

# INDIAN CULTURE

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## TUTORIAL

- 1 Culture

India is a land of ancient civilization. India's social, economic, and cultural configurations are the products of a long process of regional expansion. Indian history begins with the birth of the Indus Valley Civilization and the coming of the Aryans. These two

phases are usually described as the pre-Vedic and Vedic age. Hinduism arose in the Vedic period.

The fifth century saw the unification of India under Ashoka, who had converted to Buddhism, and it is in his reign that Buddhism spread in many parts of Asia. In the eighth century Islam came to India for the first time and by the eleventh century had firmly established itself in India as a political force. It resulted into the formation of the Delhi Sultanate, which was finally succeeded by the Mughal Empire, under which India once again achieved a large measure of political unity.

It was in the 17th century that the Europeans came to India. This coincided with the disintegration of the Mughal Empire, paving the way for regional states. In the contest for supremacy, the English emerged 'victors'. The Rebellion of 1857-58, which sought to restore Indian supremacy, was crushed; and with the subsequent crowning of Victoria as Empress of India, the incorporation of India into the empire was complete. It was followed by India's struggle for independence, which we got in the year 1947.

India is one of the world's oldest civilizations and one of the most populated countries in the world. The Indian culture, often labeled as an amalgamation of several various goolscultures, spans across the Indian subcontinent and has been influenced and shaped by a history that is several thousand years old. Throughout the history of India, Indian culture has been heavily influenced by Dharmic religions. They have been credited with shaping much of Indian philosophy, literature, architecture, art and music. Greater India was the historical extent of Indian culture beyond the Indian subcontinent. This particularly concerns the spread of Hinduism, Buddhism, architecture, administration and writing system from India to other parts of Asia through the Silk Road by the travellers and maritime traders during the early centuries of the Common Era. To the west, Greater India overlaps with Greater Persia in the Hindu Kush and Pamir Mountains. Over the centuries, there has been significant fusion of cultures between Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims (Sunni, Shia, Sufi), Jains, Sikhs and various tribal populations in India.

## 2 Family structure and marriage

For generations, India has a prevailing tradition of the joint family system. It is when extended members of a family - parents, children, the children's spouses and their offspring, etc. - live together. Usually, the oldest male member is the head in the joint Indian family system. He mostly makes all important decisions and rules, and other family members are likely to abide by them.

### 2.1 Arranged marriage

Arranged marriages have long been the norm in Indian society. Even today, the majority of Indians have their marriages planned by their parents and other respected family-members. In the past, the age of marriage was young. The average age of marriage for women in India has increased to 21 years, according to 2011 Census of India. In 2009, about 7% of women got married before the age of 18.

### 2.2 Wedding rituals

Weddings are festive occasions in India with extensive decorations, colors, music, dance, costumes and rituals that depend on the religion of the bride and the groom, as well as their preferences. The nation celebrates about 10 million weddings per year, of which over 80% are Hindu weddings.

## 3 Greetings

Greetings include Namaste (Hindi and Sanskrit), Namaskar (Hindi), Juhar/Namaskar in Odia, Namaskar (Marathi), Namaskara (Kannada), Namaskaram (Telugu, Malayalam), Vanakkam (Tamil), Nomoshkaar (Bengali), Nomoskar (Assamese). All these are common spoken greetings or salutations when people meet, and are forms of farewell when they depart. Namaskar is considered slightly more formal than Namaste but both express deep respect. Namaskar is commonly used in India and Nepal by Hindus, Jains and Buddhists, and many continue to use this outside the Indian subcontinent. In Indian and Nepali culture, the word is spoken at the beginning of written or verbal communication.

## 4 Festivals

India, being a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, celebrates holidays and festivals of various religions. The three national holidays in India, the Independence Day, the Republic Day and the Gandhi Jayanti, are celebrated with zeal and enthusiasm across India. In addition, many Indian states and regions have local festivals depending on prevalent religious and linguistic demographics. Popular religious festivals include the Hindu festivals of Navratri, Janmashtami, Diwali, Maha Shivratri, Ganesh Chaturthi, Durga Puja, Holi, Rath Yatra, Ugadi, Onam, Vasant Panchami, Rakshabandhan, and Dussehra. Several harvest festivals such as Makar Sankranti, Pongal and Raja sankranti swinging festival are also fairly popular.

Indian New year festival are celebrated in different part of India with unique style in different times. Ugadi, Bihu, Gudhi Padwa, Puthandu, Pohela Boishakh, Vishu and Vishuva Sankranti are the New years festival of different part of India.

Certain festivals in India are celebrated by multiple religions. Notable examples include Diwali, which is celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs and Jains across the country and Buddha Purnima, celebrated by Buddhists. Sikh festivals, such as Guru Nanak Jayanti, Baisakhi are celebrated with full fanfare by Sikhs and Hindus of Punjab and Delhi where the two communities together form an overwhelming majority of the population. Adding colours to the culture of India, the Dree Festival is one of the tribal festivals of India celebrated by the Apatanis of the Ziro valley of Arunachal Pradesh, which is the easternmost state of India. Nowruz is the most important festival among the Parsi community of India.

Islam in India is the second largest religion with over 172 million Muslims, according to India's 2011 census. The Islamic festivals which are observed and are declared public holiday in India are; Eid ul Fitr, Eid ul Adha-(Bakri Eid), Milad un Nabi, Muharram and Shab-e-Barat. Some of the Indian states have declared regional holiday's for the particular regional popular festivals; such as Arba'een, Jumu'ah-tul-Wida and Shab-e-Qadar.

Christianity is India's third largest religion. With over 23 million Christians, of which 17 million are Roman Catholics, India is home to many Christian

festivals. The country celebrates Christmas and Good Friday as public holidays.

Regional and community fairs are also common festival in India. For example, Pushkar fair of Rajasthan is one of the world's largest markets of cattle and livestock.

## 5 Animals

The varied and rich wildlife of India has had a profound impact on the region's popular culture. Common name for wilderness in India is Jungle which was adopted by the British colonialists to the English language. The word has been also made famous in The Jungle Book by Rudyard Kipling. India's wildlife has been the subject of numerous other tales and fables such as the Panchatantra and the Jataka tales.

In Hinduism, the cow is regarded as a symbol of ahimsa (non-violence), mother goddess and bringer of good fortune and wealth. For this reason, cows are revered in Hindu culture and feeding a cow is seen as an act of worship. This is why beef remains a taboo food in mainstream Hindu and Jain society.

## 6 Cuisine

Indian food is as diverse as India. Indian cuisines use numerous ingredients, deploy a wide range of food preparation styles, cooking techniques and culinary presentation. From salads to sauces, from vegetarian to meat, from spices to sensuous, from breads to desserts, Indian cuisine is invariably complex.

## 7 Clothing

Traditional clothing in India greatly varies across different parts of the country and is influenced by local culture, geography, climate and rural/urban settings. Popular styles of dress include draped garments such as sari for women and dhoti or lungi or panche (in Kannada) for men. Stitched clothes are also popular such as churidar or salwar-kameez for women, with dupatta (long scarf) thrown over shoulder completing the outfit. Salwar is often loose fitting, while churidar is a tighter cut

## 8 Languages and literature

Language families in India and its neighbouring countries. India has 22 official languages – 15 of which are Indo-European. The 2001 census of India found 122 first languages in active use.

Sanskrit has had a profound impact on the languages and literature of India. Hindi, India's most spoken language, is a "Sanskritised register" of the Khariboli dialect.

Odia is India's 6th classical language in addition to Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

## 9 Performing arts

India has had a long romance with the **art of dance**. The Hindu Sanskrit texts Nāṭyaśāstra (Science of Dance) and Abhinaya Darpana (Mirror of Gesture) are estimated to be from 200 BCE to early centuries of the 1st millennium.

Indian dance includes eight classical dance forms, many in narrative forms with mythological elements. The eight classical forms accorded classical dance status by India's National Academy of Music, Dance, and Drama are: bharatanatyam of the state of Tamil Nadu, kathak of Uttar Pradesh, kathakali and mohiniattam of Kerala, kuchipudi of Andhra Pradesh, yakshagana of Karnataka, manipuri of Manipur, odissi (orissi) of the state of Odisha and the sattriya of Assam.

**Indian drama and theatre** has a long history alongside its music and dance. Kalidasa's plays like Shakuntala and Meghadoota are some of the older dramas, following those of Bhasa. One of the oldest surviving theatre traditions of the world is the 2,000-year-old Kutiyattam of Kerala. It strictly follows the Natya Shastra. Nāṭyāchārya Māni.

**Music** is an integral part of India's culture. Natyasastra, a 2000-year-old Sanskrit text, describes five systems of taxonomy to classify musical instruments. One of these ancient Indian systems classifies musical instruments into four groups according to four primary sources of vibration: strings, membranes, cymbals, and air. According to Reis Flora, this is similar to the Western theory of organology. Archeologists have also

reported the discovery of a 3000-year-old, 20-key, carefully shaped polished basalt lithophone in the highlands of Odisha.

The oldest preserved examples of Indian music are the melodies of the Samaveda (1000 BC) that are still sung in certain Vedic Śrauta sacrifices; this is the earliest account of Indian musical hymns

## 10 Visual arts

**Cave paintings** from Ajanta, Bagh, Ellora and Sittanavasal and temple paintings testify to a love of naturalism. Most early and medieval art in India is Hindu, Buddhist or Jain. A freshly made coloured floor design (Rangoli) is still a common sight outside the doorstep of many (mostly South Indian) Indian homes. Raja Ravi Varma is one of the classical painters from medieval India.

Pattachitra, Madhubani painting, Mysore painting, Rajput painting, Tanjore painting, Mughal painting are some notable Genres of Indian Art.

The first **sculptures** in India date back to the Indus Valley civilisation, where stone and bronze figures have been discovered. Later, as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism developed further, India produced some extremely intricate bronzes as well as temple carvings. Some huge shrines, such as the one at Ellora were not constructed by using blocks but carved out of solid rock.

Indian **architecture** encompasses a multitude of expressions over space and time, constantly absorbing new ideas. The result is an evolving range of architectural production that nonetheless retains a certain amount of continuity across history. Some of its earliest production are found in the Indus Valley Civilisation (2600–1900 BC) which is characterised by well planned cities and houses. Religion and kingship do not seem to have played an important role in the planning and layout of these towns.

## 11 Sports and martial arts

Field hockey was considered to be the national game of India, but this has been recently denied by the Government of India, clarifying on a Right to Information Act (RTI) filed that India has not declared any sport as the national game.

Cricket is considered the most popular sport in India. Football is popular in the Indian state of West Bengal.

Chess is commonly believed to have originated in northwestern India during the Gupta empire, where its early form in the 6th century was known as chaturanga. Other games which originated in India and continue to remain popular in wide parts of northern India include Kabaddi, Gilli-danda, and Kho kho. Traditional southern Indian games include Snake boat race and Kuttiyum kolum.

One of the best known forms of ancient Indian martial arts is the *Kalaripayattu* from Kerala. This ancient fighting style originated in southern India in the 12th century BCE and is regarded as one of the oldest surviving martial arts.

## 12 Popular media

**Indian television** started off in 1959 in New Delhi with tests for educational telecasts. Indian small screen programming started off in the mid-1970s. At that time there was only one national channel Doordarshan, which was government owned. 1982 saw revolution in TV programming in India, with the New Delhi Asian games, India saw the colour version of TV, that year. The Ramayana and Mahabharat were some among the popular television series produced. By the late 1980s more and more people started to own television sets. Though there was a single channel, television programming had reached saturation. Hence the government opened up another channel which had part national programming and part regional. This channel was known as DD 2 later DD Metro. Both channels were broadcast terrestrially.

In 1991, the government liberated its markets, opening them up to cable television. Since then, there has been a spurt in the number of channels available. Today, Indian small screen is a huge industry by itself, and has thousands of programmes in all the states of India.

**Bollywood** is the informal name given to the popular Mumbai-based film industry in India. Bollywood and the other major cinematic hubs (in Bengali Cinema, Oriya film industry, Assamese, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil, Punjabi and Telugu) constitute the broader Indian film industry, whose output is considered to be the largest in the world in terms of number of films produced and number of tickets sold.

### 13 Perceptions of Indian culture

India's diversity has inspired many writers to pen their perceptions of the country's culture. These writings paint a complex and often conflicting picture of the culture of India. India is one of the ethnically and religiously diverse countries in the world. The concept of '**Indian culture**' is a very complex and complicated matter. Because Indian citizens are divided into various ethnic, religious, caste, linguistic and regional groups. It makes the realities of "Indianness" extremely complicated. This is why the conception of Indian identity poses certain difficulties and presupposes a series of assumptions about what concisely the expression "Indian" means. However, despite its vast heterogeneous composition, the creation of some sort of typical or shared Indian culture is the result of some inherent internal forces- such as a robust Constitution, universal adult franchise, flexible federal structure, secular educational policy etc. and by certain historical events- such as Indian Independence Movement, Partition, wars against Pakistan etc.