



1

CULTURAL HERITAGE OF INDIA

Key Concepts

- Culture
- Cultural heritage
- Culture and civilization
- Indian culture
- Features of Indian culture
- Phases of Indian culture
 - Ancient era
 - Medieval era
 - Modern era
- Mahatma Gandhi, the embodiment of the cultural heritage of India

Mahatma Gandhi is the embodiment of Indian culture and its heritage. So it is desirable to know about Indian cultural traditions. This unit discusses the features of Indian culture and heritage, its meaning and significance.

What is Culture?

Activity

Identify different festivals in India and the reasons for celebrating them. Discuss their similarities and differences.

Culture is a complex term. It has different meanings. It is a way of life that is vital for the survival of a specific group or people living in a specific society. It includes the way we dress, the way we behave, the way we talk, the type of music, food and so on.

Definition of Culture

Culture is the characteristic way of life inspired by fundamental values in which people live. It is the sum total of the values expressed through art, religion, literature, social institutions and behaviour

(K.M. Munshi)



Let us know

Culture is understood as a system of shared beliefs, values, customs and artifacts that the members of a society use. These are transmitted from generation to generation. Culture has a key role in determining the course of social change and the history of a nation.

Cultural heritage

What do you mean by cultural heritage?

Cultural heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation. Cultural heritage includes tangible culture (such as buildings, monuments, landscapes, books, works of art, and artifacts), intangible culture (such as folklore, traditions, language, and knowledge), and natural heritage (including culturally significant landscapes, and biodiversity).

Mahatma Gandhi on India's Cultural heritage

"It stands for synthesis of the different cultures that have come to stay in India, that have influenced Indian life, and that, in their turn, have themselves been influenced by the spirit of the soil. This synthesis will naturally be of the spirit of the soil. This synthesis will naturally be of the Swadeshi type, where each culture is assured its legitimate place, and not of the American pattern, where one dominant. Culture absorbs the rest and where the aim is not towards harmony, but towards an artificial and forced unity" - M.K. Gandhi



Let us know

Culture and Civilization

The terms culture and civilization are used interchangeably. People associate culture with the clothes they wear, the architectural monuments etc. They reveal the material development of life and are a part of civilization. Civilization grows with the development of scientific knowledge and application. But, culture depends on the flow of moral and ethical values for its continuity and existence.

Indian Culture

Indian word for culture is *Sanskriti*. It means *to purify, to transform, to sublimate, to mould and to perfect*. From time immemorial Indians have described their culture as Human Culture (*Manava Dharma* or *Manava Sanskriti*). It has a universal appeal.

History has not been able to trace its beginning. It has always existed in time and it shows no sign of decline. The Vedas, the oldest books known to the world speak about this culture. So it is known as the vedic culture. It is also called the Hindu Culture or Indian Culture, because it flourished on the eastern side of the river *Indus*, which is the same as *Sindhus* or *Hindus* in various languages.

Features of Indian Culture

- Do we have a uniform culture across India?
- What are the main features of our culture?

Unity in Diversity

According to the Indian spiritual tradition there is only one source for the universe. But it has infinite manifestations. Many people have described and experienced it in different ways. This is the meaning of *Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti* (*Truth is one although its manifestations are many*). The principle of unity in diversity is the implicit law of nature, universe and life.

People belonging to various religions harmoniously co-exist in India. Numerous styles of architecture, sculpture, painting, music, dance, festivals and customs have developed here. This wide variety has made the Indian culture rich and beautiful.

- Why is there so much variety in our culture?

There are many reasons. The size of the country and the variations in its physical and climatic features are the main reasons for the variety.

Different ethnic groups like Iranians, Greeks, Kushanas, Shakas, Hunas, Arabs, Turks, Mughals and Europeans came to India. They settled here and mingled with the local population. They brought their cultural habits, thoughts and ideas to India. India has always shown a remarkable capacity for the assimilation of ideas. Despite this diversity, there is an intrinsic unity in our cultural heritage. It is reflected throughout the nation in our music, dance forms, drama, art and literature.

Let us do



Prepare a poster and arrange an exhibition on Indian culture with the theme 'unity in diversity'.

Continuity and Change

Indian cultural heritage is as old as the Indus Valley Civilization. It still flourishes maintaining its original features together with changes. Even today, the pattern of a house in an Indian village is not very different from that of a Harappan house. There were many great cultures in different parts of the world. However, most of them have disappeared or have been replaced by other cultures. A culture perishes when it fails to absorb changes.

They include the reform movements by Jainism and Buddhism in 6th century BC and the religious and social awakening in the 18th and 19th centuries. Several changes were brought about in Indian thought and practices by various movements. The Indian culture has maintained an unbroken continuity from the Vedic times to the present day, in spite of countless wars and two centuries of the British rule. Thus a process of continuity and change has always been a feature of the Indian culture. It shows the dynamic character of our culture.

Religious Pluralism

India has been a cradle of religions. It considered religion as a way of life and not just as rituals or dogmas. India has a tradition of giving equal respect for all religions. Due to this, other major world religions flourished in India. *Adhithidevobhava* is a famous mantra of our land. India has always preached and practised tolerance and understanding. These have been the basis of Indian religion, philosophy, art and literature.

The secular character of Indian culture is a result of the intermingling of people from diverse cultural groups. Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists,

From the Chicago speech of Swami Vivekananda (1893)

'Much has been said of the common ground of religious unity. I am not going just now to venture my own theory. But if any one here hopes that this unity will come by the triumph of any one of the religions and the destruction of the other, to him I say, "Brother, yours is an impossible hope." Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid. The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become the earth, or the air, or the water? No. It becomes a plant, it develops after the law of its own growth, assimilates the air, the earth, and the water, converts them into plant substance, and grows into a plant.'



Let us know

Jains, Parsees and Jews live together in India. During festivities people come together to share their thoughts and beliefs. (Example: The devotees of Lord Ayyappa visit the Vavar Mosque at Erumeli). Everyone is free to profess, practise and propagate any religion of his/her own choice. There is no state religion and the state gives equal respect for all religions.



Let us do

Prepare a write-up on secular values based on a local religious practice and display it in the class.

Universalism

The values of *Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam* and *Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavanthu* are the key aspects of Indian tradition. Our scriptures advocate that *Iswar* or the Divine Spirit is in all living beings. So, the Indian culture believes in the oneness of all living beings.

The concept of co-existence is not limited to the geographical and political boundaries of the country alone. India has a universal outlook. It has been promoting the message of peace and harmony in the entire world.

Spiritual and Material

India is popularly known to be a land of spiritualism. However, Indian history from ancient times shows the development of materialistic culture as well. Our ancient civilizations were proud of its vast knowledge of mathematics, weights and measures. Discoveries of many scientific theories were made by Indians long before the modern science acknowledged them. Similarly, in the areas of astronomy, medicine and other sciences India's achievements in ancient times were significant. There was no resistance from religions in pursuing such knowledge.

Humanity and Tolerance

The gentleness of Indians has always been there, despite the aggressiveness of the Muslim conquerors and the reformative attitude of the British, the Portuguese and the Dutch. The Indians are noted for their benevolent and calm nature, without any harshness in their principles and ideals. Mahatma Gandhi's satyagraha principle or Ahimsa worked wonders and gave credit to India in the international forum.

Closely connected Social System

The Indian culture has family-bound traditions and customs. The families are closely connected with grandparents, parents, children and grandchildren. They share the same spirit, values, tradition and property. Indians regard family as an institution or a link, which continues for the rest of their lives.

Cultural Charisma (Cultural Appeal)

India is a place of infinite variety of culture and tradition. They are the most remarkable features of India. One can identify 'Indian Music', 'Indian Dance', 'Indian Literature', 'Indian Cuisine', 'Indian Fairs and Festivals' and so on. Indian classical music and dance are mentioned in the ancient religious texts and are treasured by its people till now. There are innumerable religious and historical monuments in India that reflect the strong influence of several rulers that ruled the country for ages.

Let us check



Devotees of Lord Ayyappa visit the Vavar Mosque at Erumeli and offer prayers and rituals. Identify the aspect of Indian culture revealed here. Analyse other features of Indian culture with examples.

Phases of Indian Culture

Identify the different periods in Indian culture. Discuss

Like any other country, Indian history can be divided into ancient, medieval and modern periods. The ancient period started with human life on earth.

Indian Culture during the Ancient Era

India has a continuous history covering a very long period. Harappa and Mohanjodaro on the banks of the river Indus around 2700 BC, bear testimony to the early character of Indian civilization. The culture associated with the Harappan civilization is the first urban culture in India. The Harappans built the earliest cities complete with town planning including sanitation, drainage system and broad well-laid roads. They built double storied houses of burnt bricks each one of which had a bathroom, a kitchen and a well. Harappans knew how to write and most of their seals contain some form of script. They were perhaps the first people to cultivate cotton. By 1800 BC the Harappan civilization began to decline.

Vedic Culture

Which are the four Vedas?

After the decline of the Harappan civilization, a new culture flourished in the same region. It gradually spread across the Ganga-Yamuna plains and came to be known as the Aryan culture. The Aryans settled on the banks of the rivers Indus (Sindhu) and Saraswati. They adopted agricultural and settled life. They composed many hymns in honour of their gods and goddesses. These were compiled in the four Vedas - the *Rig Veda*, the *Sama Veda*, the *Yajur Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*. The word *Veda* means sacred spiritual knowledge.

Among the four Vedas the *Rig Veda* is the collection of 1028 hymns for using during the sacrifices of the Aryan cult. The *Sama Veda* is a collection of certain verses from the *Rig Veda* arranged for liturgical purposes. The *Yajur Veda* contains sacrificial formulae in prose and verse to be chanted by the priests who performed the sacrifice. The *Atharva Veda* consists mainly of magical spells and incantations in verse.

These vedas were considered infallible as they imparted the highest spiritual knowledge. Since our knowledge of the early Aryans is based on these Vedas, the culture of this period is called the Vedic Culture. Scholars divide the Vedic period into Earlier and Later Vedic periods. The earlier period is represented by the *Rig Veda*. The later, by all other Vedic literature including the *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*. The two epics - the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, though compiled much later, also throw light on the life and society of an earlier period.

Upanisads: The Upanisads form the concluding portions of the Vedas, and therefore are called the *veda-anta*, or the end of the Veda. They contain the essence of the Vedic teaching. They are the foundations of the Indian philosophy and religions. The central theme of the Upanisads is the search for what is true. They lead us to the central reality which is infinite existence (*sat*), absolute truth (*chit*), and pure delight (*ananda*). Hence the prayer

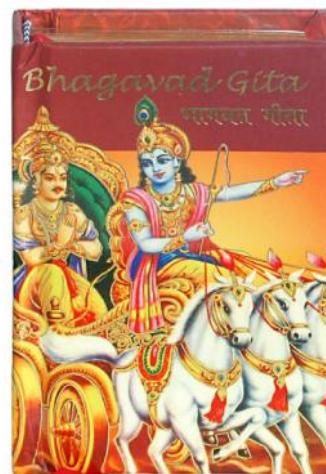
Asatoma satgamaya

Thamaso ma jyothirgamaya

Mruthyoma amrutham gamaya

Bhagavad Gita: The *Bhagavad Gita* is a part of the *Bhisma Parva* of the *Mahabharata*. It contains lessons on philosophy, religion and ethics. The *Bhagavad Gita* is

considered to be the most influential work in Indian thought. The message of the *Gita* is universal in its scope. It is considered as the gospel of selfless action and service i.e. *Nishkamakarma*. It is the service to God. The *Bhagavad Gita* embodies an intermingling of *Karmayoga* and *Jnanayoga*.



Society and Religion: Though Aryan society was patriarchal, women were treated with dignity and honour. The family was the smallest social unit. Several families (*kula*) formed a village (*grama*). There was no concept of the state or kingdom at this stage. Towards the later Vedic period, society was divided into four *varnas* - Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. This was also called the *Varna-Vyavastha*. It denoted categories of people doing different kinds of functions but with the passage of time this division became hereditary and rigid. The teachers were called the Brahmins; the ruling class was called the Kshatriyas; farmers, merchants and bankers were called the Vaisyas while the artisans, craftsmen, labourers were called the Shudras.

Another important social institution of the time was the system of *chaturashrama* or the division of life span into four distinct stages i.e. *brahmacharya* (period of celibacy, education and disciplined life in Guru's ashram), *grihastha* (a period of family life), *vanaprastha* (a stage of gradual detachment) and *sanyasa* (a life dedicated to spiritual pursuit away from worldly life). However, these stages were not applicable to women or to the people of lower *varnas*. Women were respected by the society, enjoyed freedom, and had access to education.

Charvaka Philosophy: Charvaka (also known as *Lokayata*) is a part of the Indian philosophy. It rejected the authority of the Vedas as well as the sacrifices of the Brahmin priests. Those who regard India as an entirely religious and spiritual place might do well to look into this philosophy. The Charvaka School is one of the most irreligious and sceptical systems of thought.

Religious Developments: The period (600 BC to 200 BC) is important for political and cultural unity of the country. Ancient India saw the rise of two very important religions i.e. Jainism and Buddhism. They left a lasting influence on Indian life and culture. Basically both these movements were against the orthodox (*Vaidika*) and ritualistic Brahmanical religion. Both the reforms emphasised moral life and founded an order of monks and established monasteries called *sthanakas* in Jainism and *viharas* in Buddhism.

Jainism : The founder of Jainism is believed to be *Rishabhadeva*, the first of the twenty four *Tirthankaras* and as the last *Tirthankara* Mahavira developed and gave final shape to the Jain doctrines. According to a popular belief, it was Mahavira who founded Jainism.

The Jains lay great emphasis on severe penance and asceticism. Mahavira asked them to take five vows - not to tell lies (satya); not to injure life (ahimsa); not to steal (asteya); not to own property (aparigraha); and to maintain chastity (brahmacharya). These are popularly known as the *Panchavritas*. He also asked the Jains to follow the Three Gems (*Tri Ratnas*) of Right belief, Right knowledge and Right conduct.

Mahavira

Mahavira was born in 599 BC at Kundagram, in Vaishali in modern Bihar. Siddharatha was the name of his father who was the chief of his tribe. He attained enlightenment at the age of 42 and became 'Mahavira'. He spent the rest of his life in spreading Jainism. In his life-time, this religion reached the territories of Videh, Magadha and Anga. He attained salvation near Rajgriha at a place called Pava in 527 BC.

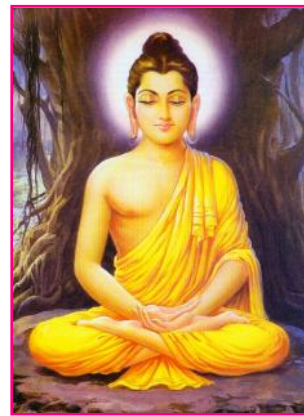


Let us know

Buddhism

Recall the life of Buddha, from your school classes.

Buddhism was led by Gautama Buddha (563 - 483 BC), a younger contemporary of Mahavira. Buddha was decidedly the greatest of the saints born in India. He preached his religion for a period of 45 years. About 487 BC at Kusinagar he left this world on Purnima of Baisakh. Buddha was an embodiment of sacrifice, service and truth, which attracted the people. Buddha's main teachings include the Four Noble Truths and the Eight Fold Path (*Astangamarga*).



Four Noble Truths. a) This world is full of sorrows. b) Desire is the main cause of these sorrows. c) One can get rid of these sorrows by killing desires. d) The desires can be killed only by following the Eight-fold Path.

Eight Fold Path (*ashtanga marga*). (1) Right understanding (2) Right thought (3) Right speech (4) Right action (5) Right livelihood (6) Right effort (7) Right mindfulness (8) Right meditation.

Asoka (304 - 232 BC)

Make a speech about Ashoka and the Kalinga war.

Ashoka stands out as a ruler who combined successful kingship with idealism and philosophy. After the battle of Kalinga he adopted the policy of *Dharmavijaya* that is conquest through *dharma*. His policies were oriented towards the welfare of his people. His dharma was based on social responsibility. Ashoka communicated his thoughts and philosophy to his people by inscribing them on stone pillars and rock surfaces. These edicts are remarkable examples of Mauryan architecture and also of engineering skills. He asked people to practise ahimsa.



Let us check

Analyse the features of Indian culture during the Vedic period.

Indian Culture during the Medieval Era

The Medieval period is considered as an age of great cultural synthesis in India. The Turks and the Mughals introduced fresh ideas in the socio - cultural fields. The Mughal emperor Akbar established a religion named Din Ilahi in the 16th century. It tried to merge the best elements of the religions of his empire like Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Jainism and Zoroastrianism. It encouraged the purification of soul through the desire for God. The Mughal emperors encouraged the blending of cultures to create a united India.

Sufism: 'Sufism' is a term used to refer to mystical religious ideas in Islam. It had evolved into a well developed movement by the 11th century. Sufis want to establish a direct communion with the divine. The basis of Sufism is God and Man, and the relation between them which is love. The Sufis were regarded as people who kept their heart pure. They sought to communicate with God through their ascetic practises, doctrine of divine love and union with God. Sufism bridged the gap between Islam and Hinduism in India.

Bhakti Movement: The Bhakti movement popularised devotional surrender to a supreme God. Its origins are traced to the Brahmanical and Buddhist

traditions of ancient India. It emerged in South India. This was based on religious equality and social participation.

The Bhakti movement attempted to break away from the orthodox Brahmanism. The Bhakti saints like Kabir, Nanak, Chaithanya and Tulsidas believed in religious equality and identified themselves with the sufferings of the common people.

Bhakti Movement: Main features

- a) Faith in God
- b) Purity of heart
- c) Hindu – Muslim Unity
- d) Condemnation of idol worship
- e) Opposition to caste system
- f) Preaching in vernacular languages



Let us know

Sikhism: The teachings and philosophy of Guru Nanak form an important part of Indian philosophical thought. His philosophy consists of three basic elements: a leading charismatic personality (the Guru), ideology (Shabad) and organisation (Sangat). Nanak was against the prevailing religious beliefs and attempted to establish a true religion, which could lead to salvation. He rejected idol worship and did not favour pilgrimage. He dismissed the theory of incarnation and was against rituals. He laid emphasis on having a true Guru for revelation. He advised people to follow the principles of conduct and worship. He emphasised the concepts of justice, righteousness and liberty.

Let us check



List out various Bhakti movements and their characteristics.

Indian Culture during the Modern Era

The social and religious movements in the nineteenth century led to the rise of modern India. Modern literature in Indian languages was influenced by the spread of English education. India thus came in contact with the western ideas and institutions.

Friendly relations existed between Hindus and Muslims and religious tolerance was practised. Members of both the communities participated in each other's festivals. Many Hindus had faith in Muslim saints while many Muslims showed an equal respect for the Hindu gods and saints. The Muslims adapted themselves with the Indian culture so well that it was difficult to distinguish one from the other.

Social Conditions: By the turn of the 20th century, the social conditions were unfavourable for women. The birth of a girl child was considered to be a misfortune. Girls were married off in their childhood. As child marriages were common there were a lot of widows including girls. They remained widows for the rest of their lives. Widows could not wear coloured clothes, or attend marriages since their presence was considered undesirable. Inter-caste marriages were not allowed. Polygamy was permitted. Women had no right to property or divorce. The social system did not permit a person from a lower caste to eat with a person of a higher caste.

Social and Religious Reformers: Christian missionaries started schools that were also attended by Indian children. They introduced printing for spreading Christian ideals and literature. English education had a great impact on the society. New ideas of liberalism, rationalism, democracy, equality and freedom came through it. Soon English language became popular among the English educated Indians and acted as a bridging force.

Ram Mohan Roy: Ram Mohan Roy (1775 - 1833) is known as the forerunner of the modern India. A large number of social practices among the Hindus claimed religious support. But Ram Mohan Roy used the religious texts to prove that this was not true. He fought against them. Brahma Samaj founded by him spread his message of rationalism and the principle of social equality. His followers believed in the worship of one supreme God (monotheism) and opposed idol worship, polytheism and ritualism.

Let us check



Discuss the changes happened in Indian culture during the Modern Era.

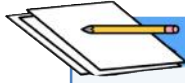
Mahatma Gandhi: The Embodiment of Indian Cultural Heritage

Mahatma Gandhi upheld the values and spirit of India's cultural heritage throughout his life. His life and activities were based on the age old tradition

and culture of India. He imbibed the finer features of Indian culture and practised them in his life. He was an advocate of Indian cultural heritage.

Mahatma Gandhi believed in the oneness of all human beings. He related himself to all living beings. Gandhi understood the value and importance of non-violence in every moment of his life. The entire living world was his arena and the welfare of all was his mission. He took voluntary poverty and led a simple life. He never accumulated wealth for his private use. He identified himself with the poor. He had a living faith in God. For him, the one and only purpose of life is God-realisation and this can only be possible through selfless service of fellowmen. He was an ardent follower of truth. To Gandhi self-suffering is the means to achieve truth. For him, truth realisation is God realisation. Mahatma Gandhi respected all religions of the world equally for the simple reason that they all lead towards the same goal - God. For him communal unity is the pre-requisite for a happy living.

All the above attributes of Mahatma Gandhi had their base in Indian culture and tradition. The uniqueness of Indian cultural heritage discussed in this chapter clearly indicates this conclusion. Gandhi, in his time, was a great exponent and representative of Indian Culture. Gandhi wrote, "Our culture is a treasure-house of such great values as are hardly found in other cultures. We have not given its due recognition; have seen it and learnt about it disregarding its proper study and undermining its values. We have almost discarded it by not conducting ourselves according to its tenets; [but] without the conduct, more intellectual knowledge is just like a corpse that may be preserved as mummy. It seems good to look at, but fails to inspire."



Summary

- Culture is the way of life that is vital for the survival of a specific group or people living in a specific society.
- Cultural heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation.
- The terms culture and civilization are used interchangeably.
- The Indian word for culture is *Sanskriti*. It means to purify, to transform, to sublimate, to mould and to perfect.
- The secular character of Indian culture is a result of the intermingling of people from diverse cultural groups.
- The values of *Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam* and *Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavanthu* are the key aspects of Indian tradition.
- India has a continuous cultural history covering a very long period.
- The culture associated with the Harappan civilization is the first known urban culture in India.
- The Medieval period is considered as an age of great cultural synthesis.
- Social and religious movements in the nineteenth century led to the rise of modern India.
- Mahatma Gandhi is an embodiment of cultural heritage of India.



I can

- explain the meaning of culture.
- identify the difference between culture and civilization.
- identify the distinguished features of Indian cultural heritage.
- analyse the features of Indian culture during Vedic, medieval and modern era.
- assess Mahatma Gandhi as an embodiment of Indian cultural heritage.



Let us assess

- 1 Explain the cultural diversity of India.
- 2 Analyse the general characteristics of culture.
- 3 Prepare a short note on culture and civilization.
- 4 Give a detailed write up on 'Indian cultural heritage'.
- 5 Mahatma Gandhi is the embodiment of Indian cultural heritage. Do you agree to this? Justify.
- 6 Prepare a note on Vedic culture.
- 7 Religious pluralism was a unique feature of Indian culture. Discuss.
- 8 The Medieval period is considered as an age of great cultural synthesis in India. Analyse.
- 9 The period 600 BC to 200 BC witnessed the rise of two very important religions. Later these religions became popular. Identify these religions and make short note on them.

Spec