IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION AND REPATRIATION OF ARTIFACTS

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has brought about economic integration and international exchange. However, it has also posed significant challenges for protecting cultural heritage and returning artefacts, especially in post-colonial societies like India. This paper critically examines how globalization leads to the blending and commercialization of culture through global mass media, consumerism, and market-driven practices. This trend marginalizes indigenous languages, traditional industries, and cultural expressions. It also discusses cultural appropriation and the exploitation of traditional knowledge through notable legal cases, including those concerning turmeric and Basmati rice. These cases reveal structural inequalities between multinational corporations and their source communities. The research also delves into the geopolitical, institutional, and legal issues that complicate the repatriation of important artefacts like the Koh-I-Noor diamond and the Peacock Throne. The paper argues that globalization has favoured dominant nations and institutions. It concludes by calling for collaborative, ethical, and adaptable frameworks that prioritize cultural integrity, fair restitution, and community involvement in heritage governance.

Keywords: Cultural Erosion, Cultural Integrity, Globalization, Heritage, Homogenization, Repatriation

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization has significantly impacted economies worldwide, leading to higher living costs, increased urbanization, and a sense of global family. However, it threatens the integrity of cultural heritage in India by promoting the blending and commercialization of culture. Instead of enhancing local practices and languages, globalization has marginalized them, alongside issues of cultural appropriation and exploitation. While English is not an official language of the Indian constitution, it is often used as a measure of intelligence. It has become the common language for communication between the states and the centre. The focus on English has led to the marginalization of indigenous languages in India and contributed to the extinction of their cultures. Global mass media and consumerism have played key roles in spreading a homogenized culture, diminishing the uniqueness of local traditions. With globalization, media worldwide has fostered a trend where conformity in thoughts, culture, and expressions overshadows distinctiveness. India, with its rich diversity of flora, fauna, traditions, languages, and cultures, has seen a troubling shift towards modernization and industrialization. This shift has caused a decline in traditional industries that relied on age-old knowledge passed down through generations. Globalization has transformed cultural practices into mere commodities, ignoring their intrinsic value. Cultural appropriation is another negative consequence of globalization, where indigenous knowledge is appropriated without crediting the communities. Traditional arts and music are often exploited for commercial profit without benefiting their original communities. Globalization has primarily advanced economic interests, neglecting the preservation of cultural heritage and the return of artefacts. Artefacts like the Peacock Throne and the Koh-I-Noor diamond, which have deep historical and cultural significance, should be returned to India. As the world becomes more globalized, geopolitics will increasingly influence the repatriation of artefacts. This article examines the adverse effects of globalization on protecting cultural heritage and the repatriation of artefacts.

HOMOGENIZATION AND COMMODIFICATION OF CULTURE DUE TO GLOBAL MASS MEDIA AND CONSUMERISM

Besides promoting cross-cultural exchange, globalization has fallen short in preserving cultural heritage. Global mass media, including television, film, music, and the internet, significantly

shapes cultural values, norms, and practices worldwide. As media companies extend their reach across borders, they often showcase a homogenized version of culture that appeals to a global audience. This standardized portrayal tends to overshadow local and indigenous cultural expressions, leading to a loss of diversity. India's rich cultural and linguistic diversity contradicts the strict homogeneity promoted by global media, which can marginalize indigenous communities and their unique heritages. Multinational corporations promote standardized products and preferences for a global consumer base, causing people to overlook products rooted in their culture. This preference leads to the marginalization of indigenous communities. Globalization has negatively affected cottage industries and handloom sectors, as western clothing has become increasingly popular in India. Handloom weavers are shifting from weaving to more lucrative jobs, like in software, out of fear of losing their livelihoods. Global media corporations often disseminate a standardised cultural product that can overshadow local expressions.[1]

MARGINALIZATION AND EROSION OF LOCAL CULTURAL PRACTICES AND LANGUAGES

India's linguistic diversity changes rapidly, with new dialects emerging approximately every 11 kilometres. This diverse landscape reflects the country's rich identity. Instead of fostering this diversity, globalization has pushed conformity toward English and Hindi. India has officially recognized only a few languages, side-lining indigenous languages that have fewer than 10,000 speakers. Languages like Majhi in Sikkim, Mahali in Arunachal Pradesh, Sidi in Gujarat, and Dimasa in Assam are on the brink of extinction. UNESCO has classified Asur, Birhor, and Korwa as endangered languages, with Birhor labeled "Critically Endangered" due to having only about 2,000 speakers left.[2] Globalization has brought about Sanskritization, forcing indigenous communities to abandon their cultural practices and languages to assimilate with the majority. Intricate wood carvings from Kashmir and vibrant Pattachitra paintings from Bengal and Odisha are disappearing as folk arts. Manjusha, a folk painting style from Bihar, which depicts the life of the local deity Manjusha Devi, is nearly lost. Some endangered crafts in India include indigo

[1] Arjun Appadurai, Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy, 7(2) Theory, Culture & Society 295 (1990).
[2] Team Her Circle, The Silent Crisis: Indigenous Languages on the Brink of Extinction in India, HER CIRCLE (Oct. 20, 2025), https://www.hercircle.in/engage/get-inspired/trending/the-silent-crisis-indigenous-languages-on-the-brink-of-extinction-in-india-6805.html (last visited Feb. 25, 2026).

dyeing, Assamese jewelry, Mirizhim Manjula, natural dyeing, Saphe Lamphee, Lashingphee, natural block printing, miniature painting, Cherial painting, Raja Rani dolls, temple Kalamkari, temple applique, and gesso work. The cultural practices of indigenous communities and tribes are fading due to the push for cultural homogeneity by global media. One way to support these communities and their crafts is to obtain Geographical Indication tags and raise awareness about the threats to indigenous crafts and art forms.

HOW DO CONSUMERISM AND GLOBALIZATION CONTRIBUTE TO CULTURAL COMMODIFICATION?

Consumerism and globalization are closely related phenomena that lead to the commodification of culture. This results in the standardization of cultural expression. Consumerism promotes acquiring and consuming goods and services as a primary source of personal fulfilment and social identity. It also commodifies cultural practices, like using Ayurvedic treatments, leading corporations to obtain patents and engage in bio-piracy without sharing benefits or recognizing traditional knowledge holders. Traditional handicrafts, once deeply embedded in local culture, may now be mass-produced and sold as souvenirs or decorations, losing their cultural importance. Similarly, indigenous art and music may be commercialized and adapted to fit mainstream tastes, resulting in a loss of their unique characteristics. The dynamics of power between global corporations and local communities reinforce the effects of consumerism and globalization on cultural commodification. Multinational corporations often have more resources, marketing expertise, and distribution networks, giving them a significant edge in shaping consumer preferences and promoting their standardized cultural products. This power imbalance can marginalize and replace local cultural expressions with globally marketable items.

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION AND EXPLOITATION OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS

A. Turmeric Case (Curcuma longa Linn)

Indian cuisine is spiced with turmeric rhizomes. Additionally, it has qualities that make it useful in medications, cosmetics, and colors. It has been used for ages to treat burns and wounds. A US patent for the use of turmeric to heal wounds was issued to two Indian-based expats working at

the University of Mississippi Medical Center in 1995. The Indian government, however, later contested the patent during a reexamination, noting the existence of prior art. Turmeric has long been used to heal burns and rashes. Thus, the government claims that its medicinal application is familiar. They backed up their claim with written evidence of traditional Knowledge, including a document written in ancient Sanskrit and 1953 research in the Journal of IMA (Indian Medical Association). Notwithstanding the appeal by the patent holders, the US PTO upheld the objections raised by the government and invalidated the patent . In the turmeric case, a patent based on Indian traditional Knowledge was successfully contested for the first time, leading to a landmark decision. The US Patent Office cancelled this patent in 1997 after concluding that there was no originality and that the information about the patent had been well-known in India for a long time. As seen in cases like turmeric and neem, systemic gaps in patent laws have allowed for the misappropriation of traditional knowledge.[3]

B. Basmati Rice Case (Oryza sativa Linn.)

The Basmati rice case refers to a legal dispute between India and the United States regarding the ownership and recognition of Basmati rice as a Geographical Indication (GI). In 1997, the RiceTec company, a Texas-based seed company, applied for a patent on Basmati rice and its method of cultivation in the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). India objected to this move, arguing that Basmati rice was a product indigenous to India and that RiceTec's claim amounted to biopiracy, as it sought to appropriate traditional knowledge. India filed a petition with the USPTO, seeking to prevent RiceTec from obtaining a patent on Basmati rice. The Indian government argued that Basmati rice had been cultivated in India for centuries and had acquired a distinct reputation for its aroma, taste, and cooking quality. The government also claimed that the patent application by RiceTec was an attempt to monopolize the production and export of Basmati rice and would adversely affect the livelihoods of Indian farmers. The USPTO eventually granted RiceTec a patent on Basmati rice, but only on certain aspects of its cultivation and not on the rice itself. The patent granted to RiceTec excluded the core components of Basmati rice, such as its grain characteristics, taste, and aroma. The decision by the USPTO was widely criticized in India, and the Indian government filed an appeal. In 2001, the Indian government succeeded in revoking the patent

[3] Aditi Chaudhri & Meenu Sharma, Combatting Biopiracy for the Protection of Natural Resources and Biodiversity in India, INDIAN J. FORENSIC MED. & RSCH., https://www.ijfmr.com (last visited Feb. 25, 2026).

granted to RiceTec after the USPTO reviewed the case. The USPTO recognized that Basmati rice was a product indigenous to India and that the use of the term "Basmati" on RiceTec's products was misleading to consumers. The USPTO's decision was seen as a victory for India's traditional knowledge and the protection of Geographical Indications. The transition from biopiracy to biojustice requires stronger integration of community-based initiatives and sui generis protections for traditional knowledge.[4] The rise of digital colonialism has enabled new forms of cultural extractivism, where traditional designs are appropriated by global corporations without community consent or benefit-sharing.[5]The WIPO Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge Treaty (2024) imposes disclosure obligations on patent applicants, though critics argue these lack sufficient sanctions to deter misappropriation effectively.[6]

HOW DOES GLOBALIZATION PERPETUATE THE EXPLOITATION OF TRADITIONAL CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS?

One way globalization perpetuates the exploitation of traditional cultural expressions is through commodifying and commercializing cultural products. The demand for exotic and "authentic" cultural artifacts, clothing, and art has led to the mass production and sale of these items in global markets. The intrinsic value of these items is lost due to massive appropriation and not appreciation. Global media has facilitated widespread dissemination of diverse cultural expressions. Indigenous communities, such as the Maori in New Zealand or the Native American tribes in the United States, have witnessed the unauthorized use of their cultural symbols and designs in commercial products, fashion, and popular culture.

HAS GLOBALISATION LED TO UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF POWER DYNAMICS WHEN IT COMES TO RAPATRIATION OF ARTEFACTS?

[4] Pragya Mishra, From Biopiracy to Biojustice: Legal Reforms for Traditional Knowledge and Agrobiodiversity in India, 30(4) J. Intell. Prop. Rts. 440 (2025).
[5] Andrea Chávez, Cultural Protection by Design: Responses to the Digital Extractivism of Indigenous Culture in Mexico, ECIJA (Dec. 2, 2025), https://www.ecija.com/en/news-and-insights/proteccion-cultural-por-diseno-respuestas-ante-el-extractivismo-digital-de-la-cultura-originaria-en-mexico/ (last visited Feb. 25, 2026).
[6] Adyasha Samal, New WIPO Treaty to Protect Indigenous Rights: Reform without Sanction, Oxford Human Rights Hub (July 7, 2025), https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/new-wipo-treaty-to-protect-indigenous-rights-reform-without-sanction/ (last visited Feb. 25, 2026).

The peacock throne, Koh-I-Noor diamond, are some of the Artefacts which must be repatriated back to India from the British. With the appointment of Rishi Sunak as the prime minister, it was expected that at last Koh-I-Noor diamond would come back to its home country. But the Britishers are yet to come out of their colonial past and white supremacy. Globalization has benefited developed countries to exploit developing countries and their sentiments, it has created countries with Veto Power in the United Nations. The impact of Globalization on the Repatriation of artefacts has been outrightly negative and minimalistic. For Repatriation of Artefacts, resorting only to Diplomacy due to fear of severance of Global ties, will not be beneficial, only hard bargainers and influential businessmen can bring back the Artefacts to the home country by participating in Auctions. An Indian businessman, Vijay Mallya, liquor-baron and businessmen participated in Auction and brought back Tippu Sultan's sword to India by paying One Fifty Million Pounds.

Vincenzo Peruggia, an Italian thief and museum worker in 1911 tried to steal Mona Lisa from the Louvre, France. He garnered huge popularity worldwide since he believed that Mona Lisa should rightfully belong to the Italians and that it was stolen by Napolean. The return of cultural objects is often hindered by legal principles such as non-retroactivity, which protect current possessors over original owners.[7] The returns of colonial belongings should be acknowledged as a form of reparation based on legal obligations, not merely voluntary gestures of goodwill.[8]

INSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY

The Museums and galleries have their own conundrum when it comes to their decisions about ownership and curation, which overshadows the cry of the community to which it belongs to. Globalization has not helped countries to come out of the shackles of rigid rules and regulations, with Globalization there should be elimination of xenophobia, colonial mindset, survival of the fittest notion and political dynamics, globalization has in fact intensified the role these factors play in repatriation of artefacts. The restitution policies of major ethnological museums are often shaped

[7] Tatiana Cardoso Squeff & Danielle Anne Creuz, Misappropriation: Legal Limitations on the Return of Cultural Objects Stolen in Times of Peace and Conflict, in HERITAGE IN WAR AND PEACE IV: SELECTED STRATHCLYDE PAPERS (M. M. Sadowski, G. M. Bonaviri & F. Ceccotti eds., 2025).
[8] Human Rights Watch, New German Guidelines on Colonial Returns Fail Rights Test (Oct. 23, 2025), https://text.hrw.org/news/2025/10/23/new-german-guidelines-on-colonial-returns-fail-rights-test (last visited Feb. 25, 2026).

by their own institutional histories and internal politics, which can overshadow the claims of source communities.[9] The 1954 Hague Convention and the 1970 UNESCO Convention establish foundational principles for protecting cultural property, yet their application to repatriation claims remains contested.[10]

CAN LEGAL FRAMEWORKS BE DONE AWAY WITH JUST FOR REPTRIATION OF ARTEFACTS?

Each country has different frameworks for dealing with repatriation of artefacts. Entering into Agreements for repatriation of artefacts with minimal frameworks is the need of the hour, geopolitical studies for repatriation of artefacts must be streamlined as a separate branch and offered as a specialization subject by the Indian universities. Globalization cannot alone offer plausible solutions for repatriation of artefacts, there are other factors which play a major role in repatriation of artefacts. Globalization has benefited only powerful nations and marginalized smaller nations.

HAS GLOBALIZATION CHANGED THE CULTURAL NARRATIVES REGARDING THE ARTEFACTS?

Globalization led to colonization and the establishment of vessel and protectorate states. The dominant powers are mainly concerned with expanding their territory by any means necessary and establishing control. Globalization also resulted in the dominant powers capturing mainstream media both within their countries and abroad. Indian history was primarily recorded by British historians until the introduction of Indology, which aimed to study Indian history. The narratives provided by British historians are often rife with historical inaccuracies and conspiracy theories. The Koh-I-Noor diamond, often referred to as a blood diamond, has a long history tied to conquests and the shifting power dynamics between empires. With globalization, many diverse theories

[9] Karl-Heinz Kohl (Project Lead), Repatriation Claims in Postcolonial Discourse: The Restitution Policy of Ethnological Museums Since 1970, NORMATIVE ORDERS (2026), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328095985_Otherwise_Rethinking_Museums_and_Heritage (last visited Feb. 25, 2026).

[10] Kennedy Wilson-LaMar, The Intersection of Cultural Rights and the Repatriation of African Art: A Comparative Analysis of International and North American Legal and Ethical Frameworks, 58(3) Int'l Lawyer (2025), https://www.americanbar.org/groups/international_law/resources/international-lawyer/58-3/intersection-cultural-rights-repatriation-of-african-art/ (last visited Feb. 25, 2026).

emerged regarding the Koh-I-Noor diamond. Unfortunately, the proliferation of theories complicates the repatriation process for artefacts. The diamond was once considered an ordinary stone, but kingdoms grew obsessed with it due to its allegedly cursed history. Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India have all laid claim to the diamond, manipulating the story to fit their own narratives. When the British became aware of Ranjit Singh's death in 1839 and his intention to give the diamond and other jewels to a group of Hindu priests, there was a public uproar in the British press. One anonymous editorial expressed outrage, stating, "The richest, costliest gem in the known world has been committed to the trust of a profane, idolatrous, and mercenary priesthood." The diamond was then recut and polished, which reduced its size by half but enhanced the brilliance of the light coming from its surface. After Ranjit Singh died in 1839, the Punjabi throne changed hands among four rulers in four years. By the end of this tumultuous time, only a young boy, Duleep Singh, and his mother, Rani Jindan, remained in the line of succession. In 1849, after imprisoning Jindan, the British compelled Duleep to sign a document that amended the Treaty of Lahore, making him give up the Koh-I-Noor along with any claims to sovereignty. Although agreements with minors are typically void from the start, this did not apply in Duleep Singh's case because the British were determined to claim the gemstone at any cost. Despite improved diplomatic relations and globalization strengthening ties between the two countries, the U.K. government has yet to return the diamond. The British are waiting for a narrative that is as accurate as possible. When source communities negotiate for repatriation, they often face significant challenges against well-funded institutions. These institutions typically employ professional negotiators and legal experts, which creates an imbalance in discussions. As one recent analysis noted, a "two-speed restitution landscape" has emerged, where recently looted items are returned, but iconic objects with deeper histories face legal limbo.[11]

CONCLUSION

Globalization has sped up the movement of cultural goods across borders, often turning heritage into marketable items disconnected from their original contexts. As cultural artefacts become part of global tourism, museum economies, and individual collections, their inherent spiritual,

[11] Who Gets to Keep History? The Politics Behind Artefact Returns, The Jordan Times (Feb. 21, 2026), https://jordantimes.com/news/local/who-gets-to-keep-history-the-politics-behind-artefact-returns (last visited Feb. 25, 2026).

historical, and communal meanings can be overshadowed by their market value. In this situation, repatriation should not only be seen as a physical return of objects but also as a wider ethical and political process aimed at restoring cultural agency and historical balance. A sustainable approach to repatriation needs equitable international partnerships among museums, governments, and source communities. Instead of framing repatriation as a simple transfer of ownership, collaborative stewardship models can encourage shared research, co-curated exhibitions, and long-term cooperation. Such partnerships acknowledge that while artefacts may circulate globally, their cultural significance lies with the communities that created them. Cultural exchange initiatives also support this balanced approach. Temporary loans and reciprocal exhibitions enable cross-cultural dialogue, while still respecting the importance of the origin communities. These arrangements let artefacts act as bridges for intercultural understanding without permanently removing them from their cultural context. For any meaningful repatriation effort, it's vital to include source communities as primary stakeholders in decision-making. Establishing ongoing dialogue platforms that involve indigenous groups, local historians, curators, and policymakers ensures that repatriation reflects the needs and wishes of those whose heritage is affected. This inclusive model confronts historically exploitative collection practices and promotes restorative justice. Digital technologies can also provide helpful solutions to address the challenges of globalization. High-resolution archives, virtual exhibitions, and open-access databases can increase public engagement with cultural heritage, even after physical repatriation. While digital copies cannot replace the symbolic power of the actual return, they can democratize access to knowledge and ease tensions between accessibility and restitution. Educational collaboration is another key element. Jointly created curricula, community-led programs, and academic partnerships can place artefacts within their proper historical and cultural contexts. By weaving repatriation into educational frameworks, institutions can help the public better understand colonial histories, cultural displacement, and the ethical responsibilities of preserving heritage. Legal reforms must accompany these institutional and cultural efforts. Current frameworks often reflect outdated views of ownership that focus on possession over provenance. Flexible and cooperative legal tools, backed by international agreements, can facilitate negotiations, acknowledge historical wrongs, and better handle the complexities of transnational heritage claims in a globalized world. Ethical accountability in collecting practices is equally important. Museums and private collectors should implement strict provenance standards and transparent acquisition

policies. Moving forward, cultural stewardship must rest on informed consent, cultural awareness, and recognition of rightful ownership. Lastly, repatriation efforts need support through investments in local cultural infrastructure. Initiatives aimed at building capacity, including conservation training, museum development, and archival preservation, empower source communities to manage returned artefacts according to their own traditions and priorities. Without this local support, repatriation risks becoming merely symbolic rather than transformative. Ultimately, reframing repatriation as a collaborative, ethically grounded, and forward-thinking process allows it to function not just as a response to globalization but as a corrective within it. By emphasizing cultural integrity, shared responsibility, and inclusive dialogue, the international community can protect the diversity and dignity of human heritage in an increasingly interconnected world. International cooperation can successfully facilitate repatriation, as demonstrated by the return of ancestral Vedda skeletal remains from Switzerland's Natural History Museum to Sri Lanka's indigenous community.[12]

[12] European External Action Service, 'Ancient Vedda Heritage Museum in Dambana Gets New Life Through the European Union Funded Revival Project' (7 December 2025) https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/sri-lanka/ancient-vedda-heritage-museum-dambana-gets-new-life-through-european-union-funded-revival-project_en accessed 25 February 2026.