

# Fostering Perspectives on Swedish and Indian Culture

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**Abstract:** This article is a reflection of cultural differences recorded by the author during her research visit to Sweden in the year 2017 (February-March month). The objectives of the research visit included understanding official dialects of both countries, existing education system and work environments, variant food habits, family structure and associations, available transport systems, sustainable living options and cultural exchange within India and Sweden. The information was first collected through existing literature and was supported by information collected through observation method, informal discussions and interactions with the Swedish people. It can be concluded that both countries are culturally very different and different parts of each country further exhibit alteration in cultural practices, languages and food preferences. Some variations are also due to population size in both countries. For instance, transportation is very well developed in developed countries due to the availability of advanced technology and less population.

**Keywords:** cultural diversity, India, Sweden, sustainable living.

## 1. Introduction

It is important to note that India and Sweden are culturally very different and different parts of each country further exhibit alteration in cultural practices. Indian culture is about diverse customs, traditions, religions and set of societal norms. In contrast, Swedish culture is generally seen as egalitarian in nature, and since the early 1970s, the Swedish establishment has very deliberately embraced feminist, anti-racist, progressive and anti-fascist stances and views. Swedish society and culture are concerned with the welfare and well-being of others, both

within and outside Sweden (University of Gothenburg, Sweden, 2016). Hence, both the cultures differ from each other in a number of contexts, however, in today's world both the cultures are coming together. The Indian culture is getting inclined towards the West and the Swedish culture has started developing a taste for the exotic Indian food and Yoga therapies.

## 2. Overview of India and Sweden

To draw some comparisons, the current population of India is 1,338,826,135 as of 8 April, 2017, based on latest United Nations estimates. The current population of Sweden, on the other hand, is 9,904,614. In percentage, India's population is equivalent to 17.86% of the world's population while that of Sweden is only 0.13% of the world's population. India has a Federal Government while Sweden is a Constitutional Monarchy. What is interesting to note is that the percentage urban population in India is 32.8%; it is 85.3% in Sweden. The median age of the population also varies and it is 26.9 years for India and 41 years for Sweden. However, while average life expectancy in India is 60+ years, it is 80+ years in the case of Sweden (Worldometers, 2017). The variation in weather in Sweden is not as frequent as it is in India where one experiences all shades of weather during different seasons and in different states. This is also perhaps because of the comparatively larger geographical area of India than Sweden. In Sweden, one needs to be prepared for anything between -10°C to +10°C and since Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, is located in the Baltic Sea, the air is often humid. This makes the chill in the air much worse than what the temperature would predict. The situation also requires individuals to consume considerable Vitamin D during winters as there is the reduced intensity of sunlight (Dewitt, 2010). The below-appended Table 1 puts together and provides an overview of the general points of comparison between India and Sweden.

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**Table 1:** General points of comparison between India and Sweden (Source: Worldometers, 2017).

Points of Comparison	India	Sweden
i. Continent	Asia	Europe
ii. Language	Hindi, English	Swedish
iii. Currency	Indian Rupee	Swedish Krona
iv. Capital city	Delhi	Stockholm
v. Type of Government	The Federal Republic	Constitutional Monarchy
vi. Population	The current population of <b>India</b> is <b>1,338,826,135</b> as of 8 April 2017, based on United Nations estimates. India's population is equivalent to <b>17.86%</b> of the total world population. India ranks No. <b>2</b> in the list of countries by population. <b>32.8%</b> of population is <b>urban</b> (439,801,466 people in 2017) <b>Median age</b> in India is <b>26.9 years.</b>	The current population of <b>Sweden</b> is <b>9,904,614</b> as of 8 April 2017, based on United Nations estimates. Sweden population is equivalent to <b>0.13%</b> of the total world population. Sweden ranks No. <b>90</b> in the list of countries by population <b>85.3%</b> of population is <b>urban</b> (8,461,650 people in 2017) <b>Median age</b> in Sweden is <b>41 years.</b>
vi. Life Expectancy	60+ years	80+ years

### 3. Comparison of Official Dialects

The official dialect of Sweden is Swedish and it is spoken by the dominant part of people living in Sweden. Swedish is not just the official dialect of Sweden. It is additionally one of the official dialects of Finland. There is a small population of people of Indian origin living in Sweden (approximately 6,000 in Stockholm), the majority of whom are *Punjabis, Bengalis, Maharashtrians, Gujaratis* and South Indians. This Indian community in Sweden is socially and culturally very dynamic. It was observed that diverse cultural associations under the cultural wing of Indian Embassy at Sweden hold cultural functions from time to time and observe national days which are supported by the Embassy of India in Sweden, headquartered in Stockholm. One of the key attributes of Swedish culture is that Swedes are open in nature, humble and find show off somewhat objectionable from various perspectives; Swedes want to tune into others instead of assuring that their own voice is heard. When speaking, Swedes converse gently and placidly. It is uncommon to witness a Swede showing outrage or compelling feeling out in the public. Swedes seldom underestimate hospitality or benevolence and accordingly, they often offer gratitude. Neglecting to state 'thank you' for something is seen adversely in Sweden.

To draw a comparison, interestingly, India is home to a few hundred dialects. India has 23 constitutionally recognized official languages. Hindi and English are the official dialects used by the Central Government. State Governments use respective official dialects. The regular

native language dialect of at least every North Indian is Hindi. Each state and city has its own particular first language dialect e.g. in Punjab individuals communicate in Punjabi, in Bengal Bengali is spoken and in Delhi, blended dialects can be heard and so forth. According to the People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI), 780 unique dialects are spoken in India and the nation has lost about 250 dialects in the last 50 years (Hindustan Times, 2013). The prevalence and popularity of English in India is perhaps to blame, however, there is need for further research in this direction (Hans, 2017).

### 4. Education System and Work Environments

In the Swedish school system, assigning grades to students below 8th standard is forbidden. The Swedish Education System believes that getting bad grades makes a student depressed and uninspired to work. In particular, it leads students to compare grades with each other which leads to an inferiority complex, feeling of jealousy and low self-esteem in the growing years of their development. This is significantly different from the Indian Education System, where examinations are part and parcel of students' life right from the very beginning. It is interesting to note that the grading system is not considered to be a suitable system by many psychologists since it reflects direct criticism and in particular, compares one person's capabilities with another. Thus, Swedes can be restrictive with both their criticism and their appreciation as they simply do not understand these expressions to the extent that Indians do (Expattarrivals.com, 2017). The workplace and

universities environment are quite open and welcoming in Sweden. Everybody is extremely very much mannered and offers a big smile with “*Heya*”. Even strangers do not hesitate in saying hello, something not so commonly found in India.

If we compare the quality of life of youth and adults in Sweden with Indian youth, then the personal satisfaction and job opportunities for individuals in Sweden are enormous. Swedish youth enjoy a sense of safety and security in their personal and professional life. The skill-oriented teaching-learning system offers them ample exposure and provides an ability which causes understudies to begin working at exceptionally youthful age. Moreover, the society inculcates values of how to be more independent and a wise citizen from a very young age. All these reasons lead to a sense of responsibility on the shoulders of young people in Sweden. Because of less populace in Sweden, youth need to confront minimal rivalry in gaining employment. However, as of late, the situation is changing. The job market has become quite demanding, requiring the youth to adjust. However, still, because of the firm inclination towards social equality in Sweden, opposition is not encouraged and children are not raised to judge that they are any more extraordinary than others.

### 5. Food and Food Habits

Traditional Swedish food is often based on meat and potatoes and is generous with butter and cream. Compared to Indian food, Swedish food is a bit tasteless since spices do not grow in Sweden, as they have grown in India. In the present day, however, one can find all kinds of food (Italian, Indian, Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, etc.) in restaurants and in grocery stores in Sweden. Like most Indians, Swedes typically consume three meals per day, i.e. breakfast before going to work, lunch around 11.00 am-12.00 pm and dinner, around 6.00 pm. Between these meals, Swedes like to *Fika*. *Fika* (pronounced fee-kah) is by far the most common social activity in Sweden where one meets friends or contacts in a cafeteria and drinks coffee/ tea along with something sweet. Most workplaces in Sweden offer *Fika*-breaks during work hours to the employees, usually at 9.00 am and 3.00 pm for about 30 minutes. Swedes are the second largest coffee consumers in the world (second only to their neighbours, Finland). It is not unusual for a Swede to drink more than 10 cups of coffee every day. Their coffee is stronger than American coffee but not as strong as an Espresso. Beer and wine are often consumed on social events but there are always plenty of non-alcoholic options. All workplaces have a small arrangement of the kitchen with the eating area having basic equipment for

cooking and heating like saucepans, cups/ mugs/ sugar/ variety of tea flavours/ coffee/ cheese/ milk/ juice and so on. The presence of fresh fruits in a basket at all workplaces is a common sight. Swedes consume a lot of fresh fruits as much as they consume coffee. Indians who are vegetarians, face a difficult time initially in Sweden. It was observed that all fresh produce in Sweden is expensive as it is imported from Spain or other Western nations in the course of the winter time frame. However, new stores are now opening up in Stockholm which import Indian spices, sweets and food items from various parts of India. In contrast, India has diverse cultures henceforth; one enjoys delicacies from *Gujarati*, *Punjabi*, South-Indian, *Rajasthani* and *Bengali*, etc. cuisines.

### 6. Family Structure and Relationships

The role of the family in Sweden is significant and the privileges of youngsters are very much secured. The rights available to Swedish families to nurture their children are some of the best rights on the planet. A review of these rights is presented below.

- Either of mother or father are permitted to be absent from work until the point that their infant becomes 18 months old.
- Either parent has the privilege to lessen their workload by 25% until the point that their child reaches 8 years of age (and is formally prepared for school).
- A parental stipend is paid for 480 days, which is planned for the two guardians. Sixty of these days should be utilized by the ‘minority’ guardian. Thus, this component of the stipend is regularly known as ‘Daddy’s months’.
- Up to 60 days off every year to care of a sick child.

It is normal in Sweden to live respectively as a couple without being hitched. Approximately 15 percent of the populace of Sweden is in this kind of relationship. Swedish term this as “*Sambo*”, which implies a man who lives with their sentimental accomplice, without being hitched. According to the Co-habitation Act in Sweden, couples who simply live together do not have the same rights and obligations as married couples. The Co-habitation Act defines this as, “Couples who do not wish to be bound by either marriage or civil union, but who nonetheless wish to have their relationship respected and given its deserved rights” (MSDCACL, 2003). This can create complications, particularly with regards to property and legacy. Despite the conjugal rights of a person, one cannot inherit someone else’s debt or mortgage in Sweden, yet in the event that one acquire things that aren’t completely paid off, one needs to ensure that every one of the obligation is paid before one can keep such items.

In contrast, marriage framework in India varies from region to region, religion to religion, caste to caste and from rich to poor. It is performed as per customised rituals of each religion. A Hindu person usually gets hitched with a Hindu girl or boy and an upper caste groom usually gets hitched with an upper caste bride. However, the present generation in India has shown some deviation and difference in thinking. Indians are now becoming more open-minded. The rural people in India continue to believe in early marriages and favours marriages in their own caste. The “arranged marriage” system is more prevalent in the Indian society and the tradition of arranged marriages is still continuing in India but conversely, a few changes are seen in this marriage procedure. Today, the guardians of an individual are anxious about the life and safety and take the consent of the person before selecting a bride or a groom. As per the Government of India, the legal age of marriage is 21 years for men and 18 years for women and the law does not permit Sambo relationships. The privilege of the legacy of property exists in India and it is typically inherited in the name of the boy (Sonawat, 2001). With greater open mindedness being adopted by the Indian society, girls are now being considered comparable to boys especially when it comes to transfer of legacy.

### 7. Comparison of Transport System

In Sweden, public transport is very efficient and well connected through an extensive network of underground trains (T-Bana), commuter trains, Metro (known as Stockholms Tunnelbana), subways, trams, ferry and excursion boats and buses. The latter have designated lines for inter-city and intra-city travel but are relatively costly. However, the Swedish government is quite considerate about the welfare of the school and college going students and offers a rebate on passes up to the age of 25 years. The percentage of concessions approximately varies between 30-40% of the actual price. The youth (below 25 years) likewise can avail similar rebates on shopping, food, sports etc. by virtue of the special “students card” possessed by them. The transport system in Sweden is timely, safe and accessible for all age groups especially for elderly and people who are differently abled. The principal public transport in Stockholm is governed by SL (Storstockholms Lokaltrafik AB). Likewise, different cities have different agencies governing major chunk of public transport. This also helps in regulating the overall transport system efficiently as it is governed directly by the Swedish Government (Hipple, 2017).

In contrast, the public transport is not very efficient in India except in the metro cities. The time taken in

voyaging squanders parcel of time in India due to poor roads, less connectivity, expensive journeys and a huge amount of traffic jams, etc. However, the Government in India is pro-actively working for making the public transport and commutation experience better. Numerous new road and railway lines have been constructed and are under construction. Among these, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) project is the major rail venture of the Government which is connecting various parts of individual cities together. The Delhi Metro is the world’s 12th largest metro system in terms of both length and number of stations and is leading the way in sustainable transport. It is important to highlight that the Delhi Metro is the first metro train system in the world to receive the Environmental Standard ISO 14001 EMS during its construction phase itself. The Delhi Metro has set a benchmark performance against world’s best Metros (Kaur, 2016).

### 8. Sustainable Living in Sweden

For most Swedes today, sustainability is a way of life. Sweden ranks first in the European Union (EU) in consumption of organic food. It is also one of the front-runners in recycling and gets the highest share of its energy from renewable energy sources. Sweden ranks at the top of the green shopper’s list among all European countries. A study by the European Commission found that 40 percent of Swedes purchase Eco-labeled items, which is more than the European average (Sweden.se, 2017a). Sweden has also put in place stringent guidelines for waste management. Sweden has virtually eliminated its waste management problem and is now looking for importing waste material to feed its waste processing plants (Fredén, 2017). Swedes recycle nearly 100% of their household waste. Several Swedish companies have voluntarily joined the struggle of a waste management revolution (Sweden.se, 2017b). For example, H&M began to accept used clothing from customers in exchange for rebate coupons in an initiative called Garment Collection. The Optibag Company developed a machine that can separate coloured waste bags from each other. This way, waste sorting stations could be eliminated. The southern Swedish city of Helsingborg even fitted public waste bins with loudspeakers playing pleasant music - all in the name of recycling.

### 9. Conclusion

The comparison between India and Sweden indicates that both countries are culturally very different and different parts of each country further exhibit alteration in cultural practices, languages and food preferences. A key reason for this could be the difference in total area and also in the total population size of both these countries. For instance,

transportation is well developed in developed countries like Sweden due to the availability of advanced technology and less population. Both the cultures differ from each other in a number of contexts, however, in today's world both the cultures are coming together. The Indian culture is getting inclined towards the West and the Swedish culture has started developing a taste for the exotic Indian food and Yoga therapies.

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