
UNIT 2 INDIAN CULTURE AND HERITAGE: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT II

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Historical Evolution
 - 2.2.1 Late Medieval Period
 - 2.2.2 Modern Period
 - 2.2.3 Contemporary Period
- 2.3 Science and Technology Through History
- 2.4 Environment and Culture
- 2.5 Features of Indian Cultural Heritage
 - 2.5.1 Assimilation
 - 2.5.2 Unity in Diversity
 - 2.5.3 Patriarchy and Women
 - 2.5.4 Syncretic Tradition
 - 2.5.5 Religious Tolerance
 - 2.5.6 The Cultural Traditions of the Elite and the Masses
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

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

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 upto 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 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 emerged a kind of Dakhni 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**, 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. 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 religions 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.

Check Your Progress-1

1) How the Mughal style of painting contributed to Indian tradition of painting ?

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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.

'A'	'B'
i) Wali Dakhani	a) Persian
ii) Raghunath Nayak	b) Urdu
iii) Tulsidas	c) Marathi
iv) Narsimaha Mehta	d) Awadhi
v) Jayadeva	e) Gujarati
vi) Abul Fazl	f) Bengali
vii) Eknatha	g) Sanskrit

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, Subramanayan 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.

Check Your Progress-2

1) Write a brief note on the social concerns developed during National Movement.

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2) List four main socio-cultural movements in modern India.

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3) In what ways did modern culture find a place in independent India?

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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

2) What were the main technological devices brought to India from outside?

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3) How does environment affect culture ?

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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. Salwar-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, inspite 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, Bhiyar (peasant), Alvan (saltmaker), Churihar (bangle maker), Chitrakar (Scroll - painter) and also Gaddis, Gujjars, Julahas, Dhobis, Saperas, 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, Kanpuria, Chamali, Arandan, Oswal, Shimong. 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 **sufi** saints. The **sufi 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 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 Gazani 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-Ilahi* 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 Grammar 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 upliftment of the country. The *Bhakti* and *sufi* movements illustrate this point amply. It is important to remember that *Kathakali* , *Madhubani* paintings, *Pandavani* , *Nautanki* , *Kaliyeri - 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.

Check Your Progress-4

1) Give a few examples which show assimilating character of Indian culture.

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

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

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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.

2.7 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.