



## Pluralistic understanding of Indian society and culture: An appraisal

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### Abstract

One or other way each and every society and culture is considered as unique and significant in the world. It is very obvious that monopoly or singularity of culture and plurality of culture exist in the world side by side. India is an exclusive example for the pluralistic society and culture in the world. Pluralistic society and culture are found in the length and breadth of the country. The beauty of India is pluralistic in nature. The study is aiming to address the importance and significance of pluralism in India. The language, literature, art, custom, belief, faith, practice, and the life styles are very unique and different thorough out India. Though India is one of the largest populated countries in the world, the unity in diversity is the back bone Indian society and culture. It is an appraisal to explore and explain the pluralistic understanding of Indian society and culture.

**Keywords:** Pluralism, society, culture, language, literature, and faith

### Introduction

Aristotle who is one of the ancient Greek Philosophers rightly said that human is a social animal. Human beings live together in the society. The life of human that is from birth to death one or other way linked to the society and social life. The social institutions like family, marriage, kinship, religion, school, college, work place etc., are the part and partial of human life. Human life is dependent and inter connected with the fellow human beings. The life style, customs, beliefs and practices are the culture of human beings. The Indian society and culture are rich in its inheritance and legacy. The language, literature, art, and architecture are exclusive examples for the cultural heritage of the Indian society. The institutional structure of the Indian society is very strong in its nature and the embodiment of culture is practiced from the past to present and carry forward to the future. It is an attempt to highlight and critically analyze the society and culture in the Indian context.

### Methodology

The methodology of study is explorative and descriptive in nature. It is to explore the pluralistic understanding of Indian society from the selected resources. It is to describe the core understanding of Indian society and culture and to bring out the challenges in the Indian society and culture. The materials were identified and studied to make an appraisal on the pluralistic understanding of Indian society and culture.

### Etymological Definition of Society and Culture

The root word of society is derived from the Latin term *Socius* which literally means companionship or friendship. The human beings live together and support one another to exist together. Further the etymological term culture is originated from Latin word *Cultura* which means cultivating or tending. A renowned Anthropologist, Malinowski said that culture is an “instrumental reality and apparatus for the satisfaction of the biological and derived need.” Culture is an essential component of human beings which are reflected in his or her identity.

### Importance of Society and Culture

Both the society and culture are playing a major role in the following ways;

- The collection of individuals is called society and they live as a group and community
- The social life strengthens the society and promotes the quality of life
- The identity of people is based on the culture that is found in the customs, values, beliefs and practices
- The art, architecture, language and literature are the core aspects of society and culture

### Society and Culture in the Indian Context

#### 1. Understanding of Indian Society

The dynamic of Indian society is found from the ancient period to the till the date. The archeological excavations prove that the Indian society and culture is well developed from the ancient past. The Indian language and literature prove that the life of people and infrastructure is an evident for the rich Indian civilization. It further developed in the medieval and modern periods as well. There are four important social institutions of Indian society as follows;

#### a. Family

One of the important and first social institution of Indian society is family. The family life and relationships are given in the Indian society. The joint family system plays a major role in the Indian society from many centuries and it is respected and practiced in the contemporary Indian society. The nuclear family system also emerged and practiced in the Indian society. The family life is treated as honorable and important in the Indian society. A strong bond among the family members is maintained with respect and honor. Mother is portrayed as equal to goddess in the Indian family. But at the same time the patriarchal influence and domination is practiced.

#### b. Marriage

Marriage is considered as holy union in the Indian society. Marriage is treated as respectful and partial fulfillment in the life of people. The expansion of family starts from the marriage and it is taught by the elders and the religious

scriptures in the Indian society. On the Indian society. The arranged marriage system is practiced almost all the parts of the country. It is strictly practiced in the rural areas of the country. Though the love marriage is accepted at some level but it is restricted under the influence honor, religion, caste and economical status. In fact, majority of the community in India don't go with love marriage.

### c. Kinship

The term kinship denotes the relationship within the family. The liner relationship within the family is called kinship. The parental, grandparental, maternal and paternal relationships are found within the Indian family system. The joint family system of Indian society reflects the strong kinship relationships. The kinship is considered as honor and respect in the Indian society for many centuries. The Indian society wants to keep and protect the family tree as big as possible and as deep as possible. The sense of attachment found with the members of the family at the time of both happiness and sorrow. The family sentiment is important in the Indian society. The marital relationship is given within the family till the date in India. For example; the giving and taking of bride and groom within the family relationships are considered as important and necessary in the Indian society.

### d. Religion

Religion is considered as one of the influencing institutions of Indian society. India is the land of many primitives, tribals, major and minor religious traditions. The religious traditions like Saivism, Vaishnavism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism originated from the Indian society. The spiritual and Guru movements are very strong and practiced by the people of India from the ancient to the contemporary society. The followers of Christianity and Islam are found in good number of percentages in India. Monotheistic and polytheistic understanding of religions are prevalent in the Indian society. A good number of religious scholars of India support polytheistic understanding of religion. Polytheism takes the position to accept all religious tradition are equal and teaches the same truth. There is no superiority and inferiority among religious traditions in India.

### e. Secular and Democratic Society

Though the people of India practice religious faith of their own but still it is one of the largest and rich secular and democratic countries in the world. The strength of Indian society and culture is the Indian constitution which emphasizes on the freedom, liberty, equality and fraternity of people irrespective of culture, language, religion, caste, color, gender etc. The Indian constitution is against any form of discrimination, exploitation, oppression, marginalization in the Indian society. Indian constitution assures that the freedom to practice and propagate any faith, express thought and speech, and freedom of movement. The self-respect, social justice, equal opportunity is considered the soul of Indian constitution.

## 2. Significance of Indian Culture

### a. Language and Literature in India

The Indian culture is unique in many senses that are language, literature, value, art, and architecture etc. The classical languages like Tamil, Sanskrit are exclusive examples of Indian cultural heritage. The ancient scriptures

like *Tholkappiyam*, *Thirukkural* and other Sangam literatures of Tamil and Vedas of Sanskrit prove the Indian cultural legacy and knowledge system. One of the living and vibrant languages of the world is Tamil. The literary and grammatical richness of Tamil language have attracted other parts of the world. The thought pattern and mind set of people of Tamil prove the antiquity of language.

### b. Art and Architecture in India

The art and architectures during the periods of ancient like Ashoka reflects the richness and intellect of Indian mind. Different caves and temples across the country prove that the Indians are masters in the art and architecture. Further, the medieval and modern periods of art and architecture substantiate and continue the legacy. It is important to note that the temples in Tamil Nadu stands for cultural heritage and aesthetics. Temples were built by many kings from dynasty to dynasty. They testify the power of Indian mind to the world.

### c. Ethics and Values in the Indian Culture

The Indian ethics and values are mostly based on the spiritual teachings from time to time. Particularly, the teachings of holy scriptures play a major role to derive the individual ethics and values in the Indian culture. The core values are derived from the Vedas, Upanishads, teachings of Buddha, Mahavir, and Guru Nanak from time to time. Individual and social disciplines are taught to practice in the day today life form their belief systems which they follow. The respect, honor and hospitality are considered most important in the Indian cultural practices. It is taught and carried forward from generation to generation. Honoring guests are considered as equal to service to divine in many societies in India.

### d. Tribal Identity

Indian society supports the tribal identity and preserve their cultural practices across the country. The dwelling places, languages, beliefs and practices of multiple tribals in India are given importance and seen as the pride of nation. A good number of tribal communities are found across the country. The tribal communities carry forward their cultural practices from generation to generation. The food and dress codes are unique from culture to culture of tribes in India. In the context of ecological degradation, the tribal communities protect the environment and they are the source of sustainable development in the country. Though the modernization and urbanization challenge the life of tribes in India but still preservation of tribal culture is given importance.

### e. Unity in Diversity

One of the salient features of Indian society and culture is unity in diversity. There are multiple cultures, languages, customs, foods, dresses, beliefs and practices in the length and breadth of the country but still all are united and proud as the citizen of India. The national flag, national anthem and Indian constitution unites all people of India as one. The secular and democratic nature of the country testifies the unity in diversity. Though the people of India speak different languages, having different food and dress codes, different religious faiths but still united as the faithful citizen of India.

### Critical Evaluation

The Indian society and culture are very rich in its nature and function. It portrays the cultural heritage from the past to the present. The Indian civilization and cultural traditions are listed along with other traditions like Egyptian, Babylonian, Mesopotamian and so on. It is also needed to acknowledge that the challenges of Indian society and culture are namely; caste system, class disparity, patriarchy, along with the modern factors like globalization, modernization, urbanization, industrialization which are major cause of losing the originality, legacy and richness of Indian culture and society. It is to accept that the following things are considered as great threats to the pluralistic understanding of Indian society and culture;

- The broken family and relationship with the emergence of western ideas and thoughts
- The family relationship is threatened by living together, living single etc.
- The practice of patriarchy and gender discrimination
- The honor killing in the name of religion and caste
- Religious fanaticism, and fundamentalism
- Globalization, industrialization, modernization and urbanization
- Excess use of technology

It is important to realize and be responsible to protect the uniqueness of Indian society and culture without any compromise. The richness of Indian society and culture need to be protected from the above threats. The Indian constitution is the custodian of Indian society and culture to safeguard and protect our cultural heritage for many centuries and set as role model in the world.

### Conclusion

Society and culture in the Indian context are a broader area in which the four important institutions of Indian society that are family, marriage, kinship and religion has been addressed. The soul of Indian society and culture is the Indian constitution. The Indian society gives importance to these four social institutions from the period of ancient to the contemporary society. The Indian cultural heritage such as language, literature, art, architecture, ethics, values, tribal identity are unique in its nature. There are multiple languages, literatures, cultures exist across the country but still the spirit of unity in diversity upholds the Indianness with the support of Indian constitution. Though the caste, class, globalization, urbanization, industrialization, modernization challenges the originality, richness, and cultural heritage of Indian society and culture but still the Indian portrays and keeps the legacy of Indian culture.

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