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Commissioner,

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CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN CULTURE

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

Characteristics of Indian Culture

Traditional Indian culture, in its overall thrust towards the spiritual, promotes moral values and the attitudes of generosity, simplicity and frugality. Some of the striking features of Indian culture that pervade its numerous castes, tribes, ethnic groups and religious groups and sects are as follows.

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A Cosmic Vision

- The framework of Indian culture places human beings within a conception of the universe as a divine creation. It is not anthropo-centric (human-centric) only and considers all elements of creation, both living and non-living, as manifestations of the divine.
- Therefore, it respects God's design and promotes the ideal of co-existence. This vision thus, synthesizes human beings, nature and God into one integral whole. This is reflected in the idea of *satyam-shivam-sundaram*.

Sense of Harmony

- Indian philosophy and culture tries to achieve an innate harmony and order and this is extended to the entire cosmos. Indian culture assumes that natural cosmic order inherent in nature is the foundation of moral and social order. Inner harmony is supposed to be the foundation of outer harmony.
- External order and beauty will naturally follow from inner harmony. Indian culture balances and seeks to synthesize the material and the spiritual, as aptly illustrated by the concept of *purushartha*

Tolerance

- An important characteristic of Indian culture is tolerance. In India, tolerance and liberalism is found for all religions, castes, communities, etc. Many foreign cultures invaded India and Indian society gave every culture the opportunity of prospering. Indian society accepted and respected Shaka, Huna, Shithiyan, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist cultures.
- The feeling of tolerance towards all religions is a wonderful characteristic of Indian society. Rigveda says—Truth is one, even then the Scholars describe it in various forms. In Gita, Lord Krishna says, —Those praying others are actually praying me. This thought is the extreme of tolerance. There is a peaceful coexistence of various religions in India and all have been effecting each other – although this tradition has been badly affected by activities of converting religion by some religious organisations.



- All the religions existing in India are respected equally. Indian culture accepts the manifoldness of reality and assimilates plurality of viewpoints, behaviours, customs and institutions. It does not try to suppress diversity in favour of uniformity. The motto of Indian culture is both unity in diversity as well as diversity in unity.

Continuity and Stability

- The principles of Indian culture are today also that much in practice, as they were initially. A special characteristic of Indian culture is – its continuous flow. Since, Indian culture is based on values, so it's development is continuous. Many centuries passed by, many changes occurred, many foreign invaders were faced, but the light of Indian culture today also is continuously glowing.
- No Scholar can end its history of like that of the cultures Egypt, Greece, Rome, Sumer, Babylon and Syria because it is yet in the phase of construction. Indian culture can be understood by looking at its present cultural standards. The light of ancient Indian culture life is yet glowing. Many invasions occurred, many rulers changed, many laws were passed but even today, the traditional institutions, religion, epics, literature, philosophy, traditions, etc. are alive. The situations and government could not remove them completely. The stability of Indian culture is unique within itself, even today.
- Indian culture has always favoured change within continuity. It is in favour of gradual change or reform. It does not favour abrupt or instant change. Therefore, most changes in thought have come in the form of commentaries and interpretation and not in the form of original systems of thought. In matters of behaviour also synthesis of old and new is preferred over replacement of old by the new.

Adaptability

- Adaptability has a great contribution in making Indian culture immortal. Adaptability is the process of changing according to time, place and period. It's an essential element of longevity of any culture. Indian culture has a unique property of adjustment, as a result of which, it is maintained till today.

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- Indian family, caste, religion and institutions have changed themselves with time. Due to adaptability and co-ordination of Indian culture, it's continuity, utility and activity is still present. Dr. Radha Krishnan, in his book, Indian culture: Some Thoughts', while describing the adaptability of Indian culture has said all people whether black or white, Hindus or Muslims, Christians or Jews are brothers and our country is the entire universe.
 - We should have devotion for those things, which are beyond the limits of knowledge and regarding which, it's difficult to say anything. Our hope towards mankind was based on that respect and devotion, which people had towards other's views. There should be no efforts on imposing our thoughts on others.

Receptivity

- Receptivity is an important characteristic of Indian culture. Indian culture has always accepted the good of the invading cultures. Indian culture is like an ocean, in which many rivers come and meet. In the same way all castes succumbed to the Indian culture and very rapidly they dissolved in the *Hindutva*.
- Indian culture has always adjusted with other cultures it's ability to maintain unity amongst the diversities of all is the best. The reliability, which developed in this culture due to this receptivity, is a boon for this world and is appreciated by all. We have always adopted the properties of various cultures. *Vasudaiva Kutumbakam* is the soul of Indian culture.
- Indian culture has always answered and activated itself by receiving and adjusting with the elements of foreign cultures. Indian culture has received the elements of Muslim cultures and has never hesitated in accepting the useful things of foreign culture. Therefore, it's continuity, utility and activity are still there today.
- The adaptability and receptivity of this culture has given it the power to remain alive in all the conditions. Due to this property, Indian culture was never destroyed even after facing the foreign attacks. Actually, Indian society and culture had facilitated foreign attackers by getting them close and becoming intimate with them and not only gave but also received many things.

Spirituality

- Spirituality is the soul of Indian culture. Here the existence of soul is accepted. Therefore, the ultimate aim of man is not physical comforts but is self-realisation. Radha Kumud Mukerjee, in his book, 'Hindu Civilization', has analysed that Indian culture, which kept its personal specialities, bound the entire nation in unity in such a way that nation and culture were considered inseparable and became unanimous.
- Nation became culture and culture became nation. Country took the form of Spiritual World, beyond the physical world. When Indian culture originated in the times of Rigveda, then it spread with time to Saptasindhu, Bramhavarta, Aryavarta, Jumbudweepa, Bharata Varsha or India. Because of its strength, it reached abroad beyond the borders of India and established there also.

Thoughts about Karma and Reincarnation

- The concept of Karma (action) and Reincarnation have special importance in Indian culture. It is believed that one gains virtue during good action and takes birth in higher order in his next birth and spends a comfortable life. The one doing bad action takes birth in lower order in his next birth and suffers pain and leads a miserable life.
- Upanishads say that the Principle of fruits of action is correct. A man gets the fruits as per the action he does. Therefore, man needs to modify his actions, so as to improve the next birth also. Continuously performing good actions in all his birth, he will get salvation, i.e. will be liberated from the cycle of birth and death. This concept is not only of the Upanishads but is also the basis of the Jainism, Buddhism, etc. In this way, the concept of reincarnation is associated with the principle of action. The actual cause of reincarnation is the actions done in the previous birth.

Emphasis on Duty

- As against rights, Indian culture emphasises *dharma* or moral duty. It is believed that performance of one's duty is more important than asserting one's right. It also emphasises the complementariness between one's own duty and other's rights. Thus, through the emphasis on community or family obligations, Indian culture

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promotes interdependence rather than Independence and autonomy of the individual.

- The Ideal of Joint Family At the level of marriage, there is a lot of plurality in India. At the level of family, however, there is striking similarity. For example, the ideal or norm of joint family is upheld by almost every Indian. Every person may not live in a joint household but the ideal of joint family is still favoured.
- The family is the defining feature of Indian culture. Although Indians differentiate between individual identity and family identity, the Western type of individualism is rare in Indian culture.

Caste System

Another characteristic of Indian culture is social stratification. In every region of India, there are about 200 castes. The social structure is made of thousands of those castes and sub-castes, which decide the social status of a person on the basis of birth.

Four Duties

- By fulfilling duties, a person can follow his religion while living in physical comforts and thus can gain salvation. Fulfilling duties is a characteristic of Indian culture.
- In this, in a person's life, four basis are considered-
 - *Dharma* (religion),
 - *Arth* (money),
 - *Kama* (lust),
 - *Moksha* (salvation).
- Religion is related to the fulfilment of moral duties. Money is related to the fulfilment of all needs. Lust is associated with pleasures in life. Salvation is the last goal. All these inspire an individual to fulfil his duties and to live in a disciplined way in society. Two contradictory thoughts are seen in the history of the world-first the world and life is momentary and destructible and second is that the success of life depends on the enjoyment.
- Its best example is Western school of thought. But one can see the co-ordination between the two in Indian culture. Both should be mingled to the real nature, importance and goal of human life. The expression of this coordination is the

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Principle of Efforts. It is believed that the nation, which has forgotten its culture, is not an alive nation. He used to tell the importance of Indian cultural values. People who believe in material development can be intolerant.

- Those who believe in development of weapons can be unrelative. Those who consider harm done to others for their own welfare as forgivable can be liberal but the exceptional of Indian culture is that though it considers material as an essential thing but has not made it the centre of faith.
- Though it has used the power of weapons but has considered its welfare in it. It has considered harm done to others for its own welfare as unforgivable. The ultimate goal of life here is not luxury and desires but is sacrifice-penance and self-realisation.

Indian Culture during the Contemporary Period

- The social structural affiliation of the classical in the traditional Indian culture had been broadly linked with princes, priests, monks, *munis*, *sadhus*, scholars, guild masters and other prosperous groups. During the medieval period the relationship between the classical and the folk was not disturbed.
- In ancient India the classical tradition was linked not only to Sanskrit but there were also streams of the classical tradition associated with Pali and Tamil. Sanskrit was the bearer of the Hindu classical tradition and the Mahayana Buddhist tradition and some of the Jain science traditions as well. Pali was the vehicle of the Theravadi Buddhist tradition and Tamil was the bearer of the South Indian classical tradition.
- During the modern period, the relationship between the classical represented by English and the vernacular folk traditions has broken down. Traditional equilibrium has been affected by different factors and processes of modernization. With the impact of modern social forces the relationship between the classical and the folk traditions has been disturbed. In the urban centres a new middle class has been growing and assuming the role of the bearer of the classical tradition.
- The middle class has a world view and outlook that is radically different from the bearers of the folk tradition. They are mostly the bearers of Western cultural values, norms, ideas, outlook and institutions, and English has become their dominant

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- language. Throughout history, the folk and the tribal traditions have remained relatively unaffected by changes in political structures.
- The importance of classical traditions has been changing from time to time with changes in political power structure but the folk and the tribal traditions have remained consistently vibrant.
 - The classical traditions in traditional India had always accepted the importance as well as given space to the folk and the tribal cultures. The bearers of modern Western classical cultural tradition, on the other hand, have on occasions shown less tolerance towards the folk and the tribal traditions.
 - They usually brand the traditional culture as primitive, barbaric and superstitious in comparison to the modern culture. They try to modernize and westernize all the elements and streams of Indian culture. The processes of westernization, industrialisation, urbanisation, globalisation and democratisation are influencing various aspects of Indian culture today.
 - These modernizing and secularizing forces, however, have not yet cut off contemporary Indian culture from the traditional and cultural roots of Indian culture. The traditional cultural media not only continue to survive today, but also some aspects of it have also been incorporated in novel ways into an emerging popular and, classical culture.

Questions :

1. Bring out the characteristics of Indian culture
2. Examine the Indian Culture during the contemporary period
3. What are the four duties in Indian Culture. Explain