



HISTORY OF INDIAN CULTURE AND HERITAGE FROM HARAPPAN PERIOD TO CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

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Introduction

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. Material development and materials come under civilization while Art of Living, customs, traditions come under culture. Material development is possible to a limit. This is the reason, that the civilizations got destroyed while Indian culture is present till today because the basis of development was spirituality and not materialism. Thus, Indian culture can be called an ancient culture, whose past is alive even in the present¹. The reminiscent of the stone-age found in Pallavaram, Chingalpet, Vellore, Tinnivalli near Madras, in the valley of river Sohan, in Pindhighev 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 Mohanjodaro etc. we come to know the 8

developed civilization and culture of the pre-historical era, which was flourished around 3000 B.C. Thus, Indian culture is about 5000 years old.

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. 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.

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 Indian Culture 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. Context I Similar to the town-planning, the potteries made by the Harappans was 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, papyrus tree, fish scales etc. The Harappans also seemed to worship papyrus tree and the phallus (an image of Shiva) which remain important religious symbols in today's India.

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 have 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 Lipan shads, Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit languages and literature, etc.

The Buddhist Epoch

During the 6th century B.C., his 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 nobility 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 noise 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 introducing Indian Culture their gates to members of all castes and groups in the society. They also gave an equal status to women.
- ii) They opposed 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.

iii) 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 period also witnessed the rise of architecture and sculpture to new heights. The temples at Jhandial (Taxila), Nagari (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), Arnaravati and Nagarjunkonda (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.

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. 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. 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. The Sanskrit epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, though composed in earlier times, are said to be collected during this period. 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 formalized during this period. The trinity of godheads (Brahma - Vishnu - Mahesh) became established. Devotional worship (Bhakti) was encouraged. A division between Vaishnavism and Saivism 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.

Indian Culture and This period also witnessed the composition of six great systems of Hindu philosophy - Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta.

The Puranas (the Hindu religious texts and historical sources) were also composed in this I period. Great developments took place in the fields of Indian astronomy, astrology and mathematics. Aryabhatta and Varahamihira were some of the great astronomers of the period. Kalidasa, 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 (Mrichchha 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.

The Early Medieval Period

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. Right from its beginnings the Bhakti movement was popular in its origins and conception. Hymns were composed in the honor of Vishnu, Shiva and later Krishna. In Maharashtra, the Bhakti movement started with Jnaneshvara 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. With him the Bhakti movement not only transcended its caste boundaries but also the religious boundaries. The Bhakti movement also gave rise to important regional literary development. Tamil, Kannada, Marathi, Bengali, Oriya, Maithili, Bhojpuri, and Awadhi were some of the Indian languages in which Bhakti literature was composed and written.

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.

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 Qutbuddi Aibak and later Iltutmish (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 co-opted many local Hindu chieftains in the ruling hierarchy and recruited Hindus in their armies. There 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 V.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.

iv) It was during this period, particularly between 10th and 13th centuries that the tradition of Hindu architecture and sculpture as witnessed in temple-budding 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 qawwali was introduced for the first time khayal was developed; ragas like zilaph, sazgi, sarparda 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 Mirsar, Quwwatul Mosque, Iltutrnish 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.

Later 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 centralized and uniform political structure. The Mughals also created a remarkably composite ruling class with nobles of Irani, Turami, Afghani, Turk, local Muslims, Rajputs, Marathas and other Indians. 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.

Translation was an important field for literary activity. Translations of important texts, religious and secular, created a composite consciousness among the elite. Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Vedas and Upanishads were translated into Persian and into regional languages. Tutiqlama was translated from Persian to Turki, Babarnama from Turki to Persian, Rajtarangini into Persian. Works on music and dance, as well as various scientific treatises 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 merged a kind of Dakhni literature centred in Gujarat, Bijapur, Golconda, Aurangabad and Bihar. 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, Tulsidas' Ramcharitmanas, Surdas, Mirabai, Raskhan, Rahim. In Bengali Chandidasa, 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. ~r&ce 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. 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 religions monopoly of the Brahmans and the ulema, they also challenged social hierarchies. 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.

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. 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 to 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 scrod 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.

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 were 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.

Contemporary Period

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.

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.

Conclusion

In the words of philosopher Will Durant,

“India is the motherland of our race and Sanskrit, the mother of Europe’s languages. She was the mother of our philosophy; mother through the Arabs of much of our Mathematics; mother through Buddha of much of the ideas embodied in our Christianity; mother through the village-community of self-government and democracy. India is in many ways the mother to us all.”

We have inherited great moral and spiritual values compared with which the materialistic progress of the West is insignificant. The West has made wonderful progress both materially and economically, scientifically and technologically. There is also an artistic aspect of our cultural heritage. We have had a proud tradition of such arts like music, dancing, sculpture, drama, architecture, etc. For instance, Ajanta and Mohenjodaro, the temples in the South, the cave of Amarnath in the north etc.

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