Impact of Colonialism on Indian Multiculturalism: An Analysis

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
	The British East India Company established its first factory in Surat in 1613 A.D. and subsequently spread their trade all over India. Not only expanding their trade, but also captured political power in due course of time, specially from the battle of Plassey in 1757. After gaining of political power, they imposed English language and Western education system in the country that led to influence India's multiculturalism and formation of a new elite class, while simultaneously marginalizing indigenous languages and knowledge systems. Besides, the colonial rule influenced religious practices and social traditions which helped to form a hybrid cultural identity. English language and western culture was given priority in all sphere and as such it became dominate culture over India's past cultural heritage. This led to create discontent among the Indian people and they started nationalist movement to get relief of such domination. These movements played a crucial role in the preservation and revival of indigenous cultural practices and the formation of a post-colonial national identity. By examining the cultural, social, and administrative impacts of British colonialism in India, this research paper provides a shaded perspective on how British colonial rule redesigned Indian society and influenced the structure of contemporary Indian multicultural identity.

Introduction

Multiculturalism is a relatively new phenomenon in the vocabulary of social sciences. It refers to the presence and acceptance of different and varied cultural or ethnic groups inhabiting in a society. The term try to ensure the idea that various diverse groups can co-exist peacefully in a society through their positive and constructive contributions as well as respecting different culture, language, heritage and social rituals. ***According to Oxford English Dictionary, "Multiculturalism is the presence of, or support for the presence of, several distinct cultural or ethnic groups within a society.[1]***

Multiculturalism seeks the inclusion of the views and contributions of diverse members of society while maintaining respect for their differences and withholding the demand for their assimilation into the dominant culture.[2]

It can be witnessed as a social conception, a political philosophy, or a set of ideas aimed at managing and respecting diversity and promoting inclusiveness to a single umbrella.

Aspects of multiculturalism: There are some key aspects of multiculturalism. These are as follows:

(i)   **Diversity:** Multiculturalism recognizes and acknowledges the existence of different cultures, ethnicity, religions, languages, and other socio-cultural characteristics and norms within a society.

(ii)   **Coexistence and Harmony:** It promotes the concept that various cultural groups and ethnic communities can live together in a society without interfering other cultures or coming under a single dominant culture. This helps in the harmonic co-existence of diverse communities and groups in a society.

(iii)   **Respect and Appreciation:** Multiculturalism encourages respect for other cultures, traditions, and appreciation of the values, and perspectives of diverse cultures. It also addresses the requirements of minority groups.

(iv)   **Inclusion and Participation:** It tries to ensure that all cultural groups have opportunities to participate in society and have their voices to be listened. All communities get chances to express their voices in the social and political platforms.

Therefore, multiculturalism is seen as a harmonic and inclusive concept that makes bridges of gapes of a diverse society with positive and constructive outlook.

In India there are ***1632 different languages and dialects***.[3] Before the British colonial force came to India, the society was scattering in many small groups and communities. The colonial rulers suppressed,

harassed and dominated the people. During their reign, the multiculturalism in India was getting influence from different angles.

Impact of Colonialism on Indian Multiculturalism

The British colonial rule in India, straddling from 1757A.D. to 1947, represents a significant era in the history of the country. The British East India Company initially established *first trade centre at Surat, Gujarat in 1613*[4] and made relations with Indian princely states, gradually expanding economic, military and political control over the Indian subcontinent. Following the Sepoy mutiny in 1857, India came under British Crown's rule directly through the '*Allahabad Darbar' that held on 1st November, 1857*,[5] starting the British Raj formally. Colonial rule greatly influenced Indian society, resulting widespread changes in administration, governance, Public policy, economy, social structures, traditions and cultural practices. The colonial policies, such as the introduction of the English language and Western education systems, the restructuring of legal system,agricultural practices, harvesting, Art and Literature, etc. indelibly changed India's cultural and societal heritage. It significantly influenced Indian multiculturalism, festivals, social rituals and as such other prevailing customs in all respects. The colonial impact on Indian multiculturalism may be discussed as under:

i)   **On the domain of Language and Culture:** The colonial impact was mostly circling around the introduction of English Language. *The introduction of English as the medium of instruction and the establishment of Western style education institutions, such as universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, created a new class of educated Indians.*[6] The British established English as the common language in administration, education, and law, effectively creating a dominant British culture. Thus the Indian languages were demoted to a lower status. The cultivation of the growth of Indian English literature, allowing for new forms of cultural expression and to get knowledge and history of Global system through this means.

ii)   **Westernization of Elite Culture:** Western ideas and customs were introduced, influencing the lifestyles and values of the Indian elite and creating a divide between the westernized elite and the masses. *Modern values like humanism, egalitarianism, secularism have entered Indian value systems. Our criminal law has been reformed.* **Evil customs like sati ended**.[7] But the adverse affect of the colonial rule was destruction of old moral values like break down of joint family into neutral family, marriage and traditional social structure and introduction of Christian Missionary system.

iii) **Rise of Nationalism:** The experience of colonialism fostered a sense of national identity and resistance, leading to the growth of nationalist movements and the desire to reclaim Indian culture. During the British colonial rule, *socio-religious reform movements of the 19th century helped in the*

rise of nationalism in India. These movements sought to remove superstition and societal evils prevalent then, and spread the word of unity, rational and scientific thought, women empowerment and patriotism among the people.[8]

iv) **Cultural Preservation and Transformation:** Indian writers, artists, and thinkers engaged in a complex process of cultural preservation and transformation, adapting to colonial influences while also seeking to maintain and redefine their cultural identity. These are seen in the performance of different festivals, music, dance, and other artistic expressions.

v) **Government support for cultural organizations:** During colonial period, a number of government aided institutions and organizations were set up. Administrative units were reconstructed. Common culture was getting importance over multiculturalism in India. However, despite the influence of English, India remained multilingual, with many Indians using both their native languages and English.

vi) **Divide and Rule:** The divide and rule policy of British colonialism has ruined the multicultural habitation of the country. They encouraged religious division of the society on the basis of caste, community. They tried to grow internal conflict in the Indian society. *By fostering internal conflicts, the British hoped to perpetuate their rule through divide and rule strategy.[9]* Multiculturalism and unity among diversity was degraded due to such colonial policy.

vii) **Identity Formation:** British Colonialism played a vital role in identity formation of the people of India, imposing complex identities while also constructing a sense of national unity and resistance. *The colonial census and legal frameworks categorized Indians into fixed identities, which sometimes exacerbated communal tensions and divisions.[10]* Post-colonial identity in India replicates a blending of colonial and indigenous influences of culture and heritage with ongoing efforts to reinstate traditional cultural practices and negotiate the legacies of colonial rule in the country.

viii) **Social Reforms in India:** The British colonial government tried to perform various social reforms in India. These included the abolition of the practices like sati system (widow burning), child marriage from the society. They also undertook initiative to promote widow remarriage. *Movements like the Brahmo Samaj, led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, sought to reform Hinduism by abolishing practices like sati and advocating for monotheism and rationalism.[11]* Although the reform measures had positive aspects, they were also viewed as way forward to Christianization and imposition of western cultural upon Indian people leading to chaos and confusion in the society.

ix) **Religious Practices:** British policies often disrupted traditional religious practices in India. The introduction of Western educational system, reform measures, etc. challenged the authority of traditional

religious leaders and institutions. Moreover, the British practice of classifying Indian people and communities into rigid religious and caste-based identities contributed to social turmoil and divisions.

x)   **Cultural Exchange and Fusion:** Colonial rule encouraged a complex cultural exchange, leading to the emergence of fusion of different cultural forms. During the colonial period, Indian Art and literature, architecture, culture, habitation, etc. often reflected a blend of indigenous and Western influences. This fusion was evident in different cultural movements, such as the Renaissance in Bengal, which tried to reconcile traditional Indian social values blending with modernity.

xi) **Modernization and Global Connection:** English language was a means of modernization and global connectivity. It helped to access western knowledge, explore world history, science and technology, Arts and literature, contributing to the intellectual and cultural growth in India. This media of connectivity and communication enormously help to come forward with diverse linguistic groups within India and linked India to the other parts of the globe.

xii) **Cultural Revival and Reclamation:** After the independence of the country, there was a conscious effort to reclaim and revive traditional cultural norms, moral practices and identities. The 'Swadeshi Movement' is regarded as the promoter of indigenous goods and self-reliance. Presently, the government has initiated various swadeshi production scheme in the country leading to make it self reliance. The promotion and preservation of different culture prevailing in the country may be marked as strengthening of multiculturalism in India, which were denied by the British colonial government.

xiii) **Continued Legacies:** The colonial legacies such as the dominance of English in education and administration, westernization of culture, dress code, food habits, behavior, etc continued to influence Indian society in every aspect of the people, specially the newly educated and newly developed middle class people in India. *The struggle to reconcile colonial legacies with indigenous traditions continues to shape India's post-colonial identity, highlighting the enduring influence of the colonial period.*[12] *But at the same time, Indian people have been rethinking about their old heritage and culture and as such* debates over language, education, and cultural policies reflect the ongoing negotiation of post-colonial influence over multiculturalism in India.

Conclusion: Colonialism had a profound and multifaceted impact on Indian multiculturalism, particularly through its influence on language and culture. Colonial policies have disrupted traditional social structures and cultural practices, while also fostering a sense of national identity and resistance. The legacy of colonialism continues to shape India's cultural landscape, reflecting a complex interplay of loss, adaptation, and transformation.

The cultural legacy of India is seen from its five-thousand-year-old stylishness and improvement. It can be said without hesitation that this cultural heritage has had a profound influence on the global cultural scenerio. People from diverse communities across the globe, expressing in distinctive languages, consuming a variety of nourishments, and carrying out different rituals which have been peaceful co-existing in harmony in India, as epitomized by the Indian 'Sanskriti.' Consequently, India's cultural heritage is defined by its diverse characteristics of faiths, trust, morality, values, traditions, customs, and beliefs. Moreover, India has chalked out different forms of art, architecture, and ideas through the years, and this richness has made Indian culture unique and trust worthy, to which almost everyone still looks forward.

Thus, India's old cultural heritage continues to flourish, retaining its original distinctiveness while adapting to changes with positive out looks. It is a kind of quality and atribute that remains a primary source of its resilience. The Prevailing Indian ethos is an outcome of interaction and inclusiveness of blending of historical background, colonial stimuli throughout widths, and inculcation of prevailing western culture. The western writers persistently overlook key facets of Indian philosophy and multiculture and their multy faced nature. In their homogeneous renderings of India, the deep-seated accumulation of Indian traditions in distinctive spreads of India is lost. Monuments and art and culture are not the sole instances of heritage and harmony. The utterd traditions, performing arts, religious and cultural remembrances, and traditional artistries are designs of living expressions inherited from ancestors and conceded to posterities. Since it is a crucial aspect in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of fast growing globalization, this inexpressible cultural heritage is delicate and requires protection and preservation. It is said to be dynamic and inclusive because it promotes social solidity, fosters a sense of belonging, and helps preserve group identities with inclusive manner. The cultural pluralism of India is surrounded in a web of interconnectedness. In this context, it may be said that a single religion or culture can't survive exclusively. The vast and vital nation like India has been growing to a large industrial economy with global strategic significance. Hence, it can politely be said that India has been walking forward with cosmopolitan urban India and traditional rural India, which is striving simultaneously to build a bright future and a prosperous nation with multicultural inclusive out looks.

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