Indian Culture Vs Western Culture Essay, Research Paper

A couple of years ago, I had invited my best friend Jenene, to attend an Indian wedding. I thought it might be fun for her to experience the different foods, clothing, personalities, and religious beliefs that were particular to my culture. Later on that evening she had pulled me to the side and told me that the culture that she was raised in was completely different from mine. She was raised in New York all of her life and she had never experienced such a distinct culture. At that time I told her that she did not know half the story! As time went on, she attended more and more Indian functions and realized that the main differences between the western and Indian cultures were religion, marriage, and social interaction.

The western culture is predominantly of the Christian faith praying to one God. Growing up in the Hindu faith, I always wondered why my mother used to pray to many Gods. As I became older, I built up the courage to ask a Pandit (Indian Priest) why we believed in many Gods whereas all the others believed only in one. He had informed me that we only believe in one God, Lord Shiva. It may appear that we are praying to many Gods, but in fact we are praying to the many forms that he appeared to us on earth.

The Hindu and the Christian religious beliefs are predominantly very similar in that they teach individuals to be good and giving people. The main difference between the two religions is our belief in the after-life. Christians believe that after we die, we wait to be judged (Judgement Day) and until that time, your soul remains in an everlasting sleep (purgatory). After Judgement Day Christians believe that they answer for the wrongs that they committed upon the earth. This determines whether they go to Heaven or Hell.

Hindus believe in reincarnation, which is life after death. We believe that after you die, your soul is transferred into another body or form. Depending on your dharma (behavior) in your previous life will determine your karma (actions that will affect your next life). If you were a good and giving person, your soul will be transferred into a human, the highest life form. If you were bad, your soul will be transferred into an insect, animal, or a lower life form. In any case, both the Christian and Hindu religion teach good values, beliefs and morals which constitute an ideal individual.

The topic of marriage is quite dissimilar in both cultures. The western belief in marriage is that first, you look for the right person. Secondly, there is the process of getting to know the right person through dating and spending quality time, which can last up to several years. Thirdly, is the engagement where a ring is placed on the female s finger and a promise is made for marriage. Finally, the wedding is where vows are exchanged and a lifetime commitment is made. On the contrary, the Indian culture follows the old tradition of parents selecting the proper mate for their children.

In India, the rules of arranged marriages are still followed today. Dating is limited, sometimes, to only the rich or city people. People living in small villages are prohibited from selecting their own mates. Parents begin the selection process for their daughters around the age of 13 and up to 18 and age 16 to 22 for their sons. After the age of 18, if their daughters are unmarried, gossip spreads and people begin to wonder if there is something wrong (mentally or physically) with the daughter and the selection process becomes difficult. For males, it is usually not that difficult because they are expected to be older than the females due to their maturity level.

The selection process is according to status, age, family background, and wealth. If your parents are farmers, then it is highly likely that they will select a farmer for their child because it will be easy for them to maintain a similar lifestyle. Parents do a family check to make sure that no evidence of crime, abuse, and mental or physical illnesses in the family s history to avoid future problems. Therefore, they usually select from families they know or from referrals. A selection is always made from a wealthy family so that they know that their child will not struggle. Once a suitable mate is selected, the male s family will approach the female s family to ask for their daughter. There may or may not be the option to meet first, prior to marriage. Nonetheless, after both parties agree, a date for the wedding is set and a ceremony takes place regardless of their children s desires.

The Indian families that migrate to the western world follow a slightly different practice of marriage. Their children are usually sent to American schools and are forced to acknowledge that in this country, everyone has choices. They use this as their method of convincing their parents to let them choose their mates. Here, they are given the option to date other Indians with their parent s permission with the intent to marry. Finally, you have rebels, such as myself, that feel that no limitations should be placed when happiness is at stake. Regardless of whichever method is used to find a mate, a family background check is done to prevent from problems occurring in the future.

Unlike the western societies of today which are mainly associational, the Indian societies of India maintain a communal society where family and community come first. I come from a village where everyone knows everyone, including your ancestors from many generations prior. Technology in associational societies houses information about your past in computers and quantitative records. In small towns in India, our past is passed down through stories told by family members, friends, and neighbors. Everyone knows your past, present and what your plans are for the future. You are correct at guessing that gossip is prevalent in these types of societies because of the degree of closeness.

Families in the Indian culture maintain an extended style where the grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins live with the immediate family. This is unlike the western nuclear family that consists only of the immediate family. Due to the extended family layout, all members of the household are responsible in child rearing. All are expected to discipline and educate the child on values, moral and beliefs of the community as a whole. In addition, others in the community play an active part in disciplining all children when crimes and deviant behavior is committed.

In associational societies, it is the role of the government or disciplinary bodies to punish individuals who commit crimes and engage in deviant behavior. Occasionally, traditional families in the western society feel that they could do the disciplining but these families are far and few between.

The Indian lifestyle is mainly agricultural where farming and distribution of wealth is the way of life. Food is grown and fed to all members of the family. The remaining is sold and the profits are distributed equally among members working in the farms and the non-workers. The individuals in the western society work independently to feed and support their families. Wealth is not distributed among all family members. For example if grandparents are living with the family, they will normally have their own income. In my opinion, this unequal distribution of wealth is just another reason why the western communities are not close.

Finally, there exists a difference in the social system of both cultures. Indians have a caste system (varnas). There are three main classes in the Indian culture although some would argue four or five. The three classes are Shudras, Vaishyas, and Brahmins. The Shudras are the lowest class, otherwise known as the untouchables. These people comprise of the peasants that work in the farms, beggars, and the homeless on the street. The Vaishyas are the middle class. These are the merchants, farm owners or businessmen. This is the category I supposedly fall into. The last class is the Brahmins. The Brahmins are the upper class and they are comprised of religious groups and leaders. The class system is a system that one is born into. For example if your parents are born Vaishya, then you are automatically a Vaishya for life.

The reason for my parents migration to the United States was to break out of the caste system. The western society has a type of class system that indicates whether you are upper, middle or lower class depending on your income. This fortunately varies from generation to generation and is not something you are born into. Therefore an individual decides what class they want to fall into.

As time goes on more similarities will be seen between the Indian and western cultures. All will reflect the changes that are occurring through assimilation. Indians, who were once thought to be backwards, more like traditionalists, are slowly adapting to the western societies and customs. Some changes can be seen today in the United States where Indians are choosing their own mates, altering their lifestyle from communal to associational, and shifting their classification from Vaishya to upper working class. All areas of life and social interaction are showing a change from traditional to non-traditional while maintaining all the values, beliefs and customs of their old respected ways.