

# Cultural Globalisation goes beyond the POP

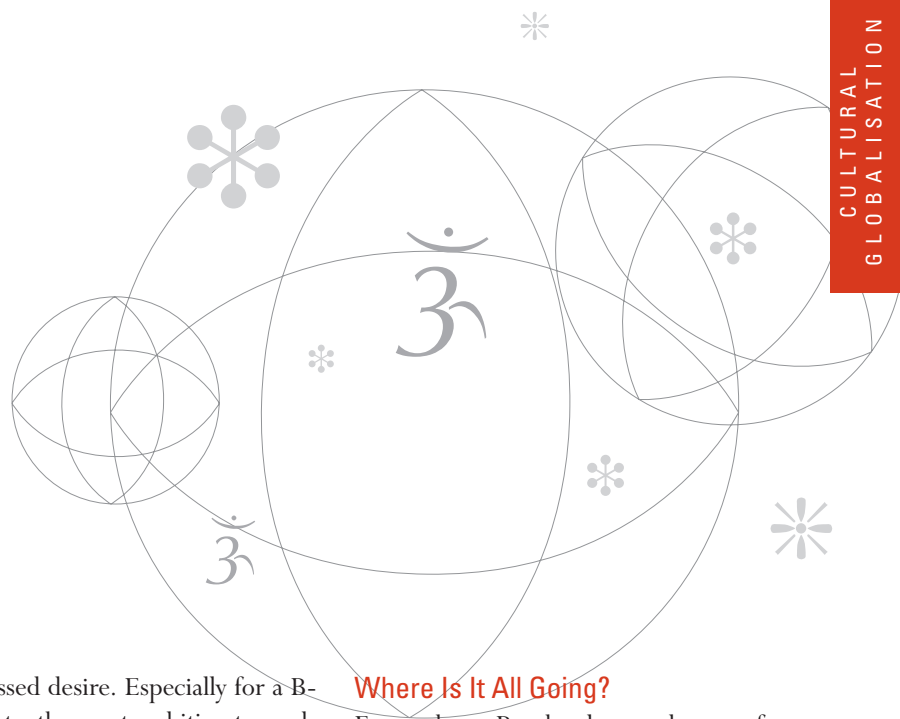


Swati Desai is a Psychotherapist in private practice in Los Angeles, California, at Akasha Centre for Integrative Medicine. She is currently on a sabbatical at the Indian School of Business as a visiting Psychotherapist. For questions and comments, send email to [swati\\_desai@isb.edu](mailto:swati_desai@isb.edu) or check the website [akashacenter.com](http://akashacenter.com)

The king of fashion Calvin Klein flies to India in a private plane to explore the fashion scene in India. Madonna flashes her *henna* tattoos across the world and the holiday resorts in America get filled up with little *henna* booths. Nike shoes, backpacks, and jeans become “uniform” for colleges across India, ‘Monsoon Wedding’ and ‘Bride and Prejudice’ play on the regular cinema circuits to full houses in the US. Multiplexes in India look increasingly Americanised, equipped with fast food chains and shopping opportunities. Zakir Hussain plays his percussion concerts to all-American audiences in prestigious music halls across America. The Indian television scene gets filled up with American style talk shows, news coverage, and MTV videos.

Fusion of Indian cooking and Western dishes with coriander dressing is served in fancy Beverly Hills parties.

The decade long explosion of exchange of popular culture between India and the US may appear innocuous on the surface. However, it could have deeper implications for the business community in the same way IT and outsourcing does. Shops in the US selling Indian goods and the amenability promoted by such exchanges are obvious examples, but the question we would like to explore is the following. Does this cultural globalisation, the exchange of cultural influences, have any implication beyond the obvious business opportunities? Is there a fundamental shift in values in both cultures because of cultural globalisation?



### Cultural Globalisation: From the US to India

The modern business school graduates represent the face of modern urban India. The fundamental shift in values can be observed in their attitudes and behaviors. Three strong points summarise most of it.

First, the expression of self esteem has become more Western. Cultural psychologists have noted that Americans rate higher on the self-esteem scale because of the high value placed in the US on positive self image. Asians typically value self-effacement or self-criticism and hence they rate lower on the same scale. This value is shifting in India towards valuing self-worth, as exemplified by the emergence of new “me” generation. B-school students being trained for interviews are constantly taught about how to portray confidence by believing in their own strengths.

The second big change is the shift from accepting Fate as a karmic implication, towards meritocracy. There is increasing expectation that the ambition of amassing power and wealth can be fulfilled by merit and hard work. It does not need to depend on the class in which you are born. This may not be true of all types of industries yet, however the realisation has arrived. It may be followed by anger, if the ambition does not bear fruit, as opposed to the previous habit of passive acceptance.

The third change is to openly work towards materialism instead of keeping it

just a suppressed desire. Especially for a B-school graduate, the overt ambition towards money and power typically generates guilt, due to its conflict with the older values of simplicity and working without expecting any fruit.

### Cultural Globalisation: From India to the US

Just the way urban India is affected by American values, the big cities in America are becoming a salad bowl of various cultures from all over the world. Indian culture has a unique contribution to the American materialism: to allow the American psyche a way to go beyond it! Yoga has become the trendiest form of exercising, along with Pranayama breathing and meditation. Courses offered by Vedanta or Self-Realisation centers are more popular than ever. Alternative medicines such as Ayurveda and different forms of healing are becoming increasingly accepted. Deepak Chopra and Bikram yogi have become familiar names for anyone practicing spirituality. The wisdom from India about happiness and peace through life style changes is seriously studied. Buddhism is associated with India and even more strongly now because the Dalai Lama resides in India. In addition, the explosions of talented contemporary Indian writers publishing in the West from Vikram Seth to Arundhati Roy have awakened the American curiosity to Indian cultural nuances.

### Where Is It All Going?

For the B-school graduate from India in today’s globalised world the cultural globalisation would mean becoming “bi-cultural”: being at ease with moving around in both cultures. In best case scenario, the bi-cultural persons would look like the following!

- Not judgmental about the other culture but curiously observing differences,
- Confident about their own traditional values (e.g. family and show of respect)
- Balancing individual ambitions with social responsibility,
- Balance the “shoulds” of their own culture and the “what about me” of the other culture.
- Borrowing the professionalism necessary for thriving in the globalised business world, such as making promises only when they can be fulfilled, commitment to quality and deadlines,
- Keeping the Indian family values, yet going beyond simply the family and work towards betterment of the community, habit borrowed from the US.

Cultural Globalisation beyond the Pop culture may mean emergence of a new confidence!