



# Acculturation

**For Prelims:** Meaning of Acculturation

**For Mains:** Acculturation and its outcomes, Significance of Acculturation, India and Acculturation

## Why in News?

India, with its distinctive fusion of various cultures, has ideals that provide a deeper understanding of the concept of **acculturation** and its outcomes.

## What is Meant by Acculturation?

- The concept of acculturation was **coined in 1880 by American geologist John Wesley Powell** in a report for the U.S. Bureau of Ethnology.
  - He defined it as the **psychological changes induced in people due to cross-cultural imitation**, resulting from the **interaction with different cultures**.
- Acculturation, in present days, is defined as the process in which a person or group from one culture comes in contact with another culture, **adopting the values and practices of the other** while still **retaining their own distinct identity**.
  - A suitable example would be the **integration of Black Americans within the white American society**.
- Sociologists understand acculturation as a **two-way process**, wherein the **minority culture adopts aspects of the majority** to fit in and the culture of the **majority is also influenced by that of the minority**.

## What are the Different Outcomes of Acculturation?

- **Assimilation:**
  - A study by W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki in 1918 on Polish immigrants in Chicago provided a better understanding of the concept of assimilation.
  - It is a process in which groups **adopt a new culture that virtually replaces their original culture**, leaving only traces behind.
  - In assimilation, individuals or groups **eventually become indistinguishable** from the culture they came in contact with.
  - It occurs when the **importance given to one's culture is minuscule and where 'fitting in' is given high significance**, deeming it necessary for survival in a new cultural space.
  - This outcome is likely to occur in societies that are "**melting pots**" into which new members are absorbed.
- **Separation:**
  - It refers to the process wherein an individual/group comes in contact with a new cultural group, but **does not embrace aspects of the new culture, as they wish to maintain their own unique identity** without being '**contaminated**' by the values and norms of another culture.

- The rejection of a new culture while maintaining one's own traditions and customs **usually occurs in culturally or racially segregated societies.**
- **Integration:**
  - Under integration, an **individual/group adapts to a new culture while maintaining their original culture.** It occurs where cultural adoption is **considered significant for the smooth functioning of society.**
  - Such a strategy is used in a multicultural society with a **relatively high proportion of minority groups.**
  - Individuals or groups who use this strategy can switch between the values and norms of the different cultures they have absorbed to **interact with groups from both cultures with ease.**
- **Marginalisation:**
  - It occurs when **individuals/groups barely interact with a new cultural group.**
  - This strategy **results in the isolation** of the person or group, pushing them aside to the corners of society, forgotten by the rest.
  - In a society where cultural exclusion is practised, it becomes **almost impossible to interact and integrate with a different cultural group** due to the barriers created between the two.
- **Transmutation:**
  - It is the process in which importance is placed on both **maintaining one's own culture while also adopting aspects of a new culture.**
  - It is different from integration in the sense that the **cultures are amalgamated into creating a new one** (instead of integrating and switching between the codes and conducts of two different cultures).
    - Thus, a unique blend of two cultures creates a new one that is **accepted by both the individuals/groups.**

## How Relevant is Acculturation in India's Context?

- India's distinctive fusion of various cultures helps significantly in understanding the concept of acculturation and its outcomes.
- **Persian culture** has influenced almost all aspects of Indian society; the origins of popular **food items like biryanis and faloodas and spices like saffron, and cumin seeds trace back to Persian origins.**
- The **Urdu language**, a blend of Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Hindi, is an example of the **amalgamation and transmutation of cultures.**
- The architectures of **Christian Churches in Kerala** like the Cheriapally (small church) in Kottayam or the Pazhaya Suriyani Pally (old Syrian church) in Chengannur have marks of **Hindu Temple architectural styles.**
  - **Sculptures of Christian deities inside a lotus** similar to that of Hindu deities, and **sculptures of animals** like cows, elephants, and monkeys carved onto the church walls are excellent examples of the **integration of Hindu and Christian traditions and cultures in Indian society.**

## Conclusion

- **Acculturation is an inevitable social process**, as migration and interactions with different cultures have always been part of the evolution of civilization.
- Acculturation allows us to learn and understand new aspects of various cultures and **appreciate their differences.**
  - **Resentment toward other cultures** and the belief that one's heritage is superior can **result in the marginalisation and separation** of different cultures, ultimately **disrupting the functioning of a society.**
- **A harmonious exchange of cultures between various groups is imperative for a peaceful society.**

**Source: TH**

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