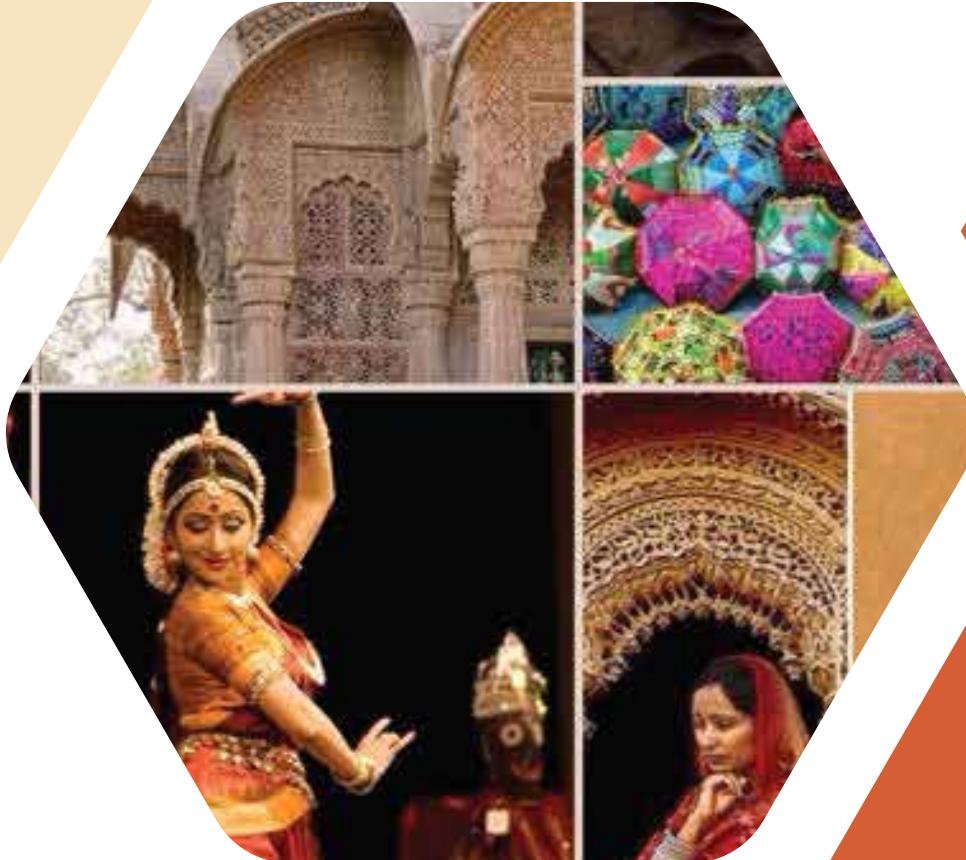


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ART & CULTURE

for Civil Services Exam

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**UNIT
1**

CULTURE OF INDIA

CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN CULTURE

■ Introduction

- Culture is the soul of a nation. On the basis of culture, we can experience the prosperity of its past and present. Culture is collection of values of human life, which establishes it specifically and ideally separate from other groups.
- Culture refers to the patterns of thought and behaviour of people. It includes values, beliefs, rules of conduct, and patterns of social, political and economic organisation. These are passed on from one generation to the next by formal as well as informal processes. Culture consists of the ways in which we think and act as members of a society. Thus, all the achievements of group life are collectively called culture.
- Culture is the product of such an organization and expresses itself through language and art, philosophy and religion. It also expresses itself through social habits, customs, economic organisations and political institutions.
- Culture has two types: (i) material, and (ii) non-material.
- The first includes technologies, instruments, material goods, consumer goods, household design and architecture, modes of production, trade, commerce, welfare and other social activities. The latter includes norms, values, beliefs, myths, legends, literature, ritual, art forms and other intellectual-literary activities. The material and non-material aspects of any culture are usually interdependent on each other. Sometimes, however, material culture may change quickly but the non-material may take longer time to change.

■ Culture and Heritage

- Cultural development is a historical process. Our ancestors learnt many things from their predecessors. With the passage of time they also added to it from their own experience and gave up those which they did not consider useful. We in turn have learnt many things from our ancestors. As time goes we continue to add new thoughts, new ideas to those already existent and sometimes we give up some which we don't consider useful any more. This is how culture is transmitted and carried forward from generation to next generation. The culture we inherit from our predecessors is called our cultural heritage.

■ Indian Culture

- According to Indologists, Indian culture stands not only for a traditional social code but also for a spiritual foundation of life. Indian culture is an invaluable possession of our society. Inspite of facing many ups and downs Indian culture is shinning with all its glory and splendor.
- Indian culture is one of the most ancient cultures of the world. The ancient cultures of Egypt, Greece, Rome, etc. were destroyed with time and only their remnants are left. But Indian culture is alive till today. Its fundamental principles are the same, as were in the ancient time. One can see village panchayats,

caste systems and joint family system. The teachings of Buddha, Mahavira, and Lord Krishna are alive till today also and are source of inspiration. The values of spirituality, praying nature, faith in karma and reincarnation, non-violence, truth, non-stealing, chastity, non- acquisitiveness, etc. inspire people of this nation, today also.

- Indian culture can be called an ancient culture, whose past is alive even in the present. The reminiscent of the stone-age found in Pallavaram, Chingalpet, Vellore, Tinnivalli near Madras, in the valley of river Sohan, in Pindhigher area in West Punjab, in Rehand area of Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh, in Narmada Valley in Madhya Pradesh, in Hoshangabad and Maheshwar, make it clear that India has been the land of development and growth of human culture.
- On the basis of excavation done in places like Harappa and Mohenjodaro etc. we come to know the developed civilization and culture of the pre-historical era, which was flourished around 3000 B.C. Thus, Indian culture is about 5000 years old.

Significance of Geography in Indian Culture

- The ancient civilization in India grew up in a sharply demarcated sub-continent bounded on the north by the world's largest mountain range- the chain of the Himalayas, which, with its extensions to east and west, divides India from the rest of Asia and the world. The barrier, however, was at no time an insuperable one, and at all periods both settlers and traders have found their way over the high and desolate passes into India., while Indians have carried their commerce and culture beyond her frontiers by the same route. India's isolation has never been complete, and the effect of the mountain wall in developing her unique culture has often been over rated.
- The importance of the mountains to India is not much in the isolation which they give her, as in the fact that they are the source of her two great rivers.
- Of the two river systems, that of the Indus, now mainly in Pakistan, had the earliest civilization. And gave its name to India, as the Indian knew this river as Sindhu, and the Persians, who found difficulty in pronouncing as initials, called it Hindu. From the Persia the word passed to Greece, where the whole of India became known by the name of the western river. The ancient Indians knew their subcontinent as Jambudvipa or Bharatavarsha. With the Muslim invasion the Persian name returned in the form of Hindustan, and those of its inhabitants who followed the old religion became known as Hindu.
- The western half of the Ganga plain, from the region around Delhi to Patna, and including the Doab, or the land between the Ganga and its great tributary river Yamuna, has always been the heart of India. Here, in the region once known as Aryavarta, the land of the Aryans, here classical culture was formed.
- The south-eastern part of the Peninsula forms a larger plain, the Tamil country, the culture of which was once independent, and is not yet completely unified with that of the North. The Dravidian peoples of Southern India still speak languages in no way akin to those of the North, and are of a different ethnic character. Though there has been much intermixing between Northern and Southern types. Geographically Ceylon is a continuation of India.
- Thus, although India was isolated largely by the geographical features and different climatic zone, yet her vast dimensions, variety of racial elements, wide differences of climate, great diversities of soils and different physical characteristics not only prevented her from being a stagnant pool but gave it a continental character. It enabled her to generate the forces of action and reaction which led to the development of rich civilization and culture.

Characteristics of Indian Culture

- Traditional Indian culture, in its overall thrust towards the spiritual, promotes moral values and the attitudes of generosity, simplicity and frugality. Some of the striking features of Indian culture that pervade its numerous castes, tribes, ethnic groups and religious groups and sects discussed below.

- The framework of Indian culture places human beings within a conception of the universe as a divine creation. It is not anthropo-centric (human-centric) only and considers all elements of creation, both living and non-living, as manifestations of the divine. Therefore, it respects God's design and promotes the ideal of co-existence. This vision thus, synthesizes human beings, nature and God into one integral whole. This is reflected in the idea of Satyam-Shivam-Sundaram.
- Indian philosophy and culture tries to achieve an innate harmony and order and this is extended to the entire cosmos.
- Indian culture assumes that natural cosmic order inherent in nature is the foundation of moral and social order. Inner harmony is supposed to be the foundation of outer harmony. External order and beauty will naturally follow from inner harmony.
- Indian culture balances and seeks to synthesize the material and the spiritual, as aptly illustrated by the concept of purushartha.
- An important characteristic of Indian culture is tolerance. In India, tolerance and liberalism is found for all religions, castes, communities, etc. Many foreign cultures invaded India and Indian society gave every culture the opportunity of prospering.
- There is a peaceful coexistence of various religions in India and all have been affecting each other – although this tradition has been badly affected by activities of converting religion by some religious organisations. All the religions existing in India are respected equally. Indian culture accepts the manifoldness of reality and assimilates plurality of viewpoints, behaviours, customs and institutions. It does not try to suppress diversity in favour of uniformity. The motto of Indian culture is both unity in diversity as well as diversity in unity.
- The principles of Indian culture are today also that much in practice, as they were initially. A special characteristic of Indian culture is – its continuous flow. Since, Indian culture is based on values, so its development is continuous. Many centuries passed by, many changes occurred, many foreign invaders were faced, but the light of Indian culture today also is continuously glowing.
- Many invasions occurred, many rulers changed, many laws were passed but even today, the traditional institutions, religion, epics, literature, philosophy, traditions, etc. are alive.
- Adaptability has a great contribution in making Indian culture immortal. Adaptability is the process of changing according to time, place and period. It's an essential element of longevity of any culture. Indian culture has a unique property of adjustment, as a result of which, it is maintained till today. Indian family, caste, religion and institutions have changed themselves with time. Due to adaptability and co-ordination of Indian culture, its continuity, utility and activity is still present.
- Receptivity is an important characteristic of Indian culture. Indian culture has always accepted the good of the invading cultures.
- An important characteristic of Indian culture is Unity in Diversity. There is much diversity in Indian culture like in geography, in caste, in creed, in language, in religion, in politics, etc.

Indian Culture during the Contemporary Period

- During the modern period, the relationship between the classical represented by English and the vernacular folk traditions has broken down. Traditional equilibrium has been affected by different factors and processes of modernization.
- With the impact of modern social forces the relationship between the classical and the folk traditions has been disturbed. In the urban centres a new middle class has been growing and assuming the role of the bearer of the classical tradition.
- Throughout history, the folk and the tribal traditions have remained relatively unaffected by changes in political structures.
- The bearers of modern Western classical cultural tradition, on the other hand, have on occasions shown less tolerance towards the folk and the tribal traditions. They usually brand the traditional culture as primitive, barbaric and superstitious in comparison to the modern culture. They try to modernize and westernize all the elements and streams of Indian culture.

- The processes of westernization, industrialisation, urbanisation, globalisation and democratisation are influencing various aspects of Indian culture today.
- These modernizing and secularizing forces, however, have not yet cut off contemporary Indian culture from the traditional and cultural roots of Indian culture. The traditional cultural media not only continue to survive today, but also some aspects of it have also been incorporated in novel ways into an emerging popular and, classical culture.

■ Unity in Diversity

- One feature that is most often noticed about India is its unity in diversity. This overworked cliché has become a part of India's self-identity. India is a country of sub-continental proportions. From north to south, east to west, people from diverse backgrounds have mixed and cultures have intermingled over centuries. Nevertheless, there has been an underlying continuity in identity. Beneath the bewildering diversity of religion, language and customs of this vast country, the underlying unity is remarkable.

Geographical and Demographic Factors:

- The first striking feature about India is its diversity because of India's geographical environment and huge populations.
- In terms of physical features of the population, there is diversity in appearance and complexion, height and figure etc.
- However, geography seems to have played an important role in engendering Indian unity and the sense of Indianness. Shut off from the rest of Asia by the inaccessible barriers of the mighty Himalayas and with the seas and the ocean on all other sides, India is clearly marked out to be a geographical entity.

◦ Religious Factors:

- ▶ India is a multi-religious country. There are seven major religious groups in India. The Hindus constitute the majority of Indian population. The Muslims constitute the second largest religious group. The Christians, the Sikhs, the Buddhists, the Jains and others the Jews, the Zoroastrians or Parsis and the Animists may not be numerically big, but their contribution to India is as significant as the other bigger groups. Religion is both a factor of unity and diversity in Indian society. All religious groups are differentiated internally.

◦ Composite Culture:

- ▶ The story of Indian culture is one of continuity, synthesis and enrichment. Culture is also a source of unity as well as diversity like religion. Powerful kingdoms and empires such as the Mauryas and the Guptas did not aggressively intervene in social and cultural matters; leaving much diversity intact.
- ▶ The distribution of material traits such as dress, habitation, arts and crafts, endless variety of food and their preparation, makes India a living example of regional diversity.

◦ Political Factors:

- ▶ It is generally believed that India's continuity as a civilisation was social and cultural rather than political. Order and stability were maintained not by means of the state but through culture and society. The vastness of the country's extreme diversity of physical features, endless variety of races, castes, creeds and languages and dialects have made it difficult to establish an all- Indian empire
- ▶ However, the idea of bringing the whole country under one central authority has always been on the minds of great kings and statesmen of India. It was with this purpose that the kings of ancient India proclaimed the idea of Chakravarti. Kings like Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka, Samudragupta and Harshvardhana had put this idea into practice. The socio-political contributions of some Muslim rulers such as Akbar and Jehangir were also highly commendable. Akbar's Din-e-Elahi and Jehangir's emphasis on justice deserve special mention in this regard.

- The British tried to establish political unification under a paramount power with regard to the defence, external relations, foreign policy and certain economic matters within the whole of India.
- After the independence the unity of India is expressed in the institution of the nation. It is the product of the freedom movement as well as the constitutional legacy of the British rule. There is political and administrative unity today but there are different political parties and diverse political ideologies. Therefore, politics is both a factor of unity and diversity.

○ **Linguistic Factors:**

- India is a multilingual country. Language is another source of cultural diversity as well as unity. It contributes to collective identities and even to conflicts. Twenty two languages are recognized by Indian Constitution.
- All major languages have regional and dialectical variations, for example, Hindi has Awadhi, Brij, Bhojpuri, Magadhi, Bundeli, Pahari, Malwi, Odia has Sambalpuri and several other dialects. The situation is further complicated since 179 languages and 544 dialects are recognised in India.
- These languages and dialects are divided into three linguistic families Indo- Aryan, Dravidian and Mundari.
- In the post independence period, English replaced Urdu as the official and court language. After independence, Hindi was made the national language but English remained the language of the central government and of the courts. English has also remained the language of higher education and research in India after 1835.
- Language too has an underlying role in the unity in diversity of Indian culture. Although there is bewildering diversity in the languages and dialects of India, fundamental unity is found in the ideas and themes expressed in these languages. There is unity also at the level of grammatical structures. Sanskrit has deeply influenced most languages of India with its vocabulary. Dravidian languages also have a number of Sanskrit words today. Persian, Arabic and English words too have become part of the Indian languages and dialects today. The spirit of accommodation, which united different ethnic groups into one social system, also expresses itself in the literatures of India.

Elements of Unity in India in different Phases

- Due to cultural and economic interaction and geographical mobility there has emerged an all-India style, a series of inter-linkages and much commonality between different regions of India. The following few paragraphs will elaborate the elements which act as binding factors inspite of numerous diversity in India.
- India is characterized by numerous local level traditions or folk traditions as well as what could be deemed as the greater classical tradition. The latter would be more widely spread over the country but also confined to certain dominant sections of society.
- Common to each linguistic region are specific agriculture related castes which form the core of rural communities, along with their complementary artisan and service castes. These were involved in a jajmani-service provider relationship. In the urban areas there were predominantly, castes of banias (traders), crafts persons and castes such as brahmans and kayasthas.
- Pilgrimage centres have also led to a type of unity at the all India level. Barriers of caste, class and other social taboos were almost absent at pilgrimage centres during several cultural occasions. People from different regions were able to interact at the pilgrim centres with each other leading to the establishment of cultural bonds. Trans-sectarian pilgrim sites include Kashi, Haridwar, Rameshwaram, Dwarka, Badrinath, Gaya, similarly Amritsar and Ajmer Sharif also became pilgrimage centre during medieval period.
- Traditional personal laws and social customs of the Hindus were applicable in different regions. The Dayabhaga system of inheritance was popular in Bengal whereas the Mitakshara prevailed over the rest of the country, except in Kerala and Bengal. Most Indians believe in the ideas of heaven and hell and cherish the idea of moksha (salvation) or nirvana (liberation) from the cycle of life and death. This concept of moksha or nirvana is linked with the perception of the one ultimate Brahma.

- In the middle ages when the world witnessed the most intensely fought religious wars in Europe and the Middle East, India stood out as a country where many religions co-existed in relative social harmony. The role of the ruler like Akbar was also very important in this context.
- Islam seems to have strengthened the de-ritualising and egalitarian trends in Medieval Hinduism, while Hindu philosophy seems to have strengthened the mystical spiritual strain in Muslim religious thought. For example, the Bhakti movement initiated by the Nayanar Saints of South India found strength in the context of Islam and Muslim dominance in North India. In the same way, the mystic and devotional aspect of Islam was strengthened in the philosophical milieu of Hinduism. Ramanand, Kabir, Nanak and Dara Shikoh played a significant role in the spread of mutual understanding among the Hindu and the Muslim masses.
- A unified culture in language, music and the arts was developed during the medieval period. Hindi and Urdu are the product of this unified Hindustani culture of medieval India. Both languages have common roots, common vocabulary but these are written in different scripts — Devanagari and Persian respectively.
- In music and arts, the Hindus and the Muslims had come together. North Indian (Hindustani) music was nurtured at the king's courts and in the Hindu temples. Hindus sang at the Muslim courts and Muslims have sung bhajans at Hindu temples. Krishna, Radha and the gopis have provided the staple theme for many of the compositions sung by Hindu and Muslim masters alike.
- In architecture the process of blending Hindu and Muslim elements was perfected during the medieval period. During the rule of Akbar, a synthesis of the Turko-Persian conceptions with Indian style was attempted. In Jehangir's time the Hindu influence seems to have had increased. The tomb of Akbar at Sikandra shows, in spite of its Muslim arches and domes, the general pattern of Buddhist viharas or of the rathas of Mahabalipuram. Jain influence is found on the mosque of Fatehpur Sikri and Mount Abu. The Mughal architecture acquired new qualities which neither the Persian nor the old Indian styles had ever possessed.
- Painting also developed a new style during this period through the blending of the Turko-Iranian with the old Indian style. Akbar founded an academy of painting at his court where Indian and Persian artists worked together. Jehangir was not only a patron of art but was himself an artist, and during his time Mughal painting reached its zenith.
- During the colonial rule different factors led to significant changes in the structure of Indian society. The traditional framework of unity in Indian civilization came under tremendous stress. Modern education introduced by the colonial rulers initiated a process of cultural westernisation.
- The freedom movement (1857-1947) created new sources of unity in Indian society. Now, nationalism replaced religion and culture as the cementing force within Indian society. Despite the partition in 1947, the experience of freedom movement is still the foundation of Indian unity in modern India.
- After the independence the nation and its different organs have become the pillars of unity in India. The constitution built on the pre-existing unity of India has strengthened it still further by emphasizing the values of equality, fraternity, secularism and justice.
- Modern means of communication, the network of railways, surface transport, civil aviation, post offices, telegraph, telephones, print media, radio and television have played important roles in maintaining and strengthening the national ethos and creating a we feeling among Indians.
- Industrialisation, urbanization and other economic factors have led to the creation of the capitalist and the middle classes and have also created mobility of labour and services throughout the country.
- Thus, the above account on the aspect of unity in diversity speaks that India has a traditional culture with cosmopolitan outlook. Since time immemorial inspite of having scores of differences the country is still united in spirit, in politics, in the mind of the inhabitants and will remain in such condition perpetually.

■ Introduction

- The past of humankind has been divided into three broad categories viz. Prehistoric, protohistoric and historic. Prehistoric period belongs to the time before the emergence of writing and the historic period to the time following it.
- Human civilisation has evolved from stone age to modern scientific world through experiments and observation. In the past we have moved from stone age to bronze age and then iron age. Stone age was marked by use of stone tool technology. The suffix lithic indicates the stone tool technology. Economically the Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods represented the hunting-gathering stage while the Neolithic represented the stage of food production, i.e. plant cultivation and animal husbandry.
- Although man struggled for his survival in the Paleolithic era, the artistic attitude made him develop several rock cut paintings in the walls of the caves. By piecing together the information deduced from these cave drawings, scholars were able to construct the history of the Paleolithic man. Remnants of rock paintings are found in the rock shelters located in Bhimbetka near Bhopal. Several other sites are situated in several districts of Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar.

■ Salient features of the paintings:

- The paintings were carved in the walls of caves with a sharp weapon.
- The paintings mainly consist of man's **struggle for survival**. Hunting scenes pre-dominate.
- Paintings have 3 motifs- man, animal and geometric pattern.
- Green and red colour paintings are found in Bhimbetka caves.
- Community dancers provide a common theme.
- Some of the pictures like women and children depict a kind of family life.



- Major breakthrough in the artistic development took place in *chalcolithic period* when man started using **pottery** in his daily life. We find painted pottery with various designs in different areas. The vividness and vitality of earlier periods disappear in this new type of painting. They used many colures such as white, yellow, orange, red, green, black, etc.

- New developments that occurred in Chalcolithic Period:
 - ▶ Brushes were made of plant fibre.
 - ▶ Paints were made by crushing rocks. They got red from hematite, white from limestone, etc.
 - ▶ They engraved on rocks as a part of the rituals they perform at birth, at death, at coming of age and at the time of marriage.
 - ▶ They also painted individual animal with a good pictorial quality which implies the mastery of painting skill compared to previous era.
- The pre-historic paintings help us to know about the life style of man at that time, his food, his daily activities and above all, his mind-the way he thought.
