UNIT 1 INDIAN CULTURE AND HERITAGE: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT I

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you shall be able to learn:

- the meaning of culture and heritage and the elements they consist of,
- the factors which contributed to the making of our culture,
- how the Indian culture evolved over centuries of history, and
- what are the landmarks of the development of our culture and what are their identifying features.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Indian culture is unique in several ways. It has an uninterrupted history of evolution dating back in the past to nearly five thousand years. During all this period it has enriched itself by assimilating diverse kinds of influences and impacts. This has given Indian culture a certain vibrance and has saved it from a monotonous uniformity. In fact the pulsating mosaic of this culture is most vividly displayed as you go across the length and width of India. You will simultaneously discern a spirit of unity that underlies this enormous diversity.

Thus when we talk of Indian culture we actually speak of a rich plurality of cultural traditions and not a monolithic entity. This plurality in some cases is the consequence of a common origin (as in the case of the majority of Indian languages); in other cases of shared heritage (such as our music, architecture, many popular religious cults etc.); and in still others due to a common struggle against the colonial rule. Equally important is the fact that we also perceive ourselves as part of a common culture cutting across national boundaries. This common cultural heritage is the legacy of a complex interaction of various cultures through centuries of shared existence.

We shall, in the following sections, take you on a historical journey through the evolution of Indian culture.
1.2 CULTURE AND HERITAGE: PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION

Let us begin this journey by first arriving at a debate over what constitutes culture. The word is often used interchangeably with civilization, and both have a history in what they have meant at different points of time and in different societies. Both referred originally to a process, and in some sense this meaning is still inherent in the ways these two words are used.

The term civilization is now generally used to describe an achieved state or condition of organized social life as well as the process whereby it has been arrived at. Through comparative studies we today also come across terms such as western civilization, modern civilization, industrial civilization, etc. which are descriptive.

Culture as a concept is more complicated than civilization. The word is used in various ways denoting values of general human development which today are not easily questionable, for example, freedom, democracy, equality, secularism; etc. The particularities of different communities which constitute their rights and expression also are included within the meaning of culture. There are three broad levels, with a certain overlapping, at which the meaning of the term culture can be understood:

i) The general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development.

ii) A particular way of life, whether of a people, period, or a group.

iii) The works of intellectual and artistic endeavour expressed through music, literature, art, film etc.

Heritage is a similarly broad concept. It often carries the meaning of culture too. Whatever we inherit from our past can be called our heritage. In terms of contents it includes our craft traditions, music, dance, painting, architecture and other art forms, traditions of production and technology, different systems of therapies, our environment with all its bio-diversity, our systems of philosophy etc.

Our cultural heritage has a strong secular — popular content and is pluralistic in character. But it also contains many elements which inhibit our development: a nation like caste system, superstitions, discriminations against women and dalits. We, therefore, have to be conscious about what aspects of our culture we should conserve and emulate and what elements we must discard.

1.3 CULTURE AND ITS DETERMINANTS

Culture is determined and shaped historically and socially. It, in its turn, influences the social, economic and political development of people or nation. This Section will deal in detail with this complex interaction of various factors which has influenced our culture over thousands of years.

1.3.1 Culture, Society and History

To begin with, culture is the life and mind of a society at any given time in history. The culture of a particular society or age cannot be separated from its historical context. The continuity, change or transformation in cultural traditions is influenced by the social, economic and political developments at any given time, and vice-versa.

To give a few examples, the growth and changes in agricultural production are inseparably linked with the emergence, development and changes within the Vedic civilization in India. The Vedic civilization which gave birth to the varnashrama and the caste system has, in turn, exerted great influence on Indian culture. The caste system - an inescapable aspect of our society through history, has assumed changes, modifications, and flexibility to suit the changing needs of the various ruling groups in India. The early Dravidian civilization has been an important influence because of its cultural significance in a specific historical and social context. The flowering of art and literature as well as the Buddhist monuments of the Maurya and Gupta period would not have been possible without the prosperity and increase
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1.3.2 Political Structures and Their Impact on Culture

Political structures have also had an impact on our culture throughout its history. For example, the periods of political decentralization, as after the disintegration of the Gupta Empire and, later, the Mughal Empire, resulted in the growth of regional cultures. Similarly, the periods of centralization, such as the Mughal and the modern periods, helped in the development of a composite, syncretic tradition that has the semblance of a national culture. The religion professed by a ruler can inspire the development of art forms bearing those religious expressions. It does not, however, mean that other forms were suppressed. Similarly, a more liberal, democratic and secular rule may witness the growth of non-religious art forms as seen in modern and contemporary India. An oppressive rule can also stimulate cultural expressions of protest as seen during the colonial rule.

1.3.3 Outside Influences and Culture

No society has existed in isolation, or remained uninfluenced by the other societies it came in contact with. This is as true of our country as any other, and we have had contact with the outside world since the earliest times. We have taken much from it, and given much to it. Our entire scientific and technological heritage is a shared heritage.

Repeated new influences as a result of trade contacts, conquests followed by settlements and adoption or intermixing with the native population by different tribes and races through India’s history have enriched India’s culture. The Aryans brought with them forms of agricultural products, new gods and beliefs. With Turkish conquest came gunpowder, cavalry and new techniques. Stitched cloth, domes, arches, paper, glass-making techniques, and water-wheel are some of the elements of civilization which came from outside. Persian influences after the Mughal conquest brought into being new melodies, musical forms, musical instruments, dastan and ghazals as forms of literary expression, miniature painting, etc. The composite, syncretic culture, and flowering of different regional cultures came from the interaction that shared life gave to India. It is a culture of unity in diversity.

1.3.4 Cultural Awareness and History

Even cultural awareness has a connection with history. For example, a scientific temper is possible only in the context of modernity, as are secularism and an attitude of pluralism. We cannot search for an awareness and consciousness of these values in our ancient past. The past may contain many things of great importance. At the same time, however, there are many things like slavery, caste system, discrimination against dalits and women, religious intolerance etc which must be seen as inimical to our development today. The past and present both must be critically examined and then the positive things be assimilated and the negative things be discarded. In this connection, the lines of a great Sanskrit poet are particularly apt:
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All that is old need not be good
All that is new need not be bad
Wise men decide after a tough test
The fools tread the beaten path.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What are the components of our culture? Write in 50 words.

2) What are the main factors which influence culture?

1.4 HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

In this Section we will discuss how our culture has evolved historically in various stages. Starting with the Harappan Civilization from the ancient period we go into the medieval period in search of our cultural heritage and then come to the modern and contemporary period. We have dealt with in this Unit upto the early medieval period. The later medieval, modern and the contemporary periods have been dealt with in the next Unit. This is not to say that the people of the stone ages or Neolithic period had no culture. Many cave paintings depict such art forms that demonstrate the culture of those periods.

1.4.1 The Harappan Period

The chance discovery of the Harappan civilization was made during the late 19th century. The fact that it was the ancient most civilization of India and contemporary to Mesopotamian (ancient Iraq) and Egyptian civilization, however, was determined only in the early 20th century. It was a five thousand year old civilization and represented an advanced level of cultural development during an epoch when iron was still not discovered and bronze was used for making tools, implements and arms.

The Harappan script has not yet been deciphered. So our knowledge about this civilization is based mainly on archaeological findings. These studies show that this civilization was mainly urban and was spread far and wide in what today are India and Pakistan. Mahenjodaro, Harappa, Kalibangan, Lothal etc. were some of the major cities of the period.

There was a certain unity of conception among the various cities. A Harappan city was divided into two parts - the one settled on a raised platform and meant for the rulers and the lower city meant for the common people. The houses were built, in some cases, of baked bricks.
and in other cases of mud bricks. These bricks were of standard size which showed that the brick-making was organized on a large scale.

Similar to the town-planning, the potteries made by the Harappans were found in large areas and showed a uniform pattern. In fact, their tradition of pottery-making can, with many changes, be found even today.

Art works in terracotta and sculptures in bronze and stone are other important remains from the Harappan period. The Harappan potteries and seals contain figures of bull, ram, pipal tree, fish scales etc. The Harappans also seemed to worship pipal tree and the phallus (an image of Shiva) which remain important religious symbols in today's India.

About this civilization you will learn more in Unit 18 in Block 6 of this course.

1.4.2 The Vedic Civilization

The Vedic Civilization, associated with the coming of the Aryans to India, is said to have begun about 1500 B.C. and lasted about 600 B.C. Unlike the Harappan Civilization which was city-based, it was an agricultural civilization. It was during this period that many features which we associate with what has come to be called as Hinduism originated and took shape. It has left its imprint on our culture today in the form of settled agriculture, cattle breeding, centrality of cow (and bullocks) in our economy and religious beliefs, the horse, the chariot, the use of iron, domestication of animals such as elephants, kinship and patriarchy as basis of social organization, the development of kingdom and large empires out of chieftainships. We still have with us the Vedic hymns composed almost 3500 years ago which even today are used in many Hindu rituals, the sacredness of fire as intermediary between god and man, the worship of gods associated with natural phenomena, the doctrine of transmigration, animal sacrifice etc. In terms of literature and philosophical thought it has given us the Vedas, the Upanishads, Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit languages and literature, etc.

1.4.3 The Buddhist Epoch

During the 6th century B.C., the opposition to the domination of the society by Brahmins grew. New religious ideas, which were heterodox in nature, arose. The reasons for their emergence were the following:

i) The Vedic rituals had become most elaborate and cumbersome for most social groups. There were meaningless ceremonies and sacrifices leading to enormous expenses.

ii) Since the Brahmins were the executors of these rituals, their domination over the other groups was becoming established. They also devised a hierarchical four-tier system called varnashram and claimed the highest position for themselves. This led to resentment among many groups such as the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas who were otherwise powerful and wealthy but lacked in social importance.

iii) The social status became linked to birth. The caste system which was earlier devised as occupational categories became atrophied and the social mobility became rare. It was this discontent generated by the Brahminical domination and the rising political and economic power of the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas that gave rise to and supported the new religious ideas.

Mahavir and Gautam Buddha were the two great religious leaders of this period. By the strength of their ideas they can be said to be among the greatest in the world. The Jain and Buddha religions emerged as a result of teachings of Mahavir and Gautam Buddha respectively. While the followers of the Jain religion were mostly among the Vaishyas, Buddhism had its followers among all communities. Buddhism spread far and wide and, at one point of time, almost the whole of Asia, which represented the pinnacle of civilization, became influenced by Buddhism. In India also, Buddhism held sway for almost one thousand years and greatly influenced Indian culture and society. Many concepts and values of this period are among our most cherished cultural heritage today. We are listing below the most important contributions of these religious ideas to our cultural tradition:

i) Jainism and Buddhism represented a revolt against the concept of social inequality and the hierarchical Varnashram system preached by the Brahmins. These religions opened
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their gates to members of all castes and groups in the society. They also gave an equal status to women.

techniques to the rituals and sacrifices prevalent in the society. Instead they put emphasis on Karma as deciding the fate of the individuals in the next world. Non-violence, humanism and stress on moral life were the hallmarks of these new religious orders.

One of the tools of the Brahminical domination was the stress on the language of the Vedas, that is, Sanskrit. The new religions put more emphasis on the popular languages like Prakrit, Pali and Ardha Magadhi. Buddhist and Jain texts were written in these languages and nobody was debarred from reading or interpreting them. This paved the way for the development of the vernacular literature.

This period also witnessed the rise of architecture and sculpture to new heights. The temples at Jhandial (Taxila), Nagar (Rajasthan), Besnagar (Madhya Pradesh) and Nagarjunakonda (Andhra Pradesh) are some of the structures found in excavations.

The Buddhist Stupas, in which the mortal remains of important personalities are to be found, are distributed in Bodh Gaya (Bihar), Sanchi and Bharhut (Madhya Pradesh), Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda (Andhra Pradesh) and Taxila (in Pakistan).

Cave architecture and cave paintings reached new heights and the Mathura, Gandhara and Amaravathi schools of art produced figures of great beauty during this period. All these places, monuments and figures are of great touristic interests even today and every year thousands of pilgrims or tourists visit these sites.

It was during this period that South India witnessed the rise of Satavahanas, one of the greatest Indian rulers, in the 1st century B.C. They were also called the Andhra dynasty. They held sway in most of the Deccan and on their collapse, other powers like the Cholas, Pandyas, Keralaputras etc arose.

The celebrated sangam poetry in Tamil was collected and classified by an academy of scholars. This provides us with one of our greatest literary traditions.

1.4.4 The Gupta Period

After the collapse of the Mauryan empire in the 2nd century B.C., there was no large political structure in India. The Kushanas ruled the North India and the Satavahanas in the South. Many small kingdoms ruled over large parts of India. With the emergence of the Guptas in the 4th Century A.D., there was again an attempt to build an all India empire.

Established by Chandra Gupta I in 319-20 A.D., the Gupta power reached its peak during the reign of Samudra Gupta and Chandra Gupta II. The process of decline started during the reign of Skanda Gupta and by the middle of the 6th Century A.D. it seems to have collapsed. In the beginning of the 7th century A.D. Harsha tried to revive the imperial tradition but after his death by the mid-7th century his empire declined.

Gupta period is often described as representing the highest forms of Indian culture. So far as the literary and philosophical achievements are concerned, there is truth in this statement. The sanskrit epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, though composed in earlier times, are said to be collected during this period. This period also saw the resurgence of Hinduism and the initiation of the great debate between Buddhism and the Brahminical religion (Hinduism in current parlance). The codification of the Hindu social and family laws was done by Manu, Yajnavalkya, Narada, Brihaspati and Katyayana. The caste-system, the joint family system and the subordinate position of the women in the family and society were formalised during this period. The Brahmins reacquired their dominant and privileged position in society.

In Hinduism the emphasis shifted from sacrifices to idol worship. The trinity of godheads (Brahma - Vishnu - Mahesb) became established. Devotional worship (Bhakti) was encouraged. A division between Vaishnavism and Shaivism occurred. The Hindu thinkers developed a cyclic theory of time according to which the Kalpa was divided into 4 ages (Satyug, Tretayug, Dwaparyug and Kaliyug) and at the end of which the Universe is recreated.
This period also witnessed the composition of six great systems of Hindu philosophy - Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimansa and Vedanta.

The Puranas (the Hindu religious texts and historical sources) were also composed in this period.

Great developments took place in the fields of Indian astronomy, astrology and mathematics. Aryabhata and Varahamihira were some of the great astronomers of the period.

Kalidas, the greatest of the Indian literary figures, composed his poetic and dramatic works during this period. His epic poems, Kumarsambhava and Raghuvamsha, the lyrical poem Meghaduta and the great drama Shakuntala are considered among the greatest of the world literature. Later on Shudrak (Mrichcha Katika) and Banabhatta (Harsha Charita) contributed to this great literary tradition. The fables of Panchatantra were collected and scripted. Vatsayayan’s Kamasutra, the world-famous text on sexual enjoyment was also written during this period.

In terms of architectural or sculptural developments also the Gupta period was significant. In Block-5 of this Course these features have been discussed in detail.

1.4.5 The Early Medieval Period

If we take the period from the decline of the empires of Guptas and Harsha to the early 16th century, we find the following developments in the cultural spheres.

i) The period saw the decline of Buddhism and rise of Hinduism led by the great South Indian religious figure, Shankara (788-820 A.D.). He was born in Kerala and developed the philosophy of Advaita (Monism) which, many scholars say, assimilated many features of Buddhism. He travelled extensively in the country, engaged the Buddhist scholars in debates, founded a religious order and established four seats or mathas in Badrinath in the north, Shringeri in the South, Puri in the East and Dwarka in the West to uphold his teachings.

ii) While Shankara upheld the orthodoxy in Hinduism, there were many streams emerging which preached a child like devotion to God. This came to be called as Bhakti movement and had its origins in South India. The Nayanars and Alvars, considered to be the first Bhakti saints, were already spreading their movement in the 8th and 9th centuries at the same time when Shankara was evolving his monistic philosophy. These saints rejected monism, Brahmin dominance, caste system and the ritual worship. Among them were many from the non-Brahmin castes, mostly peasants and traders, some even from among washermen, potters, fisherman, hunters, toddy tappers etc. Right from its beginnings the Bhakti movement was popular in its origins and conception. Hymns were composed in the honour of Vishnu, Shiva and later Krishna.

In Maharashtra, the Bhakti movement started with Jnanesvara and Namdev (1270 -1350). Eknath (1533-99), Tukaram (1598 -1650) and Ramdas (1608 -81) carried forward this tradition and built a strong popular base for the Bhakti tradition.

In Bengal the Bhakti movement was inspired by the Vaishnavites. Jayadev, Chandidas and Chaitanya were some of the influential figures of this region. From the Chaitanya tradition developed the baul movement with following both among the Hindus and muslims of the region. In North India, particularly in the Hindi land, the Bhakti tradition was inspired by Ramanand. He was probably born and brought up in South India and was among the followers of Ramanuja’s sect. Later he travelled all over India spreading his teachings. Kabir and Raidas were famous among his disciples.

Kabir Das, considered to be one of the greatest reformers and poets in the Hindi area, was born in a Muslim family of Banaras. He interacted with many saints and Sufis of his time. He was very harsh in his criticism of both the orthodox Hindu and Muslim religious practices. He believed in Nirguna Brahma and equated Ram with Rahim, Krishna with Karim and Hari with Hazrat. With him the Bhakti movement not only transcended its caste boundaries but also the religious boundaries. His verses collected in Adi Granth, Kabir Granthaval and Bijak are among the priceless jewels of our anti-orthodox and syncretic traditions.
Raidas, Nanak and Dadu were part of the tradition which Kabir represented. After them, however, it was channelised into Saguna and non-critical streams of Mirabai, Nand Das and Surdas and culminated with Tulsidas (1532-1623) whose Ramcharitmanas became the most popular text of the Hindus in north India. He tried to synthesize the existing trends of the 'Bhakti movement and poetry. But he represented a more orthodox tradition which was different from the anti-caste, homogenising tradition of Kabir, Nanak and Dadu.

The Bhakti movement also gave rise to important regional literary development. Tamil, Kannada, Marathi, Bengali, Oriya, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Awadhi and Braj were some of the Indian languages in which Bhakti literature was composed and written. These regional languages made the Bhakti movement even more popular and provided a vehicle to the saints to reach the masses. It is through them, therefore, that this great movement became ingrained in the popular memory.

iii) It was during this period that India came in touch with Arabs and, through them, with Islam. Trade relations had existed since ancient times between Arabia and India. From the 7th-8th century, Arabs had established their principality in Sindh. Since then a vital interaction existed between the two cultures. The urban population knew both Arabic and Sanskrit. The Quran was translated into Sindhi, while the Sanskrit works on astronomy, medicine, ethics and administration were translated into Arabic.

It was, however, after the victory of Mohammed of Ghur on Prithviraj in 1192 and later conquests by his generals that the Turkish rule was established in India. With headquarter in Delhi, the Turkish chieftains spread in various parts of India and by the beginning of the 13th century managed to establish a strong central kingdom called Delhi sultanate under the suzerainty of Qutbuddin Aibak and later Ilutmish (1210-36). Slowly by the 14th century the Turks reached most parts of India and forced the local rulers to accept their suzerainty. They had settled in India and considered themselves as Indians. They coopted many local Hindu chieftains in the ruling hierarchy and recruited Hindus in their armies. Theirs was as much an Indian rule as any which preceded or succeeded them.

One of the great religious movements within Islam, Sufism, came to India during this period. Even before the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate some Sufi saints had come to India. There were three chief orders (silsila) of Sufis in India: a) Chisti which was more popular in and around Delhi and western U.P.; b) Suhrawardi, which was popular in Sindh and c) Firdausi, with followers in Bihar.

Sufism, like the Bhakti movement, was the popular side of religion. The Sufis opposed the Islamic orthodoxy and kept themselves aloof from the seats of power. They respected the original Islamic doctrine of equality of all followers and criticised the ulema for not being loyal to Islam. They remained non-conformist both in relation to the state and organized religion and were sometimes persecuted for heterodoxy and heresy.

Sufism and the Bhakti movement influenced each other. Both believed in spiritual guide (guru) and in mystical union with god. The chisti Sufis and the Nathpanthi Yogis were intermixing during the sultanate period. In fact both Sufism and the Bhakti movement represent the popular face of religions in India. The shrines of the Sufi saints like Muinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi are revered by people of all religions.

iv) It was during this period, particularly between 10th and 13th centuries that the tradition of Hindu architecture and sculpture as witnessed in temple-building reached its climax. The Kandariya Mahadev Temple at Khajuraho (around 1002 A.D.), the Rajarajeshwara Temple at Tanjore (around 1012 A.D.), the Udayeshvara Temple at Udaipur, Lingaraj temple at Bhubaneswara (around 1060 A.D.), Jagannath Temple at Puri (1135 a.D.) and the Sun Temple at Konark (1250 A.D.) represent the best that any civilization can have.

v) This period also witnessed the synthesis in art forms that the sultanate period brought about. The style of architecture that evolved is termed as Indo-Islamic and is shown in Alai Darwaza (built in 1325) at the Qutub complex and the Jamat Khana Masjid (built in 1325) at Nizamuddin.

Similarly in music, the popular qawwals was introduced for the first time; khayal was developed; ragas like zilaph, sazgiri, sarnda etc. were created; and a new musical
instrument sitar was developed by combining the old Indian Veena and the Iranian tambura.

Other important monuments from this period are Qutub Minar, Quwwatul Mosque, Ilutmish Tomb, Balban's Tomb, Khirki Masjid etc in Delhi.

This period was, therefore, extremely important for the development of composite cultural forms, achievement in architecture and sculpture, evolution of popular religious movements and growth of regional literatures.

Check Your Progress-2

1) Buddhism is considered to have originated as a religion of protest against Hinduism. Critically Examine this statement.

2) List the contributions made by the Gupta period to our cultural tradition.

3) Write short notes on the Bhakti movement and Sufism.
1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have discussed the various factors which had influenced our culture through thousands of years. The cultural heritage has also been examined by tracing its development through history. In this Unit we have limited ourselves from the Harappan period to the early medieval period and shown that the Indian cultural tradition has advanced by internal and external dialogues and by incorporating features from diverse religious, ethnic and regional traditions. In the next Unit we will discuss its historical evolution from the Mughal period to the present day.

1.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

1) For answer see Sec. 1.2
2) For answer see Sec. 1.3

Check Your Progress-2

1) See the Sub-sec. 1.4.3
2) See the Sub-sec. 1.4.4
3) See the Sub-sec. 1.4.5
UNIT 2 INDIAN CULTURE AND HERITAGE: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT II

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we will discuss the historical evolution of our culture and analyse the characteristic features of our cultural heritage. After reading this Unit, you will learn about the:

- cultural heritage during later medieval, modern and contemporary period,
- role of science and technology in enriching our culture,
- relationship between environment and culture,
- assimilating qualities of our culture, and the underlying unity in our visibly diverse cultural traditions,
- syncretic trends and religious coexistence in our culture, and
- position and role of women in the cultural tradition of India.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A country is not a mere land mass. It denotes a territory with people. The people define a country — its past, its present, its future. They have their traditions which are part of their environment, and their interaction with each other. The identities of the different people who constitute the generic term Indians have been achieved through their cultural and political expressions in history. Cultural advance is a continuous process — reformulation and redefinition in the context of the demands that history makes on human beings is its hallmarks.

For those involved in tourism industry, it is significant to understand the historical context of our cultural heritage. A part of tourism industry is 'heritage' tours, and there are invariable cases of tourist guides at historical sites presenting a version of India's heritage that is not truly representative of the people. This Unit aims at giving you an idea of our cultural heritage: its secular basis and its popular character.

In this Unit, we will continue our discussion from the point where we left it in the last Unit. In terms of historical evolution we will discuss early medieval, modern and contemporary periods of our history. After a discussion on historical evolution we will talk about science
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and technology through history, environment and culture. The nature of Indian cultural heritage will also find a place. In the last section of this Unit, we will discuss some divisive tendencies in our culture which though part of our heritage represent negative aspects of it.

2.2 HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

In the previous Unit, we discussed the historical evolution of our culture and heritage up to the early medieval period. In this Unit, we will talk about late medieval, modern and contemporary period. In terms of timeframe in later medieval period we are including 16th to 18th century, in modern we will include the period from 19th century to the independence of India (1947) and contemporary will include post independent period of history. Let us now begin with late medieval period.

2.2.1 Late Medieval Period

The late medieval period witnessed a fresh wave of foreigners descending on India in the form of Mughals. Though Mughals came as invaders, they settled here and made India their home. During this period, the culture and heritage of India came in contact with the new arrivals. The Mughals brought with them different political, socio-cultural and economic traditions and institutions. The contact and interaction between the two cultures contributed significantly to Indian heritage and enriched the culture. During the period, the cultural traditions of early medieval period (about which you read in the previous Unit) also gained more ground and reached different parts of the country.

As political masters the Mughals created a centralised and uniform political structure. It was for the first time that such large parts of India followed a uniform political and administrative system in far off regions. The Mughals also created a remarkably composite ruling class with nobles of Irani, Turani, Afghani, Turk, local Muslims, Rajputs, Marathas and other Indians. The laws of the state were also independent of religious laws.

In the cultural sphere, new styles of architecture, painting, literature and languages, and music and dance forms were developed which are still with us today. The same is true of our food habits and dress, social customs and religious beliefs, marriage rituals, amusements and ways of thinking.

Literatures and languages developed in various parts of the country during this period reflect a diverse yet unified consciousness. Rather than cataloging the entire corpus of literary activity, we will try to point out its main features. Our effort will be to note in what way they advanced our cultural heritage, and to that extent they facilitated cultural interaction. Translation was an important field for literary activity. Translations of important texts, religions and secular, created a composite consciousness among the elite. Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Vedas and Upanishads were translated into Persian and into regional languages. Tutinama was translated from Persian to Turki, Babarnama from Turki to Persian, Rajtarangini into Persian. Works on music and dance, as well as various scientific treaties of ancient India and of the Arabs were also translated.

This period also saw the growth of regional languages with the Bhakti movement. These languages then developed as vehicles for popular literary activities. There emerged a rich literature in Bengali, Oriya, Marathi, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Gujarati, Braj, Awadhi, and a new language Urdu was born. New genres were created in literary activity such as Kafi and qissas (romance and development of the novel form) in regional languages. Poetry developed on religious as well as secular themes. There was inter-religious and inter-regional integration in terms of subject matter and language of literature. Keshav, Bihari, Rahim, etc. were some of the significant Hindi poets. Rahim and Tansen composed their lyrics around Krishna leela. In the South, Malayalam, Telugu, Tamil and Kannada, the older languages produced a new kind of literature linked to Bhakti, and in the new context of medieval social changes. There also emerged a kind of Dakini literature centred in Gujarat, Bijapur, Golconda, Aurangabad and Bidar. Some of the important names in various languages, cutting across communities and based in their regions are well known. In Hindi we have Malik Mohammad Jaisi's Padmavat, Tulsi Das' Ramcharitmanas, Surdas, Mirabai, Raskhan, Rahim. In Bengali Chandidas, Jayadeva, Manikdatta. In Assamese Hema Saraswati, Sankardeva, Mahadeva. In Gujarati Narsimha Mehta, Bhalana, Akho, Premananda. In Marathi Jnandeva, Eknatha, Tukaram, Ramadasa. In Sindhi Shah Abdul Latif. In Urdu Gesu Daraz, Mohammad Quli.
Shah, Wali Dakhani. In 18th century, the tradition was followed by Mir, Sauda and Nazir Akberabadi. In Punjabi Sheikh Farid, Bulhe Shah, Waris Shah. In Persian Abul Fazal, Faizi, Utbi and Naziri. Prince Dara Shikoh was a great patron of classical Indian literature and got it translated from Sanskrit to Persian. Moreover, contrary to popular belief the medieval period was rich in the production of Sanskrit literature in the North, South and East. Raghunath Nayak, Nilanatha Dikshit and Chakra kavi contributed significantly to Sanskrit literature. We have detailed historical accounts and also some important travel writings, memoirs, and political treatises, all of which are important historical sources, as well as of literary value. Also works on astronomy, music and statecraft were written.

But it was the popular religious movements that represented the most advanced thought, in medieval India. Bhakti and Sufism were of great cultural significance. In challenging the religious monopoly of the Brahmans and the ulema, they also challenged social hierarchies. They ignored traditional barriers of caste and creed and emphasized universal brotherhood. We have already discussed it in the previous Unit and will not go again into details here.

Another significant features of medieval period was rise of important religious thoughts. The most important of these was Sikhism. The foundation of Sikhism rests on the teaching and philosophy of Guru Nanak. Nanak attempted to establish a true religion which could lead to salvation. This philosophy comprised of three basic elements: a leading charismatic personality (the Guru), ideology (Shabad) and organisation (Sangat). He opposed ritualism and believed in universal brotherhood. After Guru Nanak his preachings were carried on by his disciples. A total of 10 Gurus are recognised by Sikhism. The last one was Guru Gobind Singh. Sikhism enriched Indian society's plurality and today occupies a prominent place in Indian culture.

Medieval architecture is the finest example of the blending of various talents and styles and forms. In the previous Unit, we discussed the architecture of the early medieval period. During the Mughal period, the elements of the various temple styles together with the true domes and the arches which came with the Turks reached all parts of India with new improvements. The best examples are Gujarat, Bengal, Kashmir, Kerala and other parts of South India. In the process new forms with distinct regional flavour emerged. Under the Mughals, the architecture reached new heights Humayun's Tomb (Delhi), Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar's tomb at Sikandara (Agra), Red Fort, Jama Masjid (Delhi) and Taj Mahal (Agra) are finest examples of style, technique and craftsmanship. We will read in detail about architecture in Block-5 of this course. Persian and Central Asian influence can be seen in the form of glazed tiles used for decoration in most medieval architecture, the motifs on them being the designs, the flora and fauna of this country. The entire medieval Rajput architecture - its forts and palaces - is a blend of the pre-medieval and Persian elements. Architecture of public use such as sarais, step-wells, bridges, canals and roads showed the adoption of new building techniques and had great implication in terms of possibilities of shared cultures. Building technology advanced rapidly during this period.

Painting was a well developed art in ancient India as is evident from the frescoes in the Ajantha - Ellora caves, but this was soon lost. With the Moghuls we are introduced to 3 dimensional painting. Portrait painting became widespread. The paintings done at the Mughul courts represented folk tales, stories from Ramayana, Krishnalila, and the festivals, animals and landscapes of this country combined with the new 3 dimensional, miniature form of painting. The Rajasthani and Pahari paintings combined the themes and earlier traditions of their areas with Moghul forms and styles. Illustrations in manuscripts and calligraphy were significant areas of art production. Illustrated manuscripts Babarnama, Akbarnama and Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri contain beautiful illustrations of the flora and fauna, tools and techniques of the period, as well as lives of the people.

In music and dance too the medieval period has given us much that constitutes our cultural heritage today. Hindusthani music as we know it today is a fusion of Persian and folk forms of music. New ragas were composed, new forms like the Khayal, thumari and dadra and ghazal evolved; the singers belonged to all communities; the theme-words were diverse, and audiences were not always limited to the elite. New instruments like the sitar and sarod were invented and became part of the classical and folk repertoire. Kathak as a dance form is also a mix of folk form adapted to court culture. In fact it is in dance and music that the older popular traditions interact very closely to create our well known genres of classical dance and music today. The contribution of the Bhakti and Sufi preachers has a big role in this as they come from among the people. Carnatic music was similarly transformed, although it remained distinct from Hindustani classical music. We will discuss music, dance and paintings at length in Block-3 of this course.
1) How the Mughal style of painting contributed to Indian tradition of painting?

2) In column 'A' we are listing names of some important literary figures of medieval period. Match their names with column 'B' of languages they wrote in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'A'</th>
<th>'B'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i) Wali Dakhani</td>
<td>a) Persian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Raghunath Nayak</td>
<td>b) Urdu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Tulsidas</td>
<td>c) Marathi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv) Narsimha Mehta</td>
<td>d) Awadhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v) Jayadeva</td>
<td>e) Gujarati</td>
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<tr>
<td>vi) Abul Fazl</td>
<td>f) Bengali</td>
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<tr>
<td>vii) Eknatha</td>
<td>g) Sanskrit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2.2 Modern Period

The impact of the British rule released new, contradictory social and cultural forces, impressed with the general nationalist awakening and the all-India communicational network and market. The two fold struggle against the British and against the vested interests within the country had its corresponding cultural aspects. At an intellectual level it resulted in movements for social and religious reform among all the communities, as well as a revivalism based on a search for and pride in the country's cultural roots. At a popular level it assumed the form of struggles for social equality, temple entry, anti-caste movements, and against untouchability. Movements for women's education and equality was a significant aspect of national awakening and an Indian cultural identity i.e. a national identity based on cultural diversity. The construction of cultural heritage from the 18th century onwards took the form of introducing modern values into our ancient and medieval heritage. These modern values are now part of our cultural roots. Rather than artistic endeavor, the efforts of the Indian people were geared towards re-thinking their own society, redefining their heritage, their collective personality, and the place of every section of Indian society in the collective life. In the 19th century this took the form of social reform expressed through campaigns aimed at creating a critical consciousness.

The important organizations and movements through which these were expressed was the Bengal Renaissance, Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Derozians, the Aligarh movement and several organizations all over the country.

A major transformation took place with the growth of mass politics. Social equality, women's equality, religious tolerance, scientific temper, rational thought and democracy became issues of general concern. These values found expression in anti-caste movements, popular struggles against colonial and feudal interests, against untouchability, for protection of traditional rights over resources. The important movements were the self-respect movement in Tamilnadu and Andhra, the non-Brahman movements in Karnataka and Maharashtra which challenged the traditional social order, and projected a new collective identity for lower castes. We will have a detailed discussion on social structure and caste in India in Block-2 of this course.

In formal cultural expression this took the form of growth of nationalist literatures in various languages, the standardization of the regional languages, the emergence of new genres and a new context expressing anti-imperialist sentiments. Bankimchandra, Bharatendu,
Govardhanram Tripathi are pioneering novelists, whose work exposed the detrimental effects of British rule in India and inspired patriotism. A really secular democratic literature comes with Premchand, whose works are not only anti-imperialist in sentiment, but also project great sympathy for the rights of the peasantry and the working people in general against feudal, vested interest within the country. Issues like poverty and exploitation formed the content of 20th century nationalist literature inspired as it was by the Russian Revolution and the left movements of the world. Other significant writers include Tagore, Saratchandra, Subramaniyan Bharti etc. The formation of mass fronts of students, youth, peasants and workers realised consciousness. The Indian Peoples Theatre Association and Progressive Writers' Association became the cultural expression for sentiment of freedom and popular rights. The modern values and cultural awakening found an expression in various art forms during this period. Besides, literature the trend is visible in cinema, theatre, painting, sculpture etc. All these have been discussed elsewhere in this course. The values and cultural expressions of modern period which developed during freedom struggle provided a solid base to Indian culture in contemporary India which we will discuss next.

2.2.3 Contemporary Period

In fact it would not be wrong to say that Indian cultural identity was forged in the struggle for freedom and social justice. The national movement was a project for modernity. Democracy, secularism and a struggle for a scientific temper became expressions of attempts to foster a modern culture. It was reflected within the Bengal Renaissance, the women's movement, the social and religious reform movements, literature, the forging of a struggle between regional and national identity, the arena of education and family, and in the class struggles.

All these struggles created a great churning in Indian society and growth of new values at the popular level. The central role of the popular struggles in our national movement gave a qualitatively new basis to nationhood; Culturally it implied not simply a territory, one country and one civilization, but the right of the people to collectively decide their own destiny. It becomes necessary to define the nation in terms of its millions, who began their journey from being subjects (of various rulers through history) to citizenship. This culture of citizenship is a valuable heritage of the modern period in our collective cultural personality.

Independent India adopted all the modern values and accepted equality of all citizens through the establishment of a democratic sovereign republic of India. Secularism, equality before law, freedom of thought and expression, protection to minorities and deprived sections of society were the salient features of independent India.

A voluntary acceptance of diversity and the right of all people to free and equal expression in all spheres of life becomes a cardinal, consciously expressed principle of the nationhood. The search for civilizational roots assumed the expression of regional cultural/religious forms. National plans for development noted regional inequalities and planned on the basis of diversity of resources.

Now the pluralism was defined in more positive and egalitarian terms than co-existence which has a long history in our country. Conscious respect for difference was not a value in society. This came only with modernity, the critique of modernity and the forging of an alternate modernity and a new dimension to the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity. It is this new definition of pluralism which made religious tolerance a value in itself, the separation of religion and politics a necessity, and caste and degradation of women an anathema. They have given to us the culture of democracy and democratic rights as values, mass debates and definition of identities. They made possible an all India platform for the articulation of diversity as collective-life and unity, and are as much a part of our heritage as the cultural components of our tradition created in the ancient and medieval periods.

The early independent India found significant expression of social consciousness through literature, theatre, film and such art forms which gained enormous popularity, acceptance and empathy from the Indian people. Unfortunately this momentum has been lost, without the corresponding political momentum that inspires progressive cultural expression. The contemporary India faces serious threat from caste, communal and ethnic conflicts, discrimination against women, unequal economic development and some separatist movements. These affect the cultural tradition and heritage and need to be tackled within a democratic secular framework of Indian society and polity.
2.3 SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY THROUGH HISTORY

Even as growth of scientific knowledge and technology and scientific temper and rational thought are part of our cultural heritage, from antiquity to the frontiers of scientific knowledge we are participants in a culture that constitutes the common heritage of mankind. We have not only absorbed and transformed the knowledge that has come to us, we have also transmitted the knowledge that has been generated here. There is an integral link between development and openness. Social exchanges are central to the growth of scientific knowledge, new techniques and processes. As in other aspects of culture 'outside' influences have given us a great deal in scientific knowledge. With the Greeks came the Shears, the scissors, the rotatory grain mill and the early mortar and pestle mill (200 BC) Astronomy was in the earlier years influenced by Mesopotamia. Ayurveda absorbed a great deal from the Greek system of medicine. Paper, gunpowder, cannon, glass blowing, drawloom, the Persian wheel, new techniques of metallurgy employed in brassware and bidriware, rockets employed by Tipu Sultan in the Carnatic wars against the British troops, domes and arches and lime mortar all came from outside. All these were adopted by Indian craftsmen and further improved.

India also had a great deal to give: it transformed knowledge in other countries, and contributed to cultural advance of our civilization. The first expression of scientific advance
Indian Culture and Heritage - The Historical Context II

was the systematization of Sanskrit grammar in the 4th century BC by Panini. By the 3rd century BC mathematics, astronomy and medicine began to develop separately. The contributions of our country include the notation system, the decimal system and the use of zero - (2nd century BC). There were important developments in algebra and geometry, Aryabhata (5th century AD) and Varamihira (6th century AD) contributed to knowledge of the lunar and solar eclipse to the world. Charaka (2nd Century AD) laid the foundations for Indian medicine. Ayurveda, a system of medicine was developed in ancient period.

The medieval period saw great advance in textile technology - weaving, dyeing and printing. European technology and scientific knowledge also contributed in different fields. Scientific activity continued though not at the pace it had come to acquire in Europe, as did applications of military technology. It manifested itself mainly in the productive field of agriculture and textiles. It contributed to cultural expression in precisely these fields: each region had its own design, style, and weave in textiles. During the medieval period textiles and various other crafts - glassware, bidriwork, brassware, carpet weaving, etc - become the soul of Indian people's cultural artifacts. A shared heritage with the rest of mankind, produced a very specific cultural expression, specific in relation to world civilization, diverse within itself: every region in India had its own face to show to the world in terms of craft production.

2.4 ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

Environment had a major role in determining the identity and cultural personality of the communities rooted in it. The struggle over control of environment and against nature and then with vested interests has always been a source of cultural conflict in our land. An effort to combine environmentalism with development has been another issue. Forests and rights over forests have shaped cultural expression through history. The lives of the tribal population has been specially linked with such rights.

Besides, India is rich in bio-diversity, which has provided rich resources for the development of traditional medicine, Unani and Ayurveda. The rich flora and fauna have been an asset in the context of the modern need for preserving the ecological balance and the self-preservation of traditional tribal communities and their cultural expression. The rich variety of seeds in all crops within regions is testimony to the skills and knowledge of traditional communities. Unfortunately this entire heritage is in danger of being destroyed as a result of lop-sided economic developments, with their undue and unequal pressures of market for selected high-yielding crops. The cutting of forests, excessive use of chemicals and pesticides, displacing the tribals from their natural habitats are all endangering the environment. Neem and the controversy over patents relating to its products are the most well known examples of denying to Indian people the fruits of their own natural wealth.

Check Your Progress-3

1) List important contributions made by India in the field of science.
2.5 FEATURES OF INDIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

In this section we will try to evaluate our cultural legacy in its totality. Until now, by going through the historical account, you must have noticed many characteristic features of our tradition. In this section, we will try to conceptualize them.

2.5.1 Assimilation

The quality for assimilation is a very strong element in Indian culture. This is evident not only in the adoption of new cultural forms and symbols through history, but also in food habits, particularly in North India, and dresses, building styles, marriage customs, gods and goddesses, rituals etc. Tea and coffee have become staple drinks of north and south India respectively. Potato, chilies, pineapple, tobacco and many other agricultural products have come from foreign lands and become part of Indian food. Bread, chinese chow-mien and tandoori food are quite popular. Salvar-kameez, pants and shirts are now Indian dresses. New melodies which came from Persia with the Muslims became part of the repertoire of Hindustani classical music. There are countless other examples, apart from the assimilation of techniques and inventions. Older customs, rituals and cults were also not altogether destroyed. In fact, many of them were taken over, adapted or transformed during later periods of the country's history. Assimilation has cut across regions, religious communities, and rules and regulations of specific castes. Indian Muslims and Hindus have so many customs and rituals and cultural practices of everyday life in common today that it is difficult to tell who took what from whom. The growth of capitalism and the process of 'sanskritization' have led to adoption and transformation of a lot of cultural practices of the tribal people and the lower castes as well as of the upper castes. Popular religion has created its own groundwork for assimilation of many popular cults into the religious practices of organised religion and vice versa.

2.5.2 Unity in Diversity

Our cultural profile today bears testimony to the diversity and secular basis of our culture forged by popular cultural expression through history. It underlines the central role of the common people in determining the nature of our cultural unity as well. A great deal of information about this has come out in the form of a survey by Anthropological survey of India, envisaged in approximately 20 - 30 volumes of data.

According to the conclusions of this massive survey we are one of the most diverse peoples in the world. There are 4635 communities in this country differentiated among themselves
in terms of biological traits, dress, language, forms of worship, occupation, food habits and kinship patterns. It is all these communities who, in their essential ways of life, express our national popular life.

Nobody is a 'foreigner' in this country and there is no pure Aryan. Most Indian communities have a mixed ancestry, and it is today impossible to separate our roots. Genetic and morphological traits within religious communities vary more than those between communities. Homogeneity is along lines of region, not caste or religion, and it has been scientifically disproved that upper and lower castes have a different racial ancestry. For example Tamil Brahmins have little similarity of racial traits with Brahmins in the North. The Brahmins and people of the lowest caste in the same region almost everywhere show remarkable homogeneity in this respect.

There are few communities which do not consider themselves as migrants or 'outsiders'. Every community recalls its migration in its folklore, history, and collective memory, and all have, with time, accepted the regional ethics of the area they settled in, contributing to its local traditions. Even invaders become migrants eventually, and it needs to be emphasized that Indian culture has benefited from migrations. Many settlers professing Islam and Christianity actually settled here earlier than many of those professing Hinduism. Many segments of the Muslim population, in fact, do not show any characteristic that can be called migratory, having descended mainly from the local population.

In terms of their identification 85% of the communities are rooted in their resources. Experts say that "rootedness in the eco-cultural zone is an outstanding characteristic of our communities, no matter what religious labels are attached to them". In fact, it is not possible to separate the lives and livelihood, the occupations, food habits and dress patterns, the songs and the hut settlements of the different communities from their landscape, climate and occupations deriving from their resources and environment. Even the migrant groups seek to identify themselves with their local environment except in the matter of languages they speak at home or in marriages. 71.77% of the migrants live within a single regional or linguistic boundary and are rooted in its ethos. For example, those in Kerala and Lakshwadeep, in spite of religious difference, share a great number of traits, while those in Kerala and Punjab do not.

Fifty five per cent of the communities derive their names from the traditional occupations they pursue - for example, Bhuyar (peasant), Alvan (saltmaker), Churihar (bangle maker), Chitrakar (Scroll painter) and also Gaddis, Gujars, Julahas, Dhobis, Sapera, Nai etc. 14% have their names associated with their environment i.e. mountains, plains, rivers etc.; 14% from their places of origin such as Ahluwalias, Kanpurs, Chamali, Arandans, Oswals, Shimongs. Only 3% of the communities derive their names from religious sects. The communities are divided into various caste and sub-castes which are also derived from occupations, and cut across religion. Many surnames also derive from occupations or offices traditionally held, such as Patel, Naik, Prasad, Gupta, Sharma, Deshmukh, Chaudhary, Khan etc. Clans bearing names of animals, plants or inanimate objects also cut across religion, language, region etc.

Popular cultural expression is also basically secular. Markings or identification by different communities are mainly non-religious. In disposing of their dead 3059 communities cremate them, approximately 2000 bury them, and many follow both practices. Marriage symbols, food habits, dress, dance and musical forms also cut along religious lines. Our identification of community as a religious identity primarily is thus a myth strengthened through media and consistent wrong usage, and not rooted in objective reality.

Another interesting finding of the Anthropological Survey data is that of the 775 major traits identified by expert - relating to ecology, settlement, identity, food habits, social organizations, economy, and occupation, linkages, and impact of change and development - show sharing of traits across religious categories in the following manner: Hindus share 96.77% traits with Muslims, 91.19% traits with Buddhists, 88.99% with Sikhs, 77.47% with Jains. Language is an important source of diversity and cultural expression. There are as many as 325 languages and 25 scripts, deriving from various linguistic families. At least 65% of the communities are bi-lingual, most tribal communities are tri-lingual, and language contact through bi-lingualism is a major instrument for social and cultural interaction.
2.5.3 Patriarchy and Women

Our cultural heritage has not given an equal place to women. It has not been kind to them. Women’s subordination and social oppression have had strong religious and social sanction throughout our history. Crimes against women have been perpetrated against women without any widespread social disapproval right up to the modern times. Most of the traditional crimes against women such as widow-burning (sati) female infanticide, child marriage, have their roots in ancient India and have been reinforced by the modern roots of inequality.

The religious texts of the ancient period have derogatory references to women. Women along with the Shudras were denied access to participation in religious ceremonies, education, and often to many scriptures. They did not have any inheritance rights. The first instances of Sati are in the 6th century AD. The Gupta period, otherwise rich in culture, was especially harsh on women. As economy became complex with a division of labour women were systematically relegated into subordinate roles. Manusmriti reflecting laws of the time, and very cruel to women, became the basis for women’s position in society for a long time.

The Medieval period was a continuation in this respect, and so was the early modern period.

The fight against women’s oppression and for social equality was an important component of our national movement. The movements against sati and child marriage and for women’s education were part of the general 19th century social reform movement. The entry of women into the national movement, their equal contribution to freedom, transformed the nature of the women’s movement as well. The women’s movement began to define the ferment and women’s role in society in opposition to the revivalist aspects of the definition of Indian identity. Pandita Ramabai, involved in pioneering education for women, was the first woman delegate to the Congress session, and it was only in 1890 that women delegates were allowed to speak in these sessions. Sarala Devi Ghosal, Madame Bikaji Cama, Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Aruna Asaf Ali, Kamaldevi Chattopadhyaya, Lakshmi Sehgal are well known names. Thousands of women from all classes participated in the salt satyagraha in breaking of forest laws, confronting the police, in 'terrorist' activities, in the civil disobedience and Quit India Movements, in the peasant struggles, in the Telagana movement. There was hardly anywhere or any moment in nationalist struggle where women remained unrepresented. Their contribution to the creation of artifacts, popular cultural forms such as dance, music, crafts of all kinds as well as in economy is equal to men.

In fact, as in the case of all working people women have contributed more to the creation of our cultural heritage than they have gained from it.

2.5.4 Syncretic Tradition

Composite culture has been the hallmark of the Indian tradition. Starting with the Aryan migrations to India, the fusion of cultures has constantly taken place giving rise to new cultural forms both at the elite and the popular levels. Examples of this are to be found in the Indo-Greek styles in architecture, sculpture and painting in ancient India, Indo-Islamic architectural styles in medieval India as witnessed in many tombs and mosques erected during this period. In music, this tradition found expression in Qawwali, Tabla, Sitar, Khayal etc. At the level of language, urdu developed as a medium of literature and state-craft. This language today represents one of the finest expressions of our syncretic tradition. At the popular level, we have Bhakti and sufi movements. Both these movements had followers from all castes and communities, although the Bhakti movement had more following among the Hindus and sufism among the Muslims. Some of the Bhakti saints like Kabir and Dadu had almost equal following among the adherents of both the religions. And even today we witness people of all communities going to the urs melas, celebrated in the memories of the sufis saints. The sufis dargahs at Ajmer and Delhi and other places are visited by members of all castes and communities.

In fact, the compositeness of our culture has reached such heights that the most undesirable feature of our cultural heritage - caste system - is almost equally prevalent among the followers of all religions in India.
2.5.5 Religious Tolerance

Religious Tolerance is an important characteristic of our culture. Since ancient times, this spirit has prevailed and the religious issues were sorted out more by debate than by violence. The earlier theory that the Aryans destroyed the civilization and culture of the Harappans is now discarded. In fact, the Aryans and the Harappans existed together as their specific religious remains have been found from the same period. The Aryans took many features from the Harappan mode of worship. The images of phallus (shiva), bull (cow) and pipal are used by the Hindu religion. In fact the Vedic religion, particularly in the later period seemed to have incorporated many features of the Harappan mode of worship.

Jainism and Buddhism were, in any case, non-violent religions. Throughout its thousand year old history in the sub-continent Buddhism existed side by side with Hinduism. The Hindus were present in the courts of the Buddhist rulers and the opposite was also true.

The resurgence of Hinduism occasionally witnessed acts of persecution against the Buddhists. For example, Pushyamitra Shung, who became the king of Magadha after the fall of the Mauryan empire, is said to have offered 100 gold coins for the head of one Buddhist monk. Similar acts of persecution were reported from south India as well in the later period. But these things were rare and in between. The Gupta kings never persecuted the Buddhists and during their reign the Buddhist art forms developed apace. Similarly, Harsha, the Buddhist king, accommodated Hindu religion and philosophy in running his kingdom. In fact, debate was a more significant way of converting the people than violence.

During the early years of Indian contacts with the Islam, we do find some instances of either forced conversion or destruction of the temples and the idols. Mahmud of Ghazani was perhaps the most notorious figure in this regard. But he was more interested in plunder than religion, although he used the religious symbol of jihad to carry out his plunder. Mahmud of Ghazani, however, was never interested in ruling India. Some of the Turkish invaders also indulged in some activities of religious intolerance but these instances are not many. Once they got settled in India and established their rule, they became extremely tolerant and sensitive to Hindu and other Indian views and sensibilities. They nowhere resorted to forced conversions.

The Mughals, particularly Akbar, consciously set new parameters of religious co-existence and cooperation. His Din-i-Illahi professes the worship of the supreme God without religious sectarianism. The example set by him was followed by his successors and even Aurangzeb, contrary to the popular perception of his as a bigoted king, with some digressions, stuck to the basic Indian ethos of religious tolerance.

In the modern period, if we put aside some instances of the Portuguese rule in some pockets, neither the French nor the British engaged in forced conversions. In fact, after the revolt of 1857, the British greatly restricted even the private missionary activities in India.

In the entire course of the Indian history, most of the religious conversions occurred by consent rather than by force. The discrimination against the lower castes and strict religious practices of Hinduism forced many to convert to other religions. There were, of course, some exceptions to this rule. But they were extremely rare.

2.5.6 The Cultural Traditions of the Elite and the Masses

The Indian culture has been enriched by the contributions of both the elite and the masses. The poetry of Kalidas and the Grammer of Panini, alongwith the verses of Kabir and ecstatic dances of the Baul artiste are parts of our cultural heritage. But there has been a tendency either to ignore the contribution of the popular culture to our national cultural heritage or to subordinate it to the elite tradition. In fact, the popular cultural tradition has contributed more towards the unity and uplifment of the country. The Bhakti and sufi movements illustrate this point amply. It is important to remember that Kathakali, Madhubani paintings, Pandavani, Nautanki, Kaliyari - pattu, dandi dance, the folk music of Rajasthan, Khurja pottery, paper-machie, bandhini work, patta chitra, traditional toys, are as much creations of beauty and pleasure as cultural expressions of the elite. In fact, they also contribute much to our national wealth. We should not forget either that the impressive architectural heritage of our country is the gift of the work and sweat of our labouring people, or that the cultural expressions of the elite stand on the edifice of the extraction of surplus labour of the poor. Well known Indian festivals have their origins in the agricultural cycles of the peasantry.
1) Give a few examples which show assimilating character of Indian culture.

2) Write a brief note on Anthropological Survey of India data.

3) Briefly comment on the tradition of religious tolerance in India.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we discussed the historical evolution of culture during later medieval, modern and contemporary periods. We notice that in the process of evolution of our culture we assimilated a lot of things introduced from outside. This process of assimilation gave rise to new forms and enriched our cultural heritage.

In the area of science and technology also a lot of advancement was achieved during this period which contributed to the development of culture.

We also discussed some specific features of India Culture. These include assimilation, syncretic tradition and religious coexistence. We notice that our diverse cultural trend also has a unifying thread running all through. Woman's role and position in Indian culture also finds a place in this Unit. We have also drawn your attention to the important role played by secularism, democracy, and scientific temper in the growth of modern culture in India.
ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

1) See Sub-sec 2.2.1.
2) i) b, ii) g, iii) d, iv) e, v) f, vi) a, vii) c

Check Your Progress-2

1) Women’s equality, reforms in Indian society, upliftment of depressed castes etc. were some of the concerns. See Sub-sec 2.2.2.
2) You can list reform movements of Bengal, Maharashtra or south Indian states which were more prominent. See Sub-sec 2.2.2
3) In independent India the Indian constitution provided a base for modern culture through democracy, secularism, equality, freedom of expression etc. See Sub-sec 2.2.3.

Check Your Progress-3

1) See Sec. 2.3
2) Textile technology, water lifting devices and building material and military technology were a few areas. See Sec. 2.3.
3) See Sec. 2.4

Check Your Progress-4

1) See Sub-sec 2.5.1.
2) See Sub-sec 2.5.2.
3) See Sub-sec 2.5.5.