, some fast for Navratri, so some have a feast in Onam. This is also the case of diversified grounds including dances ranging from Ghoomar to Mohiniattam, music ranging from Hindustani Classical to Carnatic, from Anrakhi to Dhoti, from AmbotTik to KoatPitha and so much that couldn't be covered within this bound scope. Overall, India is a mix of all customers and traditions bearing different cultures in every corner of the country.

What is Cultural Loss?

With the upgradation of the world and the widespread urbanization, the cultural base of the nation is loosening up. The bond and ties the nation used to hold are stretched Immensely by the uprising conflicts and race among the divisions of the nation. This is why, the country is facing such a situation in which the roots and traditions, borne by different communities of the nation are being neglected or are suppressed. As the people of the nation are being deprived of their language, traditions, customs and other cultural roots, India is losing its spiritual values and culture, often referred to as a Cultural Loss. Cultural loss is not abrupt or sudden, instead, it occurs with the passage of time with the negligence toward the culture coming from the people themselves. It may also be regarded with a better term called Cultural Erosion. As we know,

erosion is the process of wearing away of the essentials. Similarly, Cultural Erosions refer to the wearing away of the cultural diversity a country holds. As per what Nationalism in Europe says, the base of the country being a nation, and not a colony is that the rich and varied cultural heritage of the country. Cultural erosion is the loss of unique cultural practices, beliefs, and traditions over time. Cultural erosion can occur due to factors such as globalisation, urbanisation, environmental changes, political and economic pressures and so on. It is the process of a civilization, group or organization losing its core elements — often because of new elements taking their place. Cultural Loss is the phenomenon in which the traditions and customs that a community used to follow earlier, and had marvellous outreaches, are diminishing with time and getting eroded at a faster pace. Therefore, with ongoing time, India in the present world is facing a massive amount of cultural loss and is losing ground upon the context.

Cultural Loss affecting the Society

There are various reasons by which a range of Cultural repercussions does occur. These include the loss of traditional practices and customs and the ways of living. Man, being a social being, has to stay as a part of the society till his last breath. When their roots, that had ventured deep start to loosen up, it creates a situation of turmoil. The balance of the society in terms of culture gets disturbed, creating adverse effects upon the society. It results in reduction of social cohesion and society wise mental health challenges. Feeling their roots being disturbed, a community may suffer from inferiority and distress, this leading to enhanced tremor in the grounds of societal peace. Speaking from particular views, the customs of Bengal beholding rituals like the Manasa Puja, Itu Puja, Shitala Puja are being minimized and there is a sudden uprising of other festivals which were never ever celebrated in Bengal in the past. Hands of Bengali brides are lacking Alta and getting filled up with mehendi, which was never a Bengali tradition. Why are the tribals forcefully pushed into modernization leaving their traditional costumes of tree barks and shell necklaces? Why in the name of feminism, the women are regarding Indian costumes as backdated? Why are the 'smart' men avoiding dhotis and are interested in jeans? Why tradition dances such as Santhali, Garba, and even pure classicals are considered boring while, Zumba is in immense practice? This cultural loss in practice is resulting in a massive crack in society, which can never be replenished! This modernization, severing the strings of traditionalism may look attractive for a short span of time, but the erosion it is causing towards the society, is impossible to count in. The societal values are losing their importance and the unity that our nation possesses is being ruptured frantically.

Cultural Loss affecting the Economy

There has been a magnificent interconnectedness between Culture and the Economy of a nation. Even there is a very dominant branch of Economics that deals with culture and society. Cultural

economics is the branch of economics that studies the relationship between culture and related economic outcomes. A nation's economic outcomes, largely depend upon the way its cultural background is framed. The one with a rich cultural diversity is bound to receive higher rewards upon using its traditional folklore as an economical resource. The traditional customers of an area have been known to lure visitors from ages, and this practice had brought immense economic glory to the nation. There has been a massive amount of economic progress relating to the traditions, classics and cultures of the nation. Bringing in immense economic prosperity, the unearthing of the cultural roots of the nation had subsequently resulted in a grave economical downturn of the nation. The revenues it used to earn from the traditional and cultural practices, are being dismantled in the urge of urgent modernization. The general cultures of the nations are becoming hobo, affecting greatly the economical progressiveness of the country. Observing from the other side, a nation with lost cultural roots would try to rejuvenate using the aurora of the imported culture, but what happens here is that, the exploitation of the economy of the nation in order to adapt to those new cultures overrules the effects of the new cultures. In this way both the economic reserves are exploited as well as the traditional roots lose ground. Overall the loss of Cultural identities are enough to make the economic wall of the nation fall into gradual turbulence.

Cultural Loss - as an effect of globalization and also an uprising Global Issue

Globalization, as a policy since the ancient 1992, is one of the main feature of the LPG Policies of the Five Year plans of India. As a major phenomenon, it has transformed the world in many ways ranging from the widespread of Western Culture which in turn had eroded the cultural identities of the Indian societies, this terming it as "backdated". The increasing interconnectedness of people, economies, and cultures has brought about thousands of changes, including the deterioration of cultural boundaries and the emergence of a global culture. According to Giddens (1990), globalization has brought about a extricating of social relations, resulting in the loss of native cultural identities. He argues that as people become more interconnected, they begin to identify more with global culture than with local culture. In a similar sense, Appadurai (1996) argues that globalization has led to the uprising of a global cultural economy, where the production and consumption of cultural products are on a global basis. He suggests that the results of this lies in a homogenization of culture, where people intake the same cultural products regardless of their location, thus leading to a loss of cultural diversity and a weakening of local cultural identities. Western culture has been continuously dominating our nation due to its excessive power in all aspects. It has been luring the locals towards following their which they regard as more sophisticated than following the traditional habits. History is on repeat and our nation is lured to again become a colonial hub of the western cultures. Therefore Globalization and the thought of Cultural Erosion is intertwined, while the

Cultural Loss is gradually making its place as a global issue, which needs to be checked and dominated so that it might not impose threats upon the nation in the near future. Both as a effect of globalization, and as a uprising global issue, losing Cultural ground is also a threat to the national identity.

The measures taken by the Government to resurrect the downfall

The government plays a significant role in preserving traditional culture of a nation by enacting policies and providing support for the protection and promotion of our rich cultural heritage. This includes funding for cultural preservation projects, establishing cultural institutions, creating laws to protect traditional knowledge and cultural expressions, and supporting cultural education and awareness programs. Additionally, the government may work with native and local communities to protect their traditional practices and knowledge. The government's role in preserving traditional culture includes setting up of cultural awareness programmes, promotion of a specified curriculum that includes cultural knowledge, protection and preservation of the national and local cultural sites, literature, language and heritage. Article 29(1) of the Indian Constitution guarantees 'any section of citizens' with a distinct language, script or culture has the right to conserve and preserve it. This article therefore guarantees the minority group the rights to protect and preserve their culture. In order to protect, promote and preserve various forms of folk art throughout the country, Zonal Cultural Centres (ZCCs) with its various headquarters at Patiala, Nagpur, Udaipur, Prayagraj, Kolkata, Dimapur and Thanjavur conduct a number of activities such as cultural programmes, seminars, workshops, exhibitions and craft fairs on regular basis in their member States. For preservation and development of art, culture and crafts across the country, Ministry of Culture organizes Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsavs (RSMs) through these Zonal Cultural Centres where a large number of artists from all over the nation gather to showcase their talents. Since 2015, the Ministry has organized 14 RSMs up till now, in addition to three Zonal Level RSMs at Kota, Pune and Delhi. These RSMs are spreading awareness among people about cultural heritage and ancient cultural values of the country, also reconnecting the latter generation with our culture and to showcase before the country and the world India's soft power of unity in diversity.

How can we retrieve and preserve our Culture?

Running a general vocal survey among few people concerned and connected with culture, the answers can be tied up using interconnections and opinions can be traced out as follows:

- The prior thing that needs to be done is to draw a clear line of demarcation between religion and culture. We most often arrive at the misconception that culture and religion are equal. The traditional dress, Saree, is worn in different styles in different parts of the

nation and lehengas worn in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Haryana have been associated with Hindus, whereas Sharara, Kurtas and Salwar with Muslims and any western dress to liberals and moderns. 'Bindi' which was part of the culture of Bharat has been shrunk to the wear of Hindu women only. The same goes with the costumes of men; no book of any religion has defined the dress code but still dresses have become the attributes in identifying religion. In the villages of the Northern part of the nation, dhoti and kurta were traditionally worn, the Hindus have changed it to jeans and Muslims to those pyjama which hardly touch their ankles. They need to understand that dress is not a part of their religion nor does represent their modern outlook but it is part of their culture. Men in south have by and large maintained their lungi which is appropriate for the humid weather of south. Till few years ago the muslim women of Bengal and even Bangladesh used to wear Saree and Bindi but religious fanaticism is rapidly changing things there as a result they have start shifting to salwar kamiz and have stop wearing bindi. Unless we will draw a clear line of distinction between the culture and religion, people with religions which were originated on other piece of land will continue copying the culture of those lands.

- The second most important thing which needs to be done is to clearly explain to the people of the nation about the evolution of culture. If we will ask the common people to simply abandon western culture and adopt their own Bhartiya culture, the chances are minimal that they would listen to us. There is a dire need to present the logic of why our culture is rich and why it shouldn't be abandoned. It needs to be cleared up why saree for women, dhoti for men is an appropriate dress code. The idea behind such a code is because it is perfect for the hot weather of Bharat while jeans is not. Holi should be celebrated by everyone who lives in the northern part of Bharat as it has significance related to weather. Holi or the Spring Festival is considered as a Hindu festival but Hindus of the south don't celebrate it because it has no significance to them because the weather conditions of the south are different from the North. Likewise Pongal is celebrated by every person of South, and again it is considered as Hindu festival but the people in the North do not even know how and when it is celebrated, most in villages of North do not even know if such festival exists.
- We, the people of India, generally abandon things which we feel are inferior in comparison. To protect our culture we need to come out from this inferiority complex which we have developed over a long and continuous invasion and foreign colonialism. People must be taught that, their Culture is what they be be proud of, not run away from it.

- Language, as a factor plays an important role in preserving culture. Abandoning one's language or dialect is a direct threat to the culture. English has become a necessity and no one can deny this fact but how tough is it to be multilingual or even bilingual? Is it not possible to use English as a professional language and mother tongue to be used at home and surroundings? Kids should rather be encouraged to speak in mother tongue at home.

Conclusion

We can conclude this chapter with the thought that we should not try to impose something upon people, as an 'Imposition' always cause suffocation and our instinct and reflexes ask us to oppose it. So rather we should encourage people to adopt the native culture by spreading awareness and knowledge about the richness of the culture. Cultural loss or rising Cultural erosion is a complex and direct threat to the nation – including its society and economy. The challenges faced by the nation in this context can range over to global importance in which a nation is bound to lose its identity as it loses its roots of existence. The only measures that may lead to the resurrection of the native culture is by providing education about the country's cultural heritage, history, language, and customs, so that people can be more aware of the importance of preserving their cultural tags. Governments and organizations can work to protect and preserve historical sites and artifacts that are important to the country's cultural heritage. They can provide funding and resources to support the preservation of cultural heritage, such as traditional music, dance, and other art forms. The government of the nation and the other non governmental organizations may take a lead in promoting cultural tourism, find ways for preserving traditional customs and practices, Encourage cultural diversity, invest in building partnerships and alliances and take an action in encouraging the use of local languages.

References

1. Cultural Diversity in India by Marina Langkam
2. Young Scott (November 2022). What is Cultural Diversity?
<https://young.scot/get-informed/what-is-cultural-diversity/>
3. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_India
4. <https://thegeographyteacher.com/cultural-erosion/>
5. <https://homework.study.com/explanation/what-is-cultural-erosion.html>
6. Harvery, E. (September 2019) Climate change and the loss of cultural heritage.
<https://unausa.org/climate-change-and-the-loss-of-cultural-heritage/>

7. Henrich, J. (2004). Demography and cultural evolution: How adaptive cultural processes can produce maladaptive losses: The tasmanian case. *American Antiquity*, 69(2), 197– 214
<https://pressbooks.pub/terraincognita/chapter/arinyo-i-prats-a-combining-to-preserve-tools-to-estimate-the-resilience-against-cultural-loss/>
8. Sulu, D. (2022), What do we understand by loss of culture is loss of identity
<https://www.brookings.edu/collection/how-cultural-factors-shape-economic-outcomes/>
9. Stensing, S. (2015), Destroying Cultural Heritage : more than just material damage
<https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/destroying-cultural-heritage-more-just-material-damage>