

# INDIA: SOCIAL LIFE

India is a vast country in the continent of Asia. It is a country of bewilderingly great diversities. Nowhere on Earth does humanity present itself in such a dizzying, creative burst of cultures and religions, races and tongues. Home to the ancient Indus Valley Civilization and a region of historic trade routes and vast empires, the Indian subcontinent has been identified with its commercial and cultural wealth for much of its long history. High mountain ranges, vast seas, large river-irrigated lands, countless rivers and streams, dark forests, sandy deserts, all these have adorned India with an exceptional diversity. Among the people, there are numerous races, religions, languages and dialects. In course of time they wove themselves into the intricate fabric of India's social life. However, the real strength of Indian culture lies in its basic unity, vigour and the ability to contain an amazing diversity within itself. In this country there are people who belong to opposite schools of thought, yet it is this diversity that binds one Indian with another and the concept of one basic culture and one nation has continued to thrive even today.

## (1) Social Life of Western India

You have already studied about the social life of Gujarat and since Gujarat lies to the west of India, let us begin with the social life of the people of the west. Despite having an extensive coastline, the cuisine of Gujarat, is primarily a vegetarian cuisine. The staple diet of the people includes cereals, pulses, vegetables, clarified butter (ghee), milk, buttermilk, butter etc. Kathiawadi meals and Dal-Bati are very popular. Due to its vast coast line, people living in the western India consume eggs, fish etc.



### Food of the people of West India

Men wear a dhoti, jodhpuri trousers (chayno-pajamas, loose from the waist to the thigh and tight from the things to the ankle) and a short pleated frock-shirt (Angarkhu) or a Kurta. They also carry a stole (khais) on their shoulders. Women wear saris. In Rajasthan, men wear a dhoti and a short, pleated frock-shirt (Angarkhu). Women wear colourful, pleated ankle-length skirts (ghaghra) and long, waist-length blouses. In Maharashtra, women wear the 'nine-yard, divided sari (Nauvari / Kachhoto).

Today, in developing societies, men wear trousers and shirts, while women wear salwar-kameez or trousers. People of rural areas and tribals dress according to the region they live in.



The houses are made of bricks, stone and cement. Tribals of the forest and hilly areas live in huts made of bamboo and teak branches scattered over the area they live in.

In the villages of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, the houses are made of sand, stone, bricks and cement.



**Outfit of Maharashtra**



**Outfit of Rajasthan**



**Residence in forest area**



**Modern Residence**

People speak Gujarati, Marathi, Konkani, Rajasthani and Hindi. People use local dialects in forest and tribal areas.

People in India enjoy festivals. Different festivals are celebrated here. The 'Ras' and 'Garba' of Gujarat are very popular all over the world. The folk songs and dances of Rajasthan are different especially the 'Ghummar'. The 'Lavni' of Maharashtra is also famed. The fairs of Tarnetar, Bhavnath, Shamlaji, Dang Darbar are well-known. Festivals like Diwali, Ganesh Chaturti, Eid, Christmas etc. are celebrated together by one and all.





**Folk music of Rajasthan**



**Garba**

## **(2) Social Life of the people of North India**

The staple food of the people of North India is wheat-based. They also consume pulses, vegetables, fruits, clarified butter (ghee), milk and buttermilk. 'Lassi' –sweetened buttermilk of Punjab is a delight to the taste buds.

'Punjab' is known as the land of five rivers. The people are sturdy and hard working. Men and boys wear loose pants or slacks with a collared shirt or t-shirt. Some males also wear the kurta-pajama-jacket (an Indian shirt-pant outfit), especially the Punjabi farmer. Many Punjabis, mainly Sikhs, wear the turbans on their heads. The women wear salwar-khameez with bright coloured dupattas.

Jammu and Kashmir is famous for its natural beauty since time immemorial and has been aptly described as 'heaven on earth'. Costumes of Jammu and Kashmir are well known for their embroidery and intricate designs. The form of clothing is designed to counter the cold climate of the region. The traditional Pheran (long tunic stretching up to their feet with full, long sleeves) is the most popular form of dress among both men and women. They also wear Mughal type turbans (men) or headgear / coloured scarf (Taranga) worn by women on their heads. Variation is seen in their outfit due to modernization.



**Kashmiri Couple**



**Kashmiri Lady**



**Gadhwal Couple**

## **Outfit of people of North India**



Most of the houses in North India have terraces and are made of bricks, wood, stones and mud. The Dal Lake in Jammu and Kashmir is well-known for its famed house boats, known as 'Shikaras'.

Hindi is widely spoken in north India. But besides Hindi, Punjabi, Sindhi and Kashmiri languages are also spoken. Local dialects such as Bhojpuri, Bihari are spoken in Uttar Pradesh.

Festivals and Fairs in northern India is celebrated with great fervour. There are many famous festivals in the Northern India that are celebrated by the people. The 'Baisakhi' festival of Punjab is celebrated with great pomp by all. 'Bhangda', the folk dance of Punjab is lively and liked by all. The folk songs of Kashmir, devotional songs of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab are well known.

The nature of the people of North India, however, differs. While the Punjabis are lively and cheerful, the Kashmiris are quiet and poised.

Jammu and Kashmir is known as the paradise on earth for its amazing landscape and scenic beauty. The area is among the world's most beautiful places with beautiful snow covered mountains, green valleys and natural lakes. Jammu and Kashmir is bestowed with breathtaking natural beauty that can mesmerize anyone. One can see countless gardens with terraced lawns, cascading fountains, paint-box-bright flowerbeds with rare flowers in the state.

Handicraft is the traditional industry of the State and has been of crucial importance. Some of the items of industry are papier-mâché, woodcarving, carpets, shawl making, embroidery etc. Saffron is predominately cultivated here.



**Boat house (Shikara)**



**Bhangda of Punjab**



**Dance of Kashmir**



**Carpet of Kashmir**



**Embroidery of Kashmir**



Agriculture and agriculture-related activities is the principle occupation of most of the people of North India. Apart from agriculture, people are engaged in cottage and small industries too.

### (3) Social Life of the people of South India

The people of South India are benefitted by a long sea coast. They are short and sturdy in built. Rice is the staple diet, with fish being an integral component of coastal South India. They prefer to eat on banana leaves on all important occasions. Idli, dosa, sambhar, vada are some of the famous food items. South Indian cuisine is very well known and popular.



### Diet of people at South India

South Indian women traditionally wear the sari and adorn their hair with sweet-smelling garlands of flowers. The men wear either a white dhoti or a colourful lungi . The fishermen wear clothes to suit their occupation.



### Couple of South India



## Fishermen

The houses are made of bricks, wood, bamboo, stones and mud. They have sloping roofs as it rains heavily in these areas. People residing near the coastal areas live in huts. The bamboo furniture used in these houses are beautifully made. House boats are seen in the backwaters of Kerala too.





**Slanting roof**



**Pacca house with more slanting roof**

Different language are spoken in Southern India. English and regional languages like Tamil, Telugu, Malyalam and Kannada are widely spoken.

Famous for their passion for religion, tradition, customs and culture, people living in South India follow a very ritualistic lifestyle. Therefore, festivals of South India make them popular all over the globe. Onam, Pongal, Boat Races, Dussehra and Diwali are celebrated with great enthusiasm.

Mohiniattam and Kathakali of Kerala, Bharatnatyam of Tamil Nadu and Kuchipudi of Andhra Pradesh are the famous dances of South India.

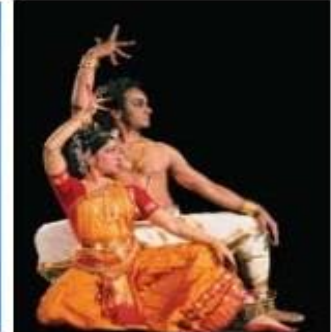
Think what is there in this picture?



**Bharatnatyam**



**Kathakali**



**Kuchipudi**

### **Classical dances of South India**

Farming and fishing are the major occupations of the people there. Paddy is the main crop of the region. People seek their livelihood through industries in the urban areas too. South Indian culture with its visible differences in customs and traditions forms an important part of the Indian culture.

### **(4) Social Life of the people of East India**

Most of the people of Eastern India live in rural areas. Since, the region comprises of mountains, plantation agriculture is practiced widely. e.g. Tea. The staple food of the people is rice and fish, but besides that, people also consume pulses and vegetables. Rasgulla, the famous, cheese based, syrupy dessert of West Bengal, is popular all over the world.

People prefer to wear cotton, ankle-length clothes as the region faces a tropical monsoon climate. People are usually short in height. Men wear the dhoti-kurta while women drape their saris in a traditional pattern.





**People of East India**



**Couple of East India**

Most of the houses of Eastern India are made of bamboo and wood, but some are also made of brick and cement. Tribals in forest areas live in huts spread over the forest area. The houses have sloping roofs due to the excessive rains. The backyards of most houses have small ponds (known as 'Pukur') in which Pisciculture (fish breeding / culture) is practiced.



**House made of Bamboos**

Assamese, Bengali and Oriya are commonly spoken by the people of Eastern India. Hindi and English are also spoken marginally.

Many festivals brighten the lives of the people of these regions. Bihu and Ojapali, the folk dances of Assam are very famous.



**Bihu**



**Odissi**

**Folk and classical dance of East India**

India believes in secularism and Indians have the liberty of following the religion of their choice. India offers astounding variety in virtually every aspect of social life. Diversities of ethnic, linguistic, regional, economic, religious, class, and caste groups crosscut Indian society, which is also permeated with immense urban-rural differences and gender distinctions. A variety of languages and dialects are spoken here.

India, being a multi-cultural and multi-religious society, celebrates holidays and festivals of various religions. The three national holidays in India, the Independence Day, the Republic Day and the Gandhi Jayanti are celebrated with zeal and enthusiasm across India. However, with the passage of time, many transformations can be seen in the Indian way of life. e.g. changes are visible in diet, apparel, lifestyle etc. due to increase in communication technology and faster means of transportation. Globalization has brought about many changes in the social life of the people.

Change is inevitable, natural and necessary. But, our culture and heritage must be conserved. Man and environment are interdependent and thus along with culture and heritage, its prestige and honour must be preserved under all circumstances.

The culture of India refers to the way of life of the people of India. India's languages, religions, dance, music, architecture, food and customs differ from place to place within the country. The Indian culture often labeled as an amalgamation of several cultures, spans across the Indian subcontinent and has been influenced by a history that is several millennia old. The people of the rural areas too enjoy this diversity. Diversity is seen in castes, colour, creed, languages, culture, tradition, rituals, customs, thinking and beliefs right from northern state of Kashmir to its southern most counterpart-Kanniyakumari and from western Gujarat to north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh. The political, social, economic scenario is completely different from one another. Hence, India is known as 'The Land of Diversities'.



## **SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REFORMS**

In the nineteenth century, Indian society was infested with various social evils like superstition, illiteracy, ignorance, evil social customs, caste system etc. The condition of women was worst in this narrow minded society. Various evil customs were widespread in our society like the custom of 'dudhpiti' (Female infanticide by immersing a new born girl child into a container full of milk), sati system (Burning of a woman on her husband's funeral pyre), denial of widow remarriage etc. Due to the western education, a 'New Awakening' (Renaissance) began in the nineteenth century to remove the evil customs from the society. Intensive efforts were made to bring in social and religious reforms. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first among such reformers.

### **Raja Ram Mohan Roy**

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was born in the year 1772 C.E. in the Hooghly district of Bengal in Radhanagar village in a Brahmin family. Raja Ram Mohan Roy got married in his early childhood. His brother's wife became 'Sati' on her husband's death. This incident shook Raja Ram Mohan Roy deeply. He initiated many reforms and protested strongly against the evil customs such as child marriage, casteism, dudhpiti etc. He started the Bengali Newspaper namely 'Samvad Kaumudi' in the year 1821 C.E. and also 'Mirat-ul-Akbar' in Persian in the year 1822 C.E. 'Brahmo Samaj' was established in the year 1828 C.E. Raja Ram Mohan Roy established the Hindu college in Kolkata. He recommended many changes to the British government like the independence of press, freedom of speech, women's rights, personal liberty, judiciary independent from executive etc. Raja Ram Mohan Roy started movement to abolish the Sati system. As a result, the British Governor General of Bengal, Lord William Bentinck passed a law to abolish the Sati Pratha (system). This law was framed in the year 1829 C.E. so it can be said, that Raja Ram Mohan Roy laid the foundation of the Indian Renaissance (New Awakening) with regards to initiating social, religious and political reforms. The emperor of Delhi sent Raja Ram Mohan Roy to England in the year 1830 C.E. in regards to his case of right to property. Raja Ram Mohan Roy died in Bristol in the year 1833 C.E. Brahmo Samaj played a vital role in reforming the contemporary Hindu Samaj (society). Brahmo Samaj tried to abolish the rigid and superstitious religious beliefs prevalent then.

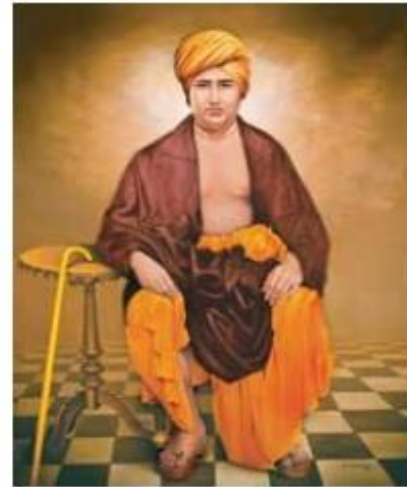


**Raja Ram  
Mohan Roy**



## Dayanand Saraswati

Dayanand Saraswati was born in a Brahmin family in Tankara village near Morbi in Saurashtra. In his early childhood, he realized that the idol worshipping and religious rituals were worthless. He renounced his family and the world in search of truth. He travelled across India for the next 15 years and also studied Yoga. He became a 'Sanyasi' i.e. an ascetic / recluse and studied the philosophy of Hinduism from Swami Virajanand Dandeesha in Mathura.



**Dayanand  
Saraswati**

Swami Dayanand Saraswati made an attempt to achieve national unity by advocating a classless and casteless society. He acquired a deep insight into the Indian-culture and religion through the Vedas. He preached to the people to 'Go Back to the Vedas'. He wrote a book entitled 'Satyarth Prakash'. He made people aware that in the Vedas there is no mention about the evils customs such as idol worship, rituals, child marriage, Sati Pratha (system), untouchability etc. He advocated Monotheism i.e. 'There is only one God'. He preached in Hindi and as a result his thoughts reached the maximum number of people in the country. Dayanand Saraswati established 'Arya Samaj' (1875 C.E.) branches of which were established in Lahore, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat. Consequently, social changes occurred rapidly. Arya Samaj started a movement to reconvert those people to Hinduism who had changed their religion out of force or choice and were willing to return to their original faith.

After the death of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the activities of this organization were continued by leaders like Lala Hansraj, Pandit Gurudatt and Lala Lajpat Rai. In the year 1902 C.E. 'Kangdi Gurukul' was established near Haridwar by Swami Shraddhanand. Arya Kanya Mahavidyalaya was started in Vadodara, Gujarat where the education focused on inculcating discipline, dignity of labour, tolerance, patience and moral values.

## Ramkrishna Paramhans

Ramkrishna Paramhans was the torchbearer of the Indian culture. He was also a reformer and saint who had sought the truth through all the religions. He was born in Kamarpukur village of Hoogly district in Bengal. He took interest in the religious activities from his childhood. He became a priest in the Kali Temple of Dakshineswar near Kolkata. Many people were attracted towards him due to his preaching on purity



of character and deep knowledge. He tried to attain God in various forms. Many religious reformers like Keshavchandra Sen, Dayanand Saraswati and others had obtained guidance from him. Those influenced by the western culture, redeveloped their faith in culture and religion of India because of the preachings of Ramkrishna Paramhans.

### **Swami Vivekanand**

A Bengali graduate, named Narendranath Dutt (1863-1902 C.E.) came into contact with Ramkrishna Paramhans who reciprocated his quest for knowledge. Narendra became a disciple of Ramkrishna and became an ascetic (sanyasi) later acquiring the name Swami Vivekanand. He did an intensive study of the Indian and Western philosophy.

Swami Vivekanand advised people to 'Serve the poor' and look for God in needy people. He imbibed pride for our rich cultural heritage and faith in a bright future in the Indian youngsters. He attended The Parliament of the Religions in Chicago in the United States in the year 1893 C.E. With his influential speech, he provided understanding about the Indian philosophy and culture. He propagated the Indian culture by touring various countries like the United States, Europe, Egypt, China, Japan etc. He was an ardent supporter of the Indian culture and a devout nationalist. He gave the legendary slogan to the Indians, "Arise, awake and stop not still the goal is achieved".

Swami Vivekanand established the 'Ramkrishna Mission' in Kolkata in the year 1897 C.E. in the name of his Guru. It has its headquarters at Bellur. This mission adopted the ideals of service to mankind through various works. The mission followed the slogan 'Service to man is service to God' by gaining motivation from the life of Ramkrishna Paramhans. This mission opened schools across the nation for imparting education. Hospitals were run by the mission to help the people in need. Even today the branches of the Mission are functional in India and abroad.



**Ramkrishna Paramhans**



**Swami Vivekanand**



## Thakkar Bapa

Thakkar Bapa's contribution as the head of the 'Akhil Hind Harijan Sangh' established by Gandhiji was very valuable in the upliftment of the untouchables (harijans). He worked tirelessly to provide relief to people affected by natural calamities. Amritlal Thakkar popularly known as Thakkar Bapa was born in 1869 C.E. in the city of Bhavnagar. He remained a dutiful and devoted servant of the people throughout his life. He was an engineer who left his lucrative job to serve the downtrodden and marginalized people after being inspired by Gandhiji.



**Thakkar Bapa**

Thakkar Bapa established the 'Panchmahal Bhil Seva Mandal' and tried to reform the lives of the Bhils who inhabited the deep forests and the hilly areas of the Panchmahal region. Thakkar Bapa and his followers freed the Bhils from the addiction of alcohol, other evil customs and superstitions. He opened schools for the Bhil children. He taught them how to operate a spinning wheel to produce Khadi and involved them in small cottage industries.

As time passed, awakening and nationalism spread among people which connected them better with the freedom movement. Gandhiji's emphasis upon the removal of the untouchability improved the condition of people from the backward classes.



## Indian Culture and Tradition

India enjoys a wide variety of cultural and traditional presence amongst the 28 states. Indian origin religions Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism are all based on dharma and karma. Even, India is a blessed holy place which is also a native place for most of the religions. Recently, Muslim and Christianity also practiced working amongst the whole India population. The pledge also added the line, 'India is my country, and I am proud of its rich and varied heritage.'

Indians are great with cooking; their spices are special for medicinal purposes, so visitors are difficult to adjust to with such heavy spices. The cricketers touring Indian pitches are out due to such food. Frequently, it's been observed that the sportsperson arrived in India either with cooking skills or with a cook. Spices such as cumin, turmeric and cardamom have been used for a long period, to make the dishes more delicious and nutritional. Wheat, rice and pulses help to complete the meal. The majority of the population is a vegetarian one due to their religious aspects.

Talking about the language, India is blessed with a wide range of languages used. Each state has its own language. A major part of the state is unable to speak other languages than the native one.



Gujrathi, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil, Punjabi, Telugu and many more are the representative languages of the respective state. It's easy to recognize the person with the language he spoke. There are 15 regional languages but almost all of them Hindi is the national language of the country. Sanskrit is considered an ancient and respected language. And most of the legendary holy texts are found in Sanskrit only. Along with these, most of the people are aware of plenty of foreign languages.

Indian clothing is adorable to most of the foreigners. Woman wearing a *sari* is the pride of a nation. These create a pleasant effect and she looks so beautiful that a majority of foreign country's female want to be like her. The origin of the *sari* is from the temple dancers in ancient times. Sari allows them to maintain modesty and freedom of movement. On the other hand, men traditionally wear a *dhoti* and *kurta*. Actually, Dhoti is a type of cloth without any further attached work done on it. The great Mahatma Gandhi was very fond of it and in their dignity, most of the people used to wear the same.

Apart from all the above facts, Indians are legends with arts and studious material. Shah-rukh Khan, Sachin Tendulkar, Dhirubhai Ambani, Amitabh Bachchan Rajnikant, Sundar Pichai are many more faces of India who are shining and representing India on a global



scale. There are 20-30 grand festivals celebrated every year in which every festival pops up with history and respect to the respective religion. Even in terms of business, India is not behind. Agriculture is the best occupation of 70% of people in India. It's our duty to protect the wonderful culture that we have.

Indian culture is one of the oldest and most unique cultures known across the globe. It has various kinds of traditional values, religion, dance, festivals, music, and cloth, which varies from each state or town even. Indian art, cuisine, religion, Literature, Education, Heritage, Clothes etc has a huge impact on the whole world where everyone admires and follows it. It is known as the land of cultural diversity. India thrives on a variety of languages, religions, and cultures due to the diverse race of people living in the country. It can be referred to as one of the world's most culturally enriched countries. When one thinks of India, they picture colors, smiling faces of children running in the streets, bangle vendors, street food, music, religious festivals etc.

## **Religion**

India is a land where different religious beliefs are followed. It is the land of many religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity,

Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism. Four Indian religions namely Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism were born in India while others are not of Indian origin but have people following those faiths. The people of India keep a solid belief in religion as they believe that following a faith adds meaning and purpose to their lives as it is the way of life. The religions here are not only confined to beliefs but also include ethics, rituals, ceremonies, life philosophies and many more.

## **Families**

Family plays a vital role in every Indian household. Indians are known to live together as a joint family with their grandparents, uncles and aunts, and the next generation of offspring as well. The house gets passed down from family to family throughout the generations. But with the new modern age, nuclear families are starting to become more common as children go out of town into cities for work or studies and get settled there, also everyone now prefers to have their own private life without any interference. But still, the concept of family get together and family gatherings are not lost as everyone does come together frequently.



## Indian Festivals

India is well known for its traditional festivals all over the world. As it is a secular country with diversity in religions, every month some festival celebration happens. These festivals can be religious, seasonal or are of national importance. Every festival is celebrated uniquely in different ways according to their ritual as each of them has its unique importance. National festivals such as Gandhi Jayanti, Independence Day and Republic Day are celebrated by the people of India across the entire nation. Religious festivals include Diwali, Dussehra, Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-Zuha, Christmas, Ganesh Chaturthi, etc. All the seasonal festivals such as Baisakhi, Onam, Pongal, Bihu etc are celebrated to mark the season of harvest during two harvesting seasons, Rabi and Kharif.

Festivals bring love, bond, cross-cultural exchange and moments of happiness among people.

## Clothing

Indian Clothing is considered to be the epitome of modesty and every style is very different in each region and state. But the two pieces of clothing that represent Indian culture are dhoti for men and

saree for women. Women adorn themselves with a lot of bangles and Payal that goes around their ankles. Even clothing styles varied from different religions to regions to cultures. Muslim women preferred to wear salwar kameez whereas Christian women preferred gowns. Men mostly stuck to dhoti, lungi, shalwar and kurta. In modern days, people have changed their sense of style, men and women now wear more modern western clothes. Indian clothes are still valued but are now in more trendy and fashionable styles.

## Language

There is no single language that is spoken all over India; however, Hindi is one common language most Indians know and can speak or understand. Every region has a different language or dialect. As per the official language act, Hindi and English are the official languages in India. Other regions or state wise languages include- Gujarati, Marathi, Bangla, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Kashmiri, Punjabi etc.