

Cultural Uniqueness of India: A Glimpse

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Abstract:

Culture is the way of life. It refers to the rational improvement evolved out of the material and intellectual guidance acquired in the course of the ages in a nation. The Indian way of life is defined by the thoughts, feelings and philosophies prevalent in the country and its inhabitants. The Indian culture is one of the oldest and matchless. In spite of the numerous diversities, a basic unity is found in it. This culture has maintained uninterrupted stability from Vedic times to the present day in spite of innumerable obstacles. This eternal harmony and constant stability of Indian culture are derived from its profound spiritual bases.

Key Words: Culture, Namaste, uttarayan, God bharna

The culture of India is compared with a Lotus flower which has innumerable odorous petals. These aromatic petals spread unique fragrance in the whole humanity. Its matchlessness lies in its compassion, forbearance, harmony, secularism, well-built social organism and family values. The Indian society is a wonderful exposition of the Indian culture. "The traditional Indian society is represented by family, festivals, names, marriages and many more. The language, dance, religions, music, various customs, food, rituals, artifacts, monuments, costumes, literature and architecture form the rich culture of India".

"Indian culture is about respecting elders, honoring heroes and cherishing love". The elders are regarded as the motivating force and so are appreciated and respected. The reverence for elders comes from within and is not synthetic. "An individual takes blessings from his elders by touching their feet". The guests are regarded as gods and are taken care of with reverence and love. The guests are in no way left hungry and are constantly taken care of by the members of the family. Indians are forever ready to facilitate one another in times

of necessitate. The idea of sharing out joys and sorrows is also a significant element of Indian culture. Supportive temperament is an additional salient feature.

“In the Indian culture the manner of salutation is distinctive in itself. Namaste or Pranam is a common spoken salutation in India. It expresses deep respect”. In this way of salutation both the palms are put together and the head is bowed down. Such putting of palms symbolizes the union of two souls and the bowing down symbolizes humbleness. Indians get glimpse of God in the other persons.

India is awfully affluent in its customs and traditions. Griha Pravesh is a ritual performed on the time of one's opening entrance into a new home. Once the home is completed, the family moves in on an auspicious day that is decided by the almanac. In a recently prepared house, the opening entrance is auspicious when the sun is in the uttarayan situation. The tithies like 4, 9, 14 and Amavasya are not appreciated. Tuesday is avoided for first entry. “Vastu pooja for vastu devata is performed outside the house before the actual entry into the house. A copper pot is filled with water, navadhanya (nine kinds of grains) and one rupee coin. A coconut is then placed on the top of the pot. It is covered with the red cloth and tied with the red thread called moli. After this the priest performs the pooja. The husband and the wife take this copper pot in the house together and place it near the havan (ceremonial fire). Vastu shanti or Griha shanty, involves the havan. A havan is performed to prevent harmful influences of the planets, to remove negative vibrations and to create a peaceful environment. When the poojas are concluded, a feast is offered to the priest. He is also given some dakshina or fees for his services and good wishes. These two poojas are essential. Other poojas like the Ganpathi pooja, the Satyanarayan pooja and the Lakshmi pooja are optional, and can be performed if the priest recommends them. Once the griha pravesh ceremony has been completed, the family can then move into the house”.

God bharna is an extremely momentous occasion in the lives of Hindu married lady. It is a ritual that celebrates the first pregnancy of the bride in a family. In Hindu tradition 'god' means the lap of the lady and 'bharna' means to fill up. Thus the mother and mother-in-law of the pregnant bride fill her god. On this day, the pregnant bride is clothed in almost bridal robes. The ritual is strictly for ladies only.

“The ceremony begins with the mother-to-be's entrance, dressed in traditional finery, through the front door of her in-law's house. The participating ladies sing traditional songs further enhancing the festive atmosphere. For each step the expectant mother takes as she

enters the house, a piece of coloured silk is placed under her feet along with a little supari, a one rupee coin and a quarter rupee coin. These actions are continued till she reaches the place where the puja will be performed. An idol of Lord Ganesh is placed at this place of worship. Traditionally, the puja area is situated in the main hall of the house and always faces east. Besides the idol of Lord Ganesh, the puja area also has a baajoth, a low four-legged wooden seat, traditionally used for such religious occasions. The mother-to-be is made to sit on the baajoth and a small red dot is put on her forehead for good luck. After this, both her mother and her mother-in-law fill her godh (the paalav of her saree) with gifts and jewellery. Her sister-in-law then offers her a cup of sweetened saffron milk before tying a yellow thread around the wrist of the right hand of the expectant mother. This wristband, known as a nada chhadi, is very significant as it is supposed to protect both the expectant mother and the unborn child from evil spirits. The elders bless the expectant mother and her unborn child accompanied by the sound of traditional festive tunes being sung by the women in the background.”

Chhathi is also a significant celebration. It is celebrated when the infant is six days old. This ceremony is mainly for ladies. It takes place late at night. According to the legends, on the 6th day after the birth of the child, God of destiny enter into the house around midnight to write the fate of the infant. Conventionally the mother of the infant lights a ‘deep’ (lamp). This ‘deep’ along with a red pen and paper are placed on a wooden board for God to note down the fate of the infant. The mother, while holding the infant in her arms, kneels before the ‘deep’.

According to Hindu tradition, the naming ceremony for the newborn babe takes place on the twelfth day after its birth. It is chiefly a function for women. On the prearranged day, female relatives and acquaintances turn up to take part in this ceremony. At the auspicious time, the newborn baby is put in the adorned cradle. All the ladies assemble around the cradle and chant the conventional naming ceremony songs. Customarily, the ladies used to carry rice grains and sugar along with toys to mark this auspicious occasion.

According to the tradition, the aunts (the father's sisters) hold the four corners of the cloth in which the babe lies. After that the aunts smoothly move back and forth the cloth, imitating the movement of a cradle, while the female participants go on with singing conventional songs. Hindus over and over again prefer to name their offsprings based on Hindu raashis for the reason that it is considered auspicious and are supposed to pass first-
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rate fortune to the child. “Raashis are determined by planetary positions at the date and exact time of the child's birth”.

Puja refers to ritual worship of a sacred deity or image. Most Hindus carry out various kind of puja at their homes or temples. Several pujas are quite difficult and have need of the expertise of a high priest whereas a number of pujas are easy enough to be performed by the regular householder. A puja is performed to attain material or pious aims. Generally either a priest or the eldest member of a family carries out the puja. There are no definite set of laws that decide who can carry out a puja. Pujas are carried out after taking a bath. The crack of dawn is considered auspicious for every day pujas however a soothsayer may be contacted to choose an auspicious occasion for various unique pujas. In addition, certain rituals may be carried out on certain calendar days, depending on which divine being is to be propitiated. “Pujas involve the use of all five senses in the ritual: sight, smell, touch, taste, and sound. A puja can be quite an enthralling experience with colourful flowers and fruits, the smell of incense sticks and fragrances, the sounds of conch shells and bells, sacred hymns and songs, etc. As a rule, every puja begins with an invocation to the elephant-headed God Ganesha”. Food is a distinguished feature of Indian culture. It has a significant function in bringing the family together. It is an occasion while every one of the family sit and share their every day experiences. Indian cuisine is one of the most popular cuisines in the entire world. Indian traditional food is far and wide liked for its marvelous use of spices. Each area of India has its own spices and cooking methods. “The food in India is classified into three major categories - Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. Satva which stand for balance, Rajas stands for passion, and Thamas stands for indulgence”.

Food is consumed according to the life style of the person. The staple foodstuff in India consists of wheat, rice and pulses. Indian food is vegetarian in its nature. The variety of spices and the methods of preparation enhance the taste of the food and enhance nutritive value to it. The Indian food is no complete without sweet at the finish. Kheer, mitha paan etc. add sweetness and freshness at the end.

The clothing style of India has uniqueness. It greatly varies across different parts of the country and “is influenced immensely by local culture, geography and climate”. In India the social status of a person is recognized by the attire. “Indian dress etiquette discourages exposure of skin and wearing transparent or tight clothes. Most Indian clothes are made from cotton which is ideal for the region's hot weather”. Dhoti- kurta is the conventional Indian

attire of male. An unstitched piece of cloth usually of 5 yards long is known as Dhoti. It is tied around the waist. Dhoti is recognized by various names as Laacha and dhuti etc. Kurta is a long loose shirt. Long ago, it was mainly worn by male members of the society. But now both male and female wear it.

Salwar- kameez is the conventional Indian attire for female. It reflects Indianness. It is highly popular in Punjab that's why it is usually popular as Punjabi suit. For India Shalwar-Kameez is not a new fashion. Ladies have been wearing this magnificent dress for a very long time. Sari is also a fantastic dress worn by Indian female. It is famous in the entire world. It is worn with a blouse which covers up the upper part of the body. Ghagara -choli is also a very popular dress in India. Ghagara is like a long skirt and choli is like a short blouse. In order to have a elegant look, ladies carry a duppatta. Apart from all these things Indian women wear bindi, chudi, kajal etc. Bindi is worn by Indian women on their forehead. Sindoor is used only by the married women.

Sherwani is also in vogue as Indian traditional dress. It is a long coat resembling achkan. It is buttoned up to the collar and lengthwise it is generally below the knees. It enhances the attraction and elegance of men. It is worn on the special occasion of marriage. Indian male wear turban too. It is basically a head dress. It is worn because it has a lot of significance in the lives of men. It is a long piece of cloth that is wrapped around the head.

The folklores and folktales have been a perpetual component of each and every culture since ages. Indian folklore has an extensive assortment of stories and fabulous legends that come out from all walks of life. The fascinating stories range from the noteworthy 'Panchatantra' to 'Hitopadesha', from 'Jataka' to 'Akbar-Birbal'. The grand Indian epics like 'Ramayana', 'Mahabharata' and 'Bhagvad Gita' are full of moralistic stories.

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