UNIT 3 RELIGION, SOCIETY AND CULTURE

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3.1 INTRODUCTION: DEFINING ‘SOCIETY’ AND ‘CULTURE’

Of the two towards, Society and Culture, culture is the most difficult word to define. If a man is not regarded as conscious and regarded as an object of consciousness it would be easy to distinguish Mr. X from Mr. Y. In other words, if man is perceived as an item (them as person) then the distinctions become easy. Shall we similarly seek to identify cultures by their geographical boundaries?

Underlining the role of Hindu religion in the formation India as a nation, Radhakumud Mookerji argued:

"The name Bharatvarsha is thus not a mere geographical expression like the term India. ...It signifies the complete accomplishment of the work initiated by the Aryan forefathers colonizing the whole country and bringing its different parts under the unifying discipline of a common culture and civilization. Bharatvarsha is thus another name for Aryanised and Hinduised India."

3.2 PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURE

In contrast to this unified view is the evolutionary perspective, which underlines the synthetic and synthetic processes inherent in a multicultural situation. The complex history of the sub-continent experienced the coming together of a variety of cultural streaming drawn from different civilizational traditions. All communities (Hindu, Muslim, Christian or Parsi) experienced the influence of this multiple cultural interaction. Tarachand, an advocate of the synthetic character of Indian culture observed:
Indian culture embraces in its orbit beliefs, customs, rites, institutions, arts, religions and philosophies belonging to strata of society in various stages of development. The complexity of Indian life is ancient, because from the dawn of history, India has been a melting place of conflicting civilizations. As a matter of fact the process of its cultural development may be envisaged as the blending of intellectual, aristocratic, folk and foreign influences.

3.3 CULTURAL PLURALITY

The cultural plurality is intelligible only in the context of relationship between religion and culture, which are interrelated but not synonymous in any society. There is no uniform religious culture in terms of Hindu, Muslim or Christian, but there is an uniformly shared culture throughout India. The different castes follow different patterns of rituals and customs. This is also true form of art. Almost, each caste has different art forms, music, dance, theatre and so on. In fact, the plurality is also an expression of resistance against any kind of domination and exploitation.

The forces of history which shaped the society did not transform into an ideal cultural melting point. The interaction of people with diverse cultural moorings and traditions influenced the society also.

3.4 EVOLUTION OF CULTURE

Modern anthropologists, archaeologists and historians consider the birth of civilization as a technological and organizational achievement. The ancient myths of humankind remember the dawn of civilization as a fall of humankind from simplicity. Increasing greed of man put him into the need of food production. Hot chase of the pot belly began. Man moved from ‘the order of the ritual’ to ‘the order of machine’ and ‘super highway’. Myth of the fall of man is not memory but one of speculative imagination. The idea of progress also arose as a myth in the eighteenth century long before the rise of archaeology as a science. In the Indian social tradition, these values were partially accepted. Nagar or urban came to be accepted as sophisticated in contrast to Gramya or rustic while sabhya or courtly came to mean well-bred and polished. Seers and prophets of all ages and Indian history preferred rural surroundings and disapproved materialistic civilization.

3.5 ART AND CULTURE

According to ancient Indian tradition the artist or silpin (sculptor) is the intermediary who transmitted the revelation of Viswakarma, the artificer (Divine sculptor) to society. The Art or Silpa included ritual, skill, craft and imagination. Silpin was a member of an artisan caste, a guild or a court and the groups were an integral part of the larger social order. The relations between the silpin, the
patron or *yajamana* and society were sacrificial. For example, construction of the vedic sacrificial altar or *vedi* within a series of concentric magic circles was the activity.

The building of the altar was a symbolic reconstruction of the dismembered cosmic man, from whose limbs the divisions of the society sprang.

The altar was a throne to be occupied by the individual gods to whom the sacrifice was addressed. The rite united the human domain of whole society with the divine inside the sacred dimension of a tabernacle (a tent or sanctuary). The patron commissioning a temple, shrine, palace or city was the sacrificer who selected a priest as his sacrificer. The priest assumed the role of architect and the overseer of *silpin hierarchy* (the maker of the building, the surveyor, the sculptor, the plasterer and the painter). The artist's role was to restore the unity of society which is lost.

Culture in its broadest sense is a search for meanings and values. It refers to the common orientation of a group of creative-appreciative persons towards the formation or discovery of such values. This orientation can take the form of religion, philosophy, art, political or social system and so on.

3.6 RELIGION AND CULTURE

Intellectual climate of India between 6th and 3rd centuries B.C. was characterized by rise of Buddhism, schools of metaphysics and ascetic sects. The new urban man felt increasingly alienated from nature. Social discipline created an anxiety resulting in non-conformism. There was withdrawal into the forest to recover the sense of identity. *Upanishads* were composed. Renunciation became a virtue. Caves served the needs of monks and laymen in search of ideal environment to practice meditation. Brahmanic religion reasserted itself by the end of 7th century A.D. The cave sanctuary of Buddhism resulted in *chaityas* while that of the Brahmanic religion produced the *Hindu temple*. Now, that the temple was constructed of slabs of stone, sculpture itself had to be modified to fit the new scheme. Religious devotion (different from monastic meditation) demanded imposing structures and focused the attention of worshipper on a complicated mythology. The tower of the temple combined the expression of both religious and temporal power. It became the emblem of a dominant ruling power of the king as well as the symbol of contact with God established by the king.

3.7 MEDIA AND CULTURE

Art in all its form (story telling, dance, chanting, image-making) is a social activity which balances tensions within the collective. Plurality as an expression of resistance has ensured the stability of our society on the principle of co-existence of social inequalities. Tensions arising out of progressive division of labour, inter-caste rivalry, inequality in hierarchical status and disputes over property have been healed by the unifying function of art. For example, village India is very active during seasonal festivals. Any festival, with its oracles, trance dances, and collective
rapture is a restorer of collective unity. All Indian cultural media ultimately derive from social culture. Brahmans have enjoyed a ritual monopoly in the Sanskrit medium while potters, weavers and basket-makers have been vernacular cultural performers. Drama and religious festivals at great temples were mixed media and drew from with classical and popular traditions. Popular inter-caste media emphasized devotional religiosity which included bhajans, recitals or dance dramas from epics and puranas (Ram Lila) and folk dances on the festival days.

3.8 CULTURAL SYNTHESIS

Human species was given the name *homo sapiens*. In course of time the same human species was designated *homo faber* (man, the maker). There is another label called *homo ludens* which means man as player, play to be understood as a cultural phenomenon. The play element is found in language, law, war, art, poetry and philosophy. The play demands application, knowledge, skill and strength. The more difficult the game, the greater, the tension in the beholders. The primary thing in a competition is a desire to excel others and not a desire for power or will to dominate. To dare, to take risks, to bear uncertainty and to endure tension are the essence of play spirit. We want to be honoured for our virtues. In order to excel, one must prove one's excellence; in order to merit recognition, merit must be made manifest. Competition serves to give proof of superiority.

About Indian culture there are two diametrically opposite views. One is the segmented view of culture in terms of religion, i.e. a Hindu view of culture, a Muslim view of culture or a Christian view of culture etc.; or in terms of religion, i.e. Bengali, Assamese or Tamil culture and so on. The second view is that Indian culture is composite. Gurudev Tagore highlighted India’s culture as a living organism thus:

The Aryan, the non-Aryan, the Dravidian, The Huns, the Pathans and the Moguls. They all have merged here into one body.

We argue that culture is a thought process while civilization is conduct. We have also thought that our culture can remain pure even if our conduct suffers degradation. The need to establish the interrelationship between the two is important. For a long period, science has not been viewed as part of a culture, even though science and OSC culture are after all products of the creative expression of human minds. OSC role to neutralise the negative elements of a market economy. A sense of dignity and sense of self-confidence of among people is necessary to have control over lives as well as environment.

There will be neither sustainable economic growth nor social progress and durable peace if they are not in tune with our cultural heritage.

3.9 CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND ITS EXPRESSION

The world has moved into the next millennium. Fears are expressed about the future of creative diversity and the plural character of culture. The change is being witnessed through media resolution, post-industrial technologies and global
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Communication networks. Number of scholars are talking about 'the clash of civilisations' and 'the end of history'. Hegemony of every kind – political, economic and cultural are anticipated. People world over are looking to India to see whether with its 5000 years of uninterrupted civilisation, India can provide answers for social harmony and respect for creative diversity. India's great heritage have inspired Indians as well as others who came to be associated with.

India is a country of over billions people, 18 languages, 1700 dialects, 4 main castes, thousands of sub-castes and 5 main religions. This cultural diversity is accompanied by immense biological diversity also. India is one of the 12 identified mega bio-diversity centres of the world. Among the finest expressions of India's culture, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Vedas and the Upanishads are rooted in the family, the villages, religious practices and agricultural modes of production. Indian arts are crafts or illustrious expressions of Indian religions and spiritual experiences. The renewal that has taken place found expression in Sufism. Vaisnavism and writing of Kabir, Nanak, Namdev and other Bhakti saints. The cultural renaissances of the 19th and 20th centuries are also deeply rooted within Indian social and cultural traditions. Poet Iqbal in his "Sare Jehan Se Acha" claims that "there is something that does not allow the Indian continuum to perish". Let us hope that Indian art, life, and thought shall find new expressions in the 21st century.

3.10 SUMMARY

Culture is an integral part of our lives. It gives a certain identity to a human being.

In this unit we have tried to define the meaning and role of culture in our lives. Despite of having all types of diversities culture teaches us to be unite. As Jawahar Lal Nehru expressed it in these words- 'Unity in Diversity'. Unity of heart and mind inspires to work together. This experience is the real life foundation of Indian culture.

3.11 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1) True or False:

1. Our cultural heritage depends upon economic growth and social progress.

2. In India we have 1800 dialects.

3. Craft and imagination is related to the art of Shilpa.

4. There are four main religions in India.

(T, F, T, F)

2) Fill up the blanks:

1. Human species were also known as _______.

2. The famous song 'Sare Jahan se Achcha' is written by poet _______.

3. Vishwakarma is known as an _______.
4. Culture can be defined as a mixture of _____, _____, _____ and _____.

(Iqbal, custom, art, architect, Homo sapiens, belief, religion)

3) Terminal Questions:

1. How religious traditions help to make a culture unique?
2. Define 'culture' in brief.
3. Write a note on plurality of Indian culture.

Answers:

1. In India there is no uniform culture in terms of Hindu, Muslim or Christian religions but there is uniformly shared culture throughout India. Indian society has undergone through many changes despite all that its harmony has been maintained. The basic principle of Indian culture was religious tolerance. Culture plays a spiritually balancing role to neutralize the negative element and this is its unique quality.

2. Culture can be defined as a mixture of knowledge, art, morals, customs, traditions and so on. Rabindra Nath Tagore defined Indian culture as living organism in these words- The Aryan, the non-Aryan, the Dravidian, the Huns, the Pathans and the Moughals. They all have emerged here into one body. The culture is seen or felt through our language, thoughts, ideas and traditions. In this way it is like search for meaning and values.

3. Indian society is made of composite culture. Though we follow different religions yet there is always a sense of being Indian in all human beings. This shows the plurality of faiths. We also have different identities being Hindu, Muslim or Christian but we know how to live in harmony. In true words, plurality is an expression of resistance against all odds of society.
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School of Performing & Visual Arts (SOPVA)

Fine Arts education is an integral part of the development of each human being. It refers to education in the disciplines of performing and visual arts. Earlier, a career in an art form was considered merely as hobby or part-time work. Due to lack of awareness, creative arts like Music, Dance, Theatre and Painting were less preferred courses for study. But today, it is considered a full-fledged profession like any other career involving its own set of challenges and hard work. With the rising demand for artists in both professional and academic areas, avenues of their employability grow day by day as Indian art industry is emerging parallel to the mainstream industries.

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is a front runner in identifying opportunities and designing suitable programmes for the benefit of the variety of demands of the student community. The idea of a school of Performing and Visual Arts at IGNOU that was initiated in 2007, finally took shape in February 2009 when the school began to be fully-functional with the newly inducted faculty. This School aims at developing and offering programmes in collaboration with different specialised institutes leading to Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees in the areas of performing and visual arts.

The School of Performing and Visual Arts (SOPVA) work with the objectives:

- To provide opportunity by promoting aesthetics as a learning process in professional and academic arena.
- To appeal the senses or emotions.
- To inculcate creativity through diverse range of creative activities and modes of expression.

To achieve its goals the School is focused to spread art and aesthetic education through its various courses. The School plans to offer courses at various levels such as Certificate, Diploma, UG, PG and Doctoral Degree.

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