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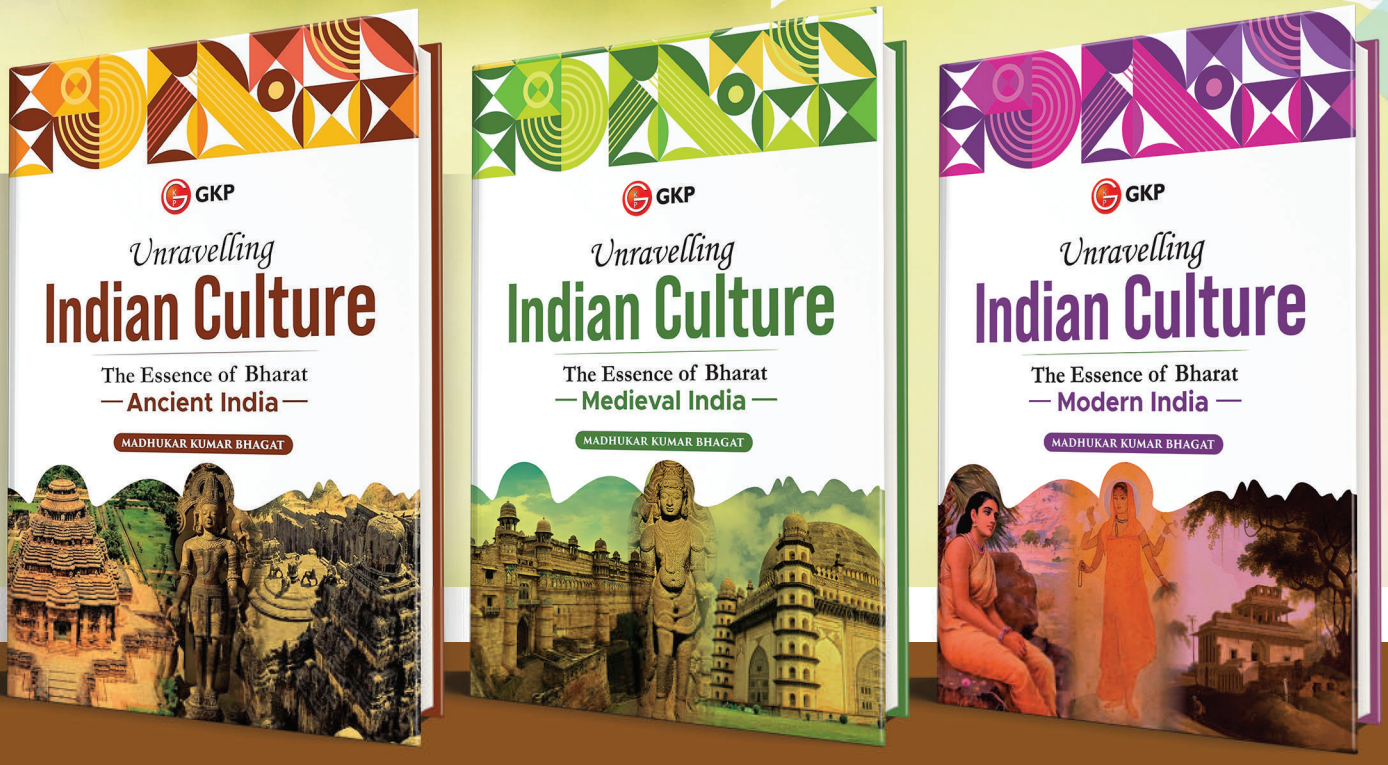

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Unravelling

Indian Culture

The Essence of Bharat

Ancient India

MADHUKAR KUMAR BHAGAT

1

Culture Eras: Ancient India

अयं निजः परो वेति गणना लघुचेतसाम् ।
उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ।।

Ayam Nijah Paro Veti Ganana Laghucetasam
Udaracharitanam Tu Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

This is mine that is other's, such accounting is done by the petty-minded;
For the generous spirited, the entire world is a family.

Maha Upanishad VI.71-73

1.1: Lord Vishnu; sculpture in black stone, 12th century CE, Pala period; location Bihar Museum, Patna — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

INTRODUCTION

The term 'culture' is varyingly understood, often as encompassing different manifestations of human intellect and other expressions, particularly of ideas, beliefs, customs and social behaviour. At a more granular level, this conception incorporates different art forms, languages and literature, traditions and values and religious expressions and practices. At times, even urbane lifestyles and discerning tastes of material subjects are considered archetypal of what the term 'culture' embodies.

India, that is Bharat, with its near continuous history of more than 5,000 years as an evolving civilisation, has a dynamic and living culture. It is justifiably proud of this unique heritage, which is often considered a key element of its own national identity. However, there are questions as to what the true Indian culture is and which hue in this multitude of cultural chroma can be said to be the quintessential representative of Indian civilisation. But this begets some more queries as to what is civilisation, what is the broader domain of culture, how has it evolved in India, how inextricably is it linked to our religious thoughts and practices, and most importantly, what is nationhood itself. A brief perusal of these concepts would help in a better appreciation of the domain of culture and in capturing a glimpse of the vibrant Indian culture, which is the main endeavour of this work.

CULTURE: A MOSAIC OF COLLECTIVE INSTITUTIONS, INTELLECTUAL AND HUMAN KNOWLEDGE ELEMENTS

The connotation of the word culture is vast. It cannot be restricted to a singular definition. However, it can be understood as the collective values of a society manifested through its numerous institutions, as well as in the disposition, attitudes, and manners of its individual members. Those in turn find expression in various material objects, abstract ideas and beliefs of individuals and society.

Thus, culture includes certain aspects of **collective institutions**, such as morality, religion, spirituality, law, custom, art etc. which are not restricted to an individual and which are handed over from generation to generation. Evidently, the **institutional elements** of culture are evolutionary and dynamic.

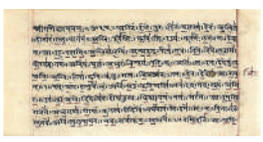
Culture also includes **intellectual** and **knowledge elements** about languages, literature, human learning, social norms, customs and behaviour. **Human** and **social aesthetics** are another key aspect of culture, encompassing within it the numerous manifestations of **tangible** and **intangible** art forms, viz, music, dance, sculpture, painting, architecture etc.

The new-age theatre and cinema are as much a reflection of the modern culture as are the cave paintings of a prehistoric society, of which we know so little. The Bhakti and Sufi movements were the embodiment of the **spiritual elements** of medieval culture, as were the imposing forts and grand palaces of this age a reflection of its societal and corporeal cultural constituents. The Sangam literature was the manifestation of the **human intellectual and socio–ethical** elements of a culture at its zenith, nearly two millennia ago. Folk art and traditional lifestyles are also as much indicative of the culture of a society as is urban lifestyle and transient tastes. Thus, our habitat, cuisine, costumes, and physical objects, apart from performing arts and architecture, are all reflective of the **material** or **tangible elements** of **culture**, as are religions, customs, festivals, traditions, social practices and ethics, philosophy and law reflective of **non-material** or **intangible elements.**

But Culture in itself is never static or an isolated mass of homogenous attributes. It is pervious and dynamic, with fresh waves of socio-cultural influences sprouting pristine cultural milieus. **Inclusivity and evolution** are its inherent and integral traits. It is this very indispensable characterisitc which is reflected in Mahatma Gandhi's words, *"No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive."*

But given its transient nature, what is that abiding essence which provides continuum and sustenance to a culture, to maintain its integrity over epochs? At the very core of the myriad cultural manifestations, lies the element of goodness of the civilisation and its people. It is the enduring element. Narrow canons of the self do not restrict it, nor is its domain limited to a specific society. It is all-encompassing and its ethos is best exemplified in the aspirational Upanishadic hymn, *sarve bhavantu sukhinah* (may all be happy).

Indeed, its universality extends even beyond the human dominion, to all the sentient beings and in its noblest manifestation, endeavouring even for the sustenance of the biotic world and the abiotic realm. Civilisations may somewhat assimilate this element as ethics and law, while religion may perceive it as



the principles of morality or the essence of spirituality. But goodness, irrespective of its classification, is the only and truly the eternal soul of any culture, bereft of which, its external trappings, no matter how seemingly glorious and glitzy, are a little more than a lifeless mass.

CIVILISATION: A MILESTONE OF HUMAN EVOLUTION

At times used synonymously with culture, the word civilisation is said to have its origin in the Latin word *Civitas,* meaning a city. Thus, it was originally meant to distinguish the human settlements, particularly the more complex urban settlements, from the nomadic, transitory or rootless people or those with a rudimentary society and negligible form of institutional governance. In the modern context, civilisation refers to a fairly advanced stage of human development of a people, which encompasses social, urban, technological as well as cultural development.

The presence of organised urban settlements, with diversity of human activity, hierarchical society, distinct forms of governance, social stratification, development of economic systems, technological growth, evolution of ethical traits and cultural elements, all can be said to be distinct features ascribable to an evolved civilisation. Thus, civilisation can truly be said to be a milestone of human evolution, encompassing within its fold all elements of growth and transformation of a society. The Indus Valley, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Chinese, were the earliest of ancient civilisations that prospered and left a mark on the sands of time.

Thus, cultural growth is an important albeit not the only factor to be reckoned for the characterisation of a society as a civilisation. Therefore, neither the two terms are analogous, nor mean even closely the same, although a developed culture may be considered a sine-qua-non for an advanced civilisation.

RELIGION AND ITS INTERCONNECT WITH CULTURE AND CIVILISATION

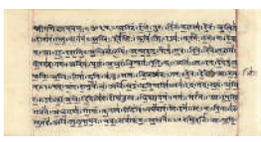
Religion generally refers to a socio-cultural system of faith, belief and worship which is usually integrated with a belief in god(s). Although there may not be any universally accepted definition of religion, there are indeed some identifiable features. Its core elements are invariably spiritualism, morality and ethics, with outward layers of customs, rituals, practices, sermons and other systems of veneration. Canonical texts, metaphysics, mythologies, rules of social and individual conduct such as at births, matrimony and funerary etc., are its other distinctive features. The existence of religious bodies and orders, priests and monks, sects and cults, festivals and ceremonies, along with associated cultural elements of literature, art forms, music and dance are other visible elements of religion.

Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism are some of the extant world religions in the chronology of their emergence, which conform to all of these elements. But faiths like Jainism and Buddhism, which either denied the very existence of god or rejected the popular conception of a divine being with personal attributes governing the realms, are still very much accepted as complete religious orders, for they truly encompass the essence of a religion. Then what is that pith of the theological systems?

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan succinctly describes the very soul of religion in a few sentences. He says, *"Religion is not merely intellectual conformity or ceremonial piety; it is spiritual adventure. It is not theology, but practice. Religion is the fulfilment of man's life, an experience in which every aspect of his being is raised to the highest extent."*

Quiet appropriately, in the Indian context, the **seeking of truth and quest for eternal emancipating knowledge, along with righteous social and individual conduct, are considered as the cornerstones of religion.**

Neither religion nor culture can be said to be a sub-part of the other, although there remains a profound interconnect between them. From the perspective of religion, elements of culture are manifested often in the form of ceremonies, rituals, religious literature, art forms or other material and non-material religious practices. Thus, along with spirituality, morality, philosophy and other canonical beliefs, culture also aids religion in its objective, which is to find the real meaning and purpose of life. But culture also influences these elements of religion such as its philosophy, its religious text and even moral beliefs.



From the perspective of culture, the religious aspect of culture is one amongst many elements enriching it and indeed is an extremely vital one. Thus, that aspect of religion which is bereft of the external trappings and truly be characterised as its soul can also be said to be the very soul of culture, for culture without that element which defines the '**real purpose of life**' is akin to only a body bereft of life.

Put rather simplistically, **religion as well as culture are indeed distinct elements of human civilisation,** albeit all **have a deep interconnect.**

NATIONHOOD ITS ELEMENTS AND CULTURE: INTERCONNECT IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

We often deliberate as to what is our true national culture and how has it evolved through the ages. A prerequisite to this discussion would be to understand what nationhood is and what its elements are. Are race, religion, and language and history essential elements of nationhood? Does culture have a significant bearing on the concept of nationality? How is Indian nationhood distinct and unique?

The modern concept of a nation and nationhood is only a few centuries old. Nationhood is usually understood as a large group of people domiciled in a geographical unit and united by a common political/administrative order, law, culture, common history, economic order and language. Other uniting characteristics could be the commonality of race, religion, ethnicity etc. National flag, anthem and emblem could be some other symbolic elements of a national identity.

From the modern perspective, the intermingling of races and freedom of faith and belief has rendered race, religion and ethnicity meaningless as defining factors of nationhood. Similarly, a multitude of spoken languages in many modern nations does not make the commonality of a spoken/official language a necessary condition for nationhood.

Thus, modern-day nations can be recognised by their people domiciled out of free will, in a geographical area, united by legal/political order, culture, history and economic activity. However, exceptions and marginal variations would exist and a watertight definition may not be possible. Whereas in countries like the United States of America, language has been a common factor, for the European Union and many South Asian nations and India in particular, the same cannot be true.

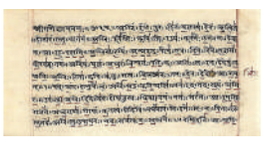
Further, while countries like India, China, Japan, Egypt and Turkey boast of a long and common history, the nation-state of Singapore or Australia does not have this vital element to define its nationhood. Even the United States of America has a relatively lesser history of only a few centuries. Thus, even the conception of a well-defined political order has not been an enduring basis of national identity. History has witnessed such political orders to be transitory and at times even self-serving. The pre-independence India is certainly a case in this point. Perhaps it is the realisation of this limitation that prompted Tagore to observe thus about Indian nationalism, *"And the moment is arriving when you also must find a basis of unity which is not political. If India can offer to the world her solution, it will be a contribution to humanity"*.

In the present context, India is a well-defined geographical entity with partly natural boundaries. The democratic constitution, the common history, economic singularity and its culture are the factors uniting the people which are otherwise characterised by different religions, languages, races, ethnicities and a multitude of other divergent factors.

The most important element of any national identity is its **People**. This is particularly true for India where a bewildering plurality is evident, almost beckoning the question as to what is the lifeblood of its national identity. Is it its unique national culture which is the bonding factor keeping it intact despite the seemingly disparate forces? And if yes, then what is this national culture?

Thus, Indian culture plays an important role in defining Indian nationhood. However, it has its own regional, social, linguistic and other variations too. Besides, Indian culture itself has never been static or an isolated silo of homogenous attributes. It has always been pervious, dynamic and evolving. Different waves of socio-cultural influences encompassed the Indian landscape leading to emergence of diverse cultural milieus, though unique to a time and space, but never singular and always sprouting.

Thus, any singular sub-culture no matter how brilliant and seemingly comprehensive, only offers a partial perspective of the all encompassing national culture. For it to appropriate the legacy of national culture would be akin to a part endeavouring to represent the whole.



Indian culture has indeed played a defining role in shaping Indian nationhood. Over centuries, its numerous facets have created resilient bonds that have withstood the vagaries of space and time and overcome the ostensibly insurmountable differences and divergences. Be it the Vedic culture or the Sramana traditions, the Bhakti movement or the Sufism, the regional customs and social practices, the congruous economic orders and analogous social strata spanning numerous political domains, they all gave a cause for people to connect. But the most important element of cohesion was the ideal, of rising above the baser instinct of merely pursuing self-interest to the loftier philosophy of universal well-being, best exemplified in the *Upanishadic* hymn, *udaar charitanam tu vasudhev kutumbkam* (for the generous-spirited the whole world is a family).

As Tagore plainly puts it, *"Only those people have survived and achieved civilization who have this spirit of cooperation strong in them."* Thus, the basis of this integration was deep within, while the apparent differences were definitely without.

Call it the innate goodness, the ethics of society, the spirituality of religion, the all-pervading *Brahma* of the *Vedantist*, the conception of the divine of the theologian, or simply the spirit of service of the social minded, it is this immanent attribute of selflessness which has provided the deeper interconnect to our varied cultures. This spirit has further been manifested in the tenets of **inclusiveness, pluralism, vibrancy, evolution and mutual co-existence**, which are the all-pervading unifying forces of our culture. Indeed, these belief systems are the **cornerstones of Indian culture, which is also the hallmark of Indian nationhood**.

Bharat and India: A Cultural Unity

'India that is Bharat shall be a Union of States", says Article 1 of the Indian Constitution, recognising the two names of this ancient and diverse country. Over the several millennia of its unbroken cultural history, the land and its people have been known by many names, **Bharat, Bharatavarsha, Jambudweep, Aryavarta, Inde, Indica** and **Hindustan** among others. What is the origin of these names? Which of these emanated in the native Indian languages and within the region itself? How has the country been known in different phases of its long history? Do these names have any special cultural significance? Are the two names now in vogue representative of the different cultural ideas of the same country and its people? These are some questions that have arisen time and again, particularly since the days of India's independence.

Bharat, *Bharata* or *Bharatavarsha*, is perhaps the most ancient of the names with which this land and its people have been recognised. It is a name which is referred to in the ancient scriptures. Scholars believe that this name may trace its origin to the **tribe of Bharatas** referred to in the Rigveda and who emerged victorious in the 'Battle of Ten Kings' (Rigveda, *mandal*-7, hymns 18,33,83). The country could also have been named after the great **King Bharata**, the son of Dushyanta and Shakuntala, whose story is also referred to in the *Adi Parva* of the Mahabharata. He was a legendary emperor of the Chandravanshi dynasty (lunar dynasty), whose descendants were the Bharata tribes and also the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The region Bharat may initially have been referred to the Northwestern and Northern portion of the country and perhaps later to the entire subcontinent. The Hathi Gupha cave inscription of the 1st century CE in Udayagiri caves near Bhubaneshwar is often cited by scholars to support a limited connotation of the region of Bharat at one point in time in ancient India. In line 10 of the seventeen-line inscription, a reference is made to Bharatavarsha in the sense of a region in the North/Northwestern part of the country. However, many historians dispute such an interpretation.

Another possible origin of the name is said to be the name of **King Bharata** of the solar dynasty (*Suryavanshi*) who was the son of Rishabhadeva. Verses from various Puranas, in particular from the Vishnu Purana (verse 2,1,31) are cited in support of this. Some of these verses are as follows.

ऋषभो मरुदेव्याश्च ऋषभात् भरतो भवेत्।
भरताद् भारतं वर्षं, भरतात् सुमतिस्त्वभूत्।।

Rishabha was born to Marudevi and Bharata was born to Rishabha,
Bhāratavarsa arose from Bharata and Sumati arose from Bharata. (Vishnu Purana 2,1,31)

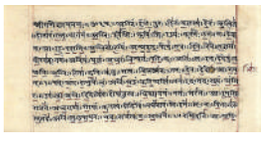
ततश्च भारतं वर्षमेतल्लोकेषुगीयते।
भरताय यतः पित्रा दत्तं प्रतिष्ठिता वनम्।। (विष्णु पुराण, *2,1,32*)

This land is henceforth referred to as Bhāratavarsa since the times the father entrusted the kingdom to his son Bharata and proceeded himself as an ascetic to the forest.

Another verse from Vishnupurana describes the boundaries of Bharatavarsha. It says;

उत्तरं यत्समुद्रस्य हिमाद्रेश्चैव दक्षिणम्।
वर्षं तद् भारतं नाम भारती यत्र सन्ततिः।।

The country that lies to the north of the ocean and is in the south of the snowcapped mountains(Himalayas); it is known as Bharata where in live the descendants of Bharata. (Vishnu Purana 2,1,32)



Some may also attribute the name to **King Bharata** of Ayodhya, the brother of Lord Rama and the son of King Dasratha. Thus, an undisputed attribution of this name may not be established. However, it is undisputed that the name *Bharat* originated in the Sanskrit language. Thus, it is an endonym, which is a name given by the people of the land to it. Its root word in Sanskrit is *bhr-* which means to bear or to carry. It is said to be cognate (a word with the same linguistic derivation as another) of the word 'bear' in English and *fero* in Latin. It was also a word to describe the qualities of 'Agni' which was the medium to bear and carry the oblation to the heavens and *devas*. Thus, it was an appropriate name for a land bearing rich natural resources, and for a civilisation and its people bearing a wealth of knowledge and deeply seeped in the quest for the divine and liberating knowledge.

Another ancient name with which this land was known is Jambudweep. This is also a name referred to in the ancient scriptures and in particular in the Puranas where Jambudweepa is recognized as one of the seven continents of ancient cosmology. This name is also said to be referred to in the treatise *Arthashastra* by Chanakya composed in around the 3rd century BCE. *Jambu* refers to the fruit *jambu/jamun* (berry) commonly found in the subcontinent and *dweepa* refers to an island. Hence the name alluded to the berry shape of the subcontinent, broader at the top and narrower at the bottom. Thus, the name had a geographical connotation and was also an endonym.

Aryavarta was yet another ancient name of this land which means, the land of the Aryas (Arya: people considered noble). Aryavarta was the land of the blossoming of the Vedic culture and the name was also an endonym. The name finds reference in the Dharma Sutras and the Dharma Shastras. Aryavarta is believed by scholars to have earlier referred to the northwestern and later to the entire Northern portions of the Indian subcontinent. However, with the Aryan influence and the Brahmanical faith expanding, the region of reference of Aryavarta also widened. As per the Baudhyayana Dharmasutra which is considered the oldest Dharmasutra (composed around 500 BCE or prior), the connotation of Aryavarta was limited to the areas between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas with eastern and western expanse limited by the Kalkavana and Adarsana. However, in the Vasistha Dharmasutra (500 BCE to 300 BCE), its western region is marked by the basin of the disappeared Saraswati River. Further, by the time of the composition of Manusmriti (200 BCE to 300 CE), the entire region from the Bay of Bengal in the east to the Arabian Sea in the west and from the Himalayas in the north to the Vindhyas in the south was included in the Aryavarta. Some scholars believe that Manusmiriti considered the entire Indian subcontinent as Aryavarta, with the Vindhyas cutting across it.

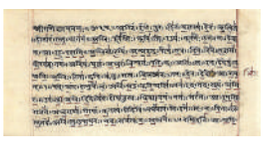
One of the great rivers of this land was the river **Sindhu** which flowed in the northwestern portion of the land and broadly formed the northwestern borders of the region. It demarcated the rugged mountains to its west and north from the fertile and thriving plains to its east. For the Persians, Greeks and other civilisations connected through trade and travellers, the river marked the gateway to the land of great bounties and richness. Hence the region and its people were recognized by the name of the river itself. The Sanskrit word *Sindhu* however took the form of *Indu/Inde* for the Greeks, and *Hindu/Hind* for the Persians and later Arabs.

The word *Sindhu* in classical Sanskrit refers to a river and also to a sea. Reference to the Sindhu (river) and Sapt-Sindhu (the seven rivers of the Northwestern region) is also found in the Vedas. The *'Nadistuti sukta'* contained in the 75th hymn (sukta) of the 10th book (Mandala) of Rigveda, is one such instance of the veneration of rivers wherein the first and the second verses highlight the glory of the river Sindhu (see inset box on 'veneration of rivers', later in the chapter). The river also lent its name to the ancient Sindhu kingdom which lay on the banks of river Sindhu, a reference to which is also said to be found in the Mahabharata and the Harivamsa Purana. Thus, the name Sindhu was an endonym referring to a mighty river and also to an ancient kingdom.

The word ***Indica/Indika/Inde*** was a Greek derivative of the word Sindhu. It finds the earliest reference in the works of Megasthenes, a Greek writer and ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya. *Indika*, an account of the Mauryan empire and the region, of the late 4th century BCE is lost, but historians have constructed its parts from the accounts of other writers who have directly quoted from this work. Arrian, another Greek philosopher and military commander, also wrote 'Indica' in the 2nd century CE which draws from the 'Indika' of Megasthenese and also includes Arrian's account of the country. As per the reconstructed works of some modern writers (*J.W. McCrindle-1877* and *Stoneman 2022*), the work 'Indica' described the geography of India as that of a quadrilateral. As per it, India was a land bounded by the Great Sea in its east and its south and by the Indus River to its west. To its north was the mountain range of Emodus (which scholars describe as Hemodus) which referred to the combined mountain ranges of Hindu Kush, Pamir, and the Himalayas. The word *Hemodus* is also believed to be derived from the *Haimavata*, a Sanskrit word meaning 'covered with snow'. Thus, the word Indica, though an exonym, was a derivative of the name of a major river of the country which nurtured a civilisation and also formed its ancient identity.

The word **Hindu** was also a Persian derivative of the word Sindhu. Scholars believe that after the conquest of the Indus Valley by Darius I in the 6th century CE, the name Hindush, an Achaemenid equivalent of the word Sindhu, was used to describe the lower Indus basin region. Thus, the region and the people later came to be identified with this name in the Achaemenid, Persian and later in the Arabian empire and the regions of their conquest. The suffix *-stan* refers to a place in Persian, just as the suffix *-varsha* refers to a country/large region in Sanskrit. Thus arose the word Hindustan, the inhabitants of which were known as Hindus, a term which initially had a geographical connotation rather than any credal significance.

Al Biruni, a Persian scholar and polymath, wrote in the 11th century the *'Kitab Al-Hind'* (The book on India) which shows that the term **Hind** and **Hindu** had already come into vogue by the beginning of the 2nd millennium. This was how the country was addressed by the Persians and Arabs. With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in the 13th century and the emergence of the different Islamic dynasties later, the word **Hindustan** came to be in vogue within the country and described the land and its people. Abul Fazl, one of the prominent medieval authors in the court of Akbar, who



wrote the *Ain-i-Akbari*, describes the land/country as Hindustan. Therefore, in the medieval period, Hindustan became the name of the country by which the ruling establishments as well as some sections of people had started referring to it. Thus, while Bharat, an endonym, was the name of ancient India, its medieval name came to be established as Hindustan. This name was an exonym taken from the Persian language but had roots in the Sanskrit word Sindhu.

The changing times brought different colonial powers to the shores of **India**. By the latter half of the 18th century, the East India Company, and hence the British, had consolidated their political authority over a vast region. With the establishment of the new political regime, the country came to be known by a new name. India, the name of this country by which the British knew it, was a Latin derivation of the Greek term Indica. It was a name by which the country had been known to the European powers for centuries and the term India itself had been in currency perhaps since the early first millennium CE. However, like the term Hindustan, it became in vogue within the region, only when the political authority changed. British rule fully established the name of the country as India (then British India) within the country as well as in the international community. Like Hindustan, the name India, a derivative of the word *Sindhu*, was also an exonym.

With the independence of the country, the concurrent name **India** as well as the ancient name **Bharat**, both were adopted as the official names of the country, by our eminent leaders and framers of the Constitution. While the country continued to be addressed in English (and other foreign languages) as India, the name Bharat was adopted in Hindi and other Indian languages. The Hindi version of the Constitution states, *'Bharat that is India shall be a union of states'* ('भारत अर्थात् इंडिया राज्यों का संघ होगा' as written in Hindi in Devanagari script). Thus, emerged a practice, where depending on the language, the country is referred to by either of the two names with both names enjoying public acceptability.

Bharat and India have different meanings. One refers to the land of the Bharatas, or the land of the descendants of Bharat, and the other refers to the land beyond the river Sindhu (Indus). One is an endonym, while the other is an exonym that has roots in the Sanskrit word Sindhu. However, over a period of time, many of the derived words or exonyms such as Hindu and Hindi have also been fully assimilated into the indigenous languages and integrated with the culture of the people. At different points in history, the rulers have referred to this country by different names. In the current context, both **Bharat and India are representative of the same land and the same people**. At times, the word Bharat is said to allude to the indigenous, the ancient and the grassroots culture, and India, to the modern and urban. However, such differentiations and distinctions are largely perceptional. India also lives in its villages, while Bharat is modern and leaping towards the future. Attribution of separate cultural connotations to either of the two names would be misplaced, as India and Bharat are one. The integral constituent of a country is its land and its people. Its name-based identity is often temporal and over centuries, displays similar transience as its political identity. However it is the cultural identity that evolves and endures.

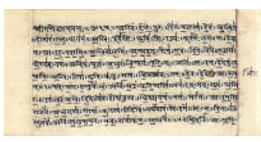
PHASES OF CULTURAL EVOLUTION AND CONFLUENCES

Over a period of 5000 years, Indian society has witnessed several phases of cultural evolution. Each of these had its distinct features. Many of these cultural phases overlapped with each other, resulting in a cultural confluence and leading to the emergence of new cultural traits. These cultural phases were **the Indus Valley culture, the Vedic and the Dravidian culture, the Buddhist and Jain cultural influences, the Puranic culture, the Bhakti movement, the Islamic influence and the Hindustani culture, the European influence and finally the modern Indian culture**. A snapshot of these phases and cultural confluences is captured below and in subsequent chapters.

1.2: A large storage painted pottery with beautiful design; has a narrow bottom neck which was fixed in the ground; Mature Harappan period 2700-2000 BCE; National Museum, New Delhi — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILISATION: THE FIRST PHASE OF CULTURAL EVOLUTION

Often referred to as the **harbinger of cultural evolution** in India, the Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC) was a distinct and foremost urban culture that flourished from 3500 BCE to 1800 BCE (Early and Mature Harappan phases). Its unique features included; an evolved town planning, modern cities, elaborate drainage system, walled citadel, extensive trade, developed script, evolved science and technology, growth of cotton and development of textiles, flourishing arts; of sculpture, bead and jewellery making, making of pottery, utensils, instruments and even weapons. According to Sir



John Marshall (who oversaw the early excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro), the standards of civilised life attained by people living in these cities were higher than that of Egyptians and ancient Babylonians and equivalent to that of Sumerians. At its zenith, spread over a large region of present North and North-West India, Pakistan and parts of Afghanistan, this advanced civilisation had a distinct and evolved culture. Further, recent research and discoveries in India have revealed some unique aspects of this civilisation, and in the process, also throwing light on their cultural practices.

1.3: Necklaces with semi-precious stones and beads from different sites of Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC), beads and jewellery, an important export to other countries from IVC; National Museum, New Delhi — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

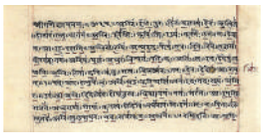
The larger settlements of Mohenjo-daro, Harappa and others reveal the extensive town planning, large and efficient drainage systems, network of streets and roads with iron grid layout, existence of walled citadels and lower towns built on burnt/sundried bricks, presence of sizable granaries, great baths and other public places, besides innumerable seals, potteries, weights, cherts and other artefacts. All of these are truly indicative of an efficient governance structure and municipal functions, organised labour and social stratification and well-defined rules of social intercourse and conduct. Besides, a flourishing commerce and trade, knowledge of engineering and sciences, and belief in socio-religious rituals, their art and aesthetics are also clearly evident from the findings over here and newly discovered settlements of this civilisation.

The existence of a tidal dockyard **at Lothal** (in Gujarat) with its **bead-making industry** has revealed a flourishing trade through the sea. The city was not only an important centre of production, but also a centre for overseas trade with far off cities in the Persian Gulf region. The channel-based **docking system** with a large man-made basin and a unique locking system is a reflection of advanced knowledge of hydraulics and engineering, besides that of extensive trade and commerce. Also known as the seafarers of Meluha in far Sumer, these people had extensive knowledge of seas, navigational astronomy and even winds and ocean currents to guide them over thousands of kilometres of perilous journeys.

Recent discoveries at **Dholavira** (Kutch, Gujarat), reveal extensive water conservation systems, including rock-cut channels and reservoirs for storage and efficient utilisation of water from nearby streams and rainwater. Research also indicates a change in the cropping pattern, to low water-requiring cereals such as millets, in response to the changing and drying weather system. Agricultural practices are also evident at **Kalibangan** (Rajasthan) where discovery has been made of a ploughed field that has a cross grid of furrows. Further, at Shortughai (Afghanistan), discovery of dryland farming has been made. Excavations here have also revealed an irrigation canal for fetching water. (see Chapter 2)

1.4: A skeleton in one of the graves at Rakhigarhi along with different types of pottery; an early example of the funerary practices of this civilisation — Courtesy, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums,Government of Haryana

The discovery of **fire altars** at **Rakhigarhi** (Haryana) and **Kalibangan**, are indicative of the emergence of rituals and sacrificial practices. The cemetery and burial sites of Rakhigarhi where skeletons of the dead have been found with pottery and other items of daily use are indicative of the existence in belief in after-life and other funerary practices.



Apart from the above, a **bronze statue of a dancing girl, the bearded priest-king bust, the Pashupati seal, the Mother Goddess figurines** and several seals with animal and other inscriptions have been found. These succinctly reveal tangible elements of their culture, art and aesthetics, besides the existence of at least a rudimentary religious culture. The inscription on numerous seals and the Dholavira signboard (see Chapter 2) points to the evolution of a written script. Although un-deciphered as yet, the script is believed to be pictographic or logographic, implying that individual symbols represent things and concepts.

Thus, it is amply evident that the Harappan culture attained great heights and it truly rivalled the cultures of Mesopotamia and Egyptian civilisations of this age. It engendered an **unparalleled urban culture.** As a civilisation lasting nearly two millennia, it can truly be said have ushered a cultural wave heralding a neo-culture hitherto unknown to the human race. But an important question is, as to **why this civilisation did not survive; what was its enduring cultural legacy** (if any)? Did it have any material impact on the ensuing society or did the subsequent cultural phase remain totally disconnected from this first cultural wave?

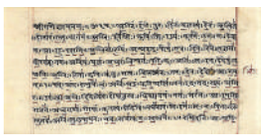
It is believed that Harappan culture did not have any perceivable cultural confluence with the Vedic culture which is said to have emerged around 1500 BCE. Experts earlier accepted the **'Aryan invasion theory'** (by Mortimer Wheeler) as the root cause of the decline of this civilisation. As such, a cultural disconnect between the Harappan culture and the succeeding Aryan culture was a natural corollary and a foregone conclusion.

1.7: A burial pottery with painting from Cemetery H. Harappa, (2000-1900 BCE), depicting the image of cattle on a boat on a river (Vaitarani); considered analogous to early Vedic belief of journey of the soul after death; location National Museum, New Delhi — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

1.5: Picture of the Mother Goddess figurine — Wikimedia Commons

1.6: Priest-King statue — Wikimedia Commons

However, the latest researches reveal varying and largely **environmental factors as the cause for the decline** of many of these once-bustling cities. The Aryan invasion hypothesis as a cause of their destruction is largely discarded. While Mohenjodaro and Lothal were ravaged by floods, the changing weather pattern and the great **Megahalayan drought** which is believed to have lasted nearly 300 years (around 2000 BCE) and affected the global weather, was the root cause of the decline of Dholavira, Rakhigarhi and some other sites around this very period (see Chapter 2). The changing weather and dearth of water made such large city systems unviable eventually led to their gradual abandonment. **But what happened to the people and their knowledge?**



The current researches do not shed any conclusive light on the post decline aspect of this great civilisation. Some theories suggest their being pushed eastwards due to Aryan migration or because of environmental factors and resettlement in villages/rural setups. Some hypotheses also suggest their moving southwards and the **gradual merger and evolution of the Dravidian culture**. An archaeological finding in Tamil Nadu (Melaperumpallam near Poompuhar) in May 2007, shows pots with arrowhead symbols similar to that found on the seals of Mohenjo-daro. Similarly, a 2014 discovery in a cave in Kerala is believed to show 19 pictograph symbols similar to Indus writing. A deeper connection is believed to be seen in the Indus script with the Dravidian languages. Prof. Asko Parpola of the University of Helsinki, Finland (who has worked on deciphering the scripts since 1968) believes that the script may have been similar to the family of Dravidian languages (or its proto languages). A stone celt (axe-like structure) belonging to the 2nd millennium BCE, found in Mayiladuthurai (Tamil Nadu), had many more Indus period symbols. According to Prof. Iravatham Mahadevan, these represented a connection between the Indus script and early Dravidian languages. Whether these evidences are indicative of resettlement or contact due to trading for gold, is not fully established. But a semblance of cultural influence is quite noticeable.

A **cultural connect with the Vedic civilisation** is also possibly seen in the numerous figurines of a female figure, adorned in jewellery and imposing fan-shaped headgear. This is believed to be similar to that of the **Mother Goddess** of the subsequent Vedic culture. Similarly, a connection is also established by the seal depicting a figure seated cross-legged in a yogic posture with a horned headdress. The figure is surrounded by several animals and is considered to be a proto-Shiva or early form of **Pashupati/Rudra**. Seal of the **Swastika symbol** found in Harappa and other seals with animal motifs such as bull, elephant and tiger (*vahana* of celestial deities) which are revered in the Vedic culture, also indicate the cultural and religious influence.

The discovery of a burial pottery with a painting from Cemetery H. Harappa, (2000-1900 BCE), which also gives the name Cemetery H culture, reveals certain religious beliefs about the journey of the soul after death. The paintings on the vase are considered by experts to be akin to the subsequent Vedic belief, of the journey of the soul after death where it has to cross the river *Vaitarani*. Here the sacrifice of cattle like a cow/bull/goat is needed to cross the river. It is only then that the soul reaches the gates of the lord of Death where it faces the final judgement. The paintings on the large burial pottery from the late Harappan period (now kept in the National Museum Delhi) also depict similar images. Thus, could there be linkages of certain customs and practices associated with afterlife between the late Harappan and early Vedic periods?

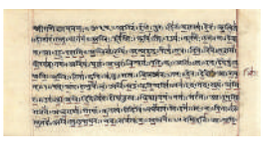
At Lothal, one of the painted terracotta jars found was seen to be bearing the **image of 'the crow and the fox'**, believed to be depicting the story of the crow and the cunning fox, of the well-known fable. (This jar is on display at the onsite Archaeological Survey Museum at Lothal). Another jar is said to be carrying the image of the 'thirsty crow' dropping the pebbles. The discoveries, though seemingly innocuous, suggest that the fables have continued to be a part of folklore in the subsequent culture(s) and are popular even to this day. Could it be a reflection of a moderate intermingling and continuity of some folk cultural elements?

The evidence as of now can only be treated as tentative. In general, experts broadly believe that the Harappan culture did not have any substantial cultural confluence with the Vedic culture, which emerged as the next phase of cultural evolution in India.

THE VEDIC CULTURE: A NEW CULTURAL WAVE

The **Vedic age,** the next wave of cultural evolution, emerged around 1500 BCE, post the decline of the Indus Valley civilisation. The new civilisation and society it created dominated the Indian landscape for nearly 1,000 years and continued to profoundly influence it even beyond this period. It is generally believed that the advent of the Aryans from central Asia to the northern part of India and later to the eastern portion in the Ganga-Yamuna doab region heralded this cultural phase. However, there is no unanimity of experts as to the origin of Aryans or even of Aryan migration theory.

This period was characterised by the composition of four Vedas. These remain the chief source of information about this civilisation and its cultural practices, hence the name, the *Vedic culture*. The Vedic phase is further divided into the Early Vedic (1500 BCE to 1000 BCE) and Later Vedic phases (1000 BCE to 600 BCE). From an archaeological perspective, this period coincides with the **Black and Red Ware culture** period (1450 BCE to 1200 BCE) prevalent in the western Gangetic plain. The pottery found in this period was typically black and red coloured and was in the period of the late Bronze Age and early Iron



Age. It was succeeded by the **Painted Greyware** culture period. This was an Iron Age culture that was prevalent in the Ghagra–Hakra valley and the western Gangetic plain. (BRW culture is believed to be from 1500 BCE to 700 BCE or 1300 BCE to 500 BCE).

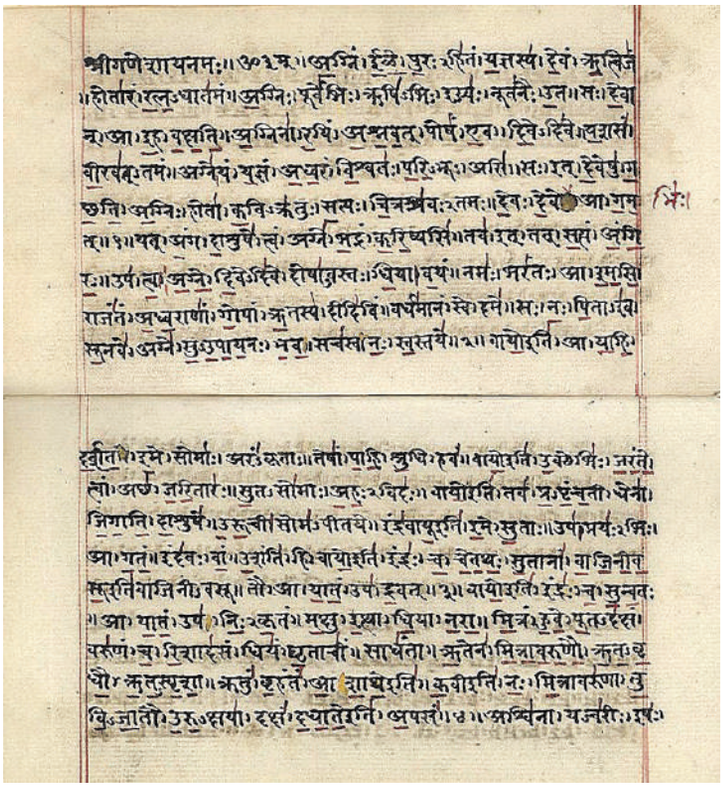
Organisation of the Vedic society

The early Vedic society was largely agrarian, with a dependence on agriculture as well as pastoralism. Larger cities like that of the Indus Valley Civilisation were absent in this phase. The administrative order was based on kingship *(rajya and rajan)*, with ***sabhas*** and ***samitis*** as representative bodies being unique features of the socio-political setup in this age. The *Jana* (tribe), the *Grama* (village) and *Kula* (clan or family) were the fundamental units of social order. Pastoral lifestyle and cattle rearing (especially cows and bulls) were in vogue. Wheat and barley, and later rice, were the chief cultivated crops. Cotton and woollen fabrics were common. Copper, bronze and later iron, was actively used in the manufacturing of day-to-day items, utensils and weapons. The use of horses and chariots was known well in this age.

The **Varna system** provided the socio-economic order and division of labour and organised the society into four working classes. To begin with, it imparted an egalitarian social order with appropriate social mobility. Reference in Vedic texts is also seen of *Daas* and *Dasyus*, who were referred to as people outside the Aryan society and belief system (viz. not performing sacrifices and believing the commandment of the gods). Perhaps these were non-Aryan or aboriginal tribes (as believed by some historians). Vedic texts also indicate a greater respect for women as seen from the accounts of certain women poets and sages such as Lopamudra, Viswavara, Apala, Ghosha, Kadru, Savitri, Vak Ambhrini, etc. who are mentioned in Rigveda. Child marriages were unheard of, *swayamvara* as the right of women to select a groom was common, and monogamy was the order of the day with polygamy being largely restricted to the nobility and royalty classes. Widow re-marriages were also permitted.

Performance of ***Soma*** **sacrifice** and other *yagnas*/rituals by the king under the chief priest (*raj-purohit*) was another significant custom/religious belief-based cultural element of the society. Numerous references to it are seen, particularly in the Vedic texts.

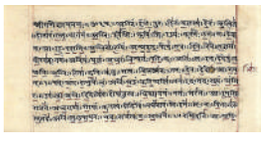
The political orders based on kingship and clan/tribal identities were not bereft of conflicts and disputes. This is also evident from the Rigvedic account of '**Battle of Ten Kings'**. As per historians, this battle led to the eventual emergence of the earliest of the Vedic states, the 'Kuru dynasty'. The performance of ***Ashwamedha yagna***, sanctioned by the Vedas to the 'powerful and noble kings', was another means by which kingship could be expanded to regions where the sacrificial horse wandered. This could lead to battles and conflicts or acceptance of the over-lordship and political hegemony. But it led to the consolidation and emergence of larger political units.



1.8: An early 19th century manuscript of Rigveda in Devanagari. The Vedic accent is marked by underscores and vertical overscores in red — Wikimedia Commons

The Battle of Ten Kings: The Emergence of the Kuru Dynasty

The Rigveda also contains the account of the 'Battle of ten kings' which took place on the banks of river Parushini (modern Ravi). Historians describe this as a battle among the different Vedic tribes. The tribe of Bharatas was led by their king/chief Sudas, who entered into a battle against ten tribes. The Bharatas lived in the upper regions of river Saraswati while another tribe of Purus, their western neighbour, lived in the lower regions, the remaining tribes lived northwest of Bharatas. In the ensuing battle, the Bharatas emerged victorious while the Puru chief Purukutsa was killed. Post war, the two tribes, the Bharatas and the Purus, merged into a new tribe, the Kurus. (*Rigveda, mandal-7, hymns 18,33,83*)



The Vedas: The text defining a cultural age

The word Veda is derived from the root word *'vid'*, meaning knowledge or wisdom. Thus, the Vedas were considered as the scriptures containing the total of the knowledge of the people. Further, the word *'vid'* also refers to the knowledge which could illuminate the path in the darkness (of ignorance), eventually leading to salvation. The Vedic texts comprise the **Rigveda,** the **Yajurveda,** the **Samaveda** and the **Atharvaveda**. The Rigveda is the oldest of all the Vedas and the most ancient of scriptures. A grand collection of hymns, it is also the most ancient Indo-European literary document.

The Vedas comprise four layers that include the **Samhitas** and the **Brahmanas,** the two former layers which together comprise the **Poorva Mimansa** or the ***Karmakanda***. The **Aranyakas** and the **Upanishads** which emerged later as separate parts or layers of the Vedas, comprise the **Uttara Mimansa** or **Vedanta** (literally meaning the end of the Vedas), also referred to as the ***Jnanakanda.***

1.9: Indra, recognisable by his mount/vehicle, the elephant

1.10: Agni, depicted as a priestly figure

1.11: Varuna, depicted with his noose (*paash*)

The socio-religious and philosophical elements of culture of the early Vedic age is reflected in the philosophy of **Poorva Mimansa** (literally meaning former enquiry) as contained in the teachings of Samhitas and Brahmanas. It considers the Vedas to be eternal and infallible and emphasizes on *mantras* and rituals as prescribed therein in Vedas, as being of primary importance. This cultural philosophy is concerned more with **dharma** and **duties** of a person or **'***Karya'* or *Karmakand*, rather than metaphysical knowledge.

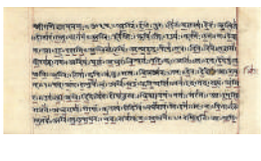
Thus, a defining cultural practice emanating in this period was the performance the Vedic rites and *soma* sacrifices. Propitiation of elements of nature was an integral practice. These included rain, fire, earth, water, wind and the associated deities viz. **Indra, Agni, Soma, Prithvi, Mitra, Varun, Marut** etc.

As a religious-cultural practice, it was indicative of the very close integration of the daily lives of the people with nature and a profound connect with its constituent elements.

1.12: Vayu, with mount antelope at his feet

1.13: Surya, with his chariot, and with Usha and Pratyusha as consorts of Surya, and Aruna as charioteer

1.9 to 1.13: Early Vedic deities, reflecting the different elements of nature; pictures on the *gudhamandap* of Sun temple at Modhera (Gujarat), 11th century CE — photographs by Madhukar K Bhagat



Indra was one of the most important early Vedic deities. Nearly 250 Rig Vedic hymns are dedicated to him. He was also the king of *devas*, whose different attributes are eulogised in the numerous hymns such as the killer of the *asura* Vritta (thus liberating the rivers), the breaker of the *vala* (a cave from which Usha was liberated) and the wielder of Vajra, the mighty one (*salwant*) and the one who is *Purandara* or the breaker of forts. Thus, he also epitomised valour in wars and his propitiation was perhaps seen as crucial for the victory of the Aryans in their onward spread. In a later period, he was also perceived as the god of rain and his propitiation was critical for an agrarian society dependent on the vagaries of rainfall.

Agni was a deity whose propitiation was essential in the performance of the numerous Vedic rites and *yagnas.* Nearly 200 hymns in his praise are contained in the Rig Vedic texts. He was the son of heaven, earth and water, who was worshipped as a god and offered sacrifices and oblations. Besides, he was also the medium that carried the oblations to the heavens and gods.

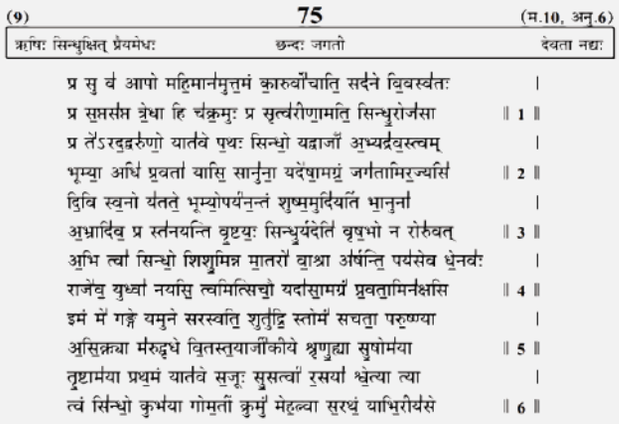
Varuna, the next important deity, is associated with *rta/rita* or the truth, and he is the protecter of *rta/rita* and thus the upholder of the natural order of the world. He is also perceived as the punisher of the sinners. In the later period he symbolised water and the mighty oceans.

The **Maruts** personified storms and the power of the wind. **Mitra**, another Aditya (son of Aditi), is often addressed along with Varuna (as *Mitravaruna*) and is also the protector of *rta*. **Parjanya** personified rains. **Usa/Usha** is the goddess of dawn who is closely associated with Surya (the Sun god). **Pushan** is a pastoral deity who wields a spear and a goad. **Soma** is a deity who is propitiated as well. It was probably a plant and its juice was offered to the gods in the ritual *yagnas*.

Vishnu, a later Vedic deity of great reverence, has only five hymns addressed to him in the Rig Veda. But he is known for the three wide steps in which he traverses the whole universe (a legend later associated with Lord Vishnu's Vamana avatar). His three steps are considered to be symbolic of the three divisions of the universe and is recognition of the great significance of this deity. **Rudra,** a relatively minor deity in Rigveda (with only three complete hymns dedicated), is the fierce god who is propitiated to be merciful and kind and is also associated with healing.

Veneration of Rivers: A Culture of Embodiment of Divinity in Nature

The Vedic culture flourished on the banks of mighty rivers and reference to the Sapt-sindhu (seven rivers in the Indian subcontinent) and others is often contained in the Vedas. The rivers were the givers of life and nurtured the civilisation and thus were venerated as a living deity. *Nadistuti sukta* contained in the 75th hymn (sukta) of the 10th book (Mandala) of Rigveda, is an important composition in the veneration of the rivers. In verses (rik/rk.)1, 2, 5, 7, 8 and 9 specific reference is contained of the mighty rivers.



(9) 75 (म.10, अनु.6)

ऋषिः सिन्धुक्षित् प्रैयमेधः छन्दः जगती देवता नद्यः

प्र सु व आपो महिमानमुत्तमं कारुर्वोचाति सदने विवस्वतः ।
प्र सप्तसप्त त्रेधा हि चक्रमुः प्र सृत्वरीणामति सिन्धुरोजसा ॥ 1 ॥
प्र तेऽरदद्वरुणो यातवे पथः सिन्धो यद्वाजाँ अभ्यद्रवस्त्वम् ।
भूम्या अधि प्रवता यासि सानुना यदेषामग्रं जगतामिरज्यसि ॥ 2 ॥
दिवि स्वनो यतते भूम्योपर्यनन्तं शुष्ममुदियर्ति भानुना ।
अभ्रादिव प्र स्तनयन्ति वृष्टयः सिन्धुर्यदेति वृषभो न रोरुवत् ॥ 3 ॥
अभि त्वा सिन्धो शिशुमिन्न मातरो वाश्रा अर्षन्ति पयसेव धेनवः ।
राजेव युध्वा नयसि त्वमित्सिचो यदासामग्रं प्रवतामिनक्षसि ॥ 4 ॥
इमं मे गङ्गे यमुने सरस्वति शुतुद्रि स्तोमं सचता परुष्ण्या ।
असिक्न्या मरुद्वृधे वितस्तयार्जीकीये शृणुह्या सुषोमया ॥ 5 ॥
तृष्टामया प्रथमं यातवे सजूः सुसर्त्वा रसया श्वेत्या त्या ।
त्वं सिन्धो कुभया गोमतीं क्रुमुं मेहत्नूं सरथं याभिरीयसे ॥ 6 ॥

Verse (*rik*) 1to 6 of the 75th hymn (*sukta*) of book 10 (*Mandal*-10) of Rigveda referred to as the *Nadistuti sukta.*

The first and the second verses highlight the glory of the river Sindhu and say as below.

The singer, O ye waters in Vivasvan's place, shall tell your grandeur forth that is beyond compare.

The rivers have come forward triply, seven and seven. Sindhu in might surpasses all the streams that flow. (verse 1)

Varuna cut the channels for thy forward course, O Sindhu, when thou rannest on to win the race.

Thou speedest o'er precipitous ridges of the earth, when thou art Lord and Leader of these moving floods (verse 2)

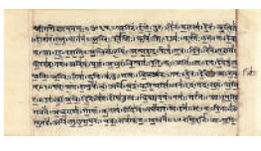
The fifth verse in a particular enumerates the 10 rivers including Ganga and says as below;

Oh Ganga, Yamuna, Sarasvati, Shutudri (Sutlej), *Parushni* (Iravati, Ravi), *follow my praise! O Asikni* (Chenab)
Marudvridha, Vitasta (Jhelum), *with the Arjikiya* (Haro) *and Sushoma (Sohan), hear my call!* (verse 5)

(translation Ralph T.H.Griffith)

Another such composition in the Rigveda is ***Vishwamitra Nadi Suktam*** contained in hymn 33 of Mandal 3. It refers to the prayer of sage Vishwamitra (one of the seven Brahmarshi of the Vedic age) to grant a passage through the rivers *Vipas* (Beas) and *Sutudri* (Sutlej). The gist of the 13 verses of the *sukta* is as below.

Vishwamitra: *O' rivers, who come down from the mountains like two swift horses like, two shining cows that lick their calves. You move like chariots to the sea through the power of Indra. You are full of water and wish to unite with one another.* (Verse 1)



The rivers: *We who are full of water move along the path, the Gods have made for us. Once we start flowing we cannot be stopped. Why do you pray to us o' sage?* (Verse 4)

Vishwamitra: *O' sisters please listen to me, the singer who has come from a distance with his chariots and carts, let your water not rise above our axles so that we can cross safely.* (Verse 9)

The rivers: *We will listen to your prayers so that you can cross safely.* (Verse 10)

The conception of the universe

The early Vedic conception of the universe is not limited to the veneration of the elements of nature; rather it also extends to the entire cosmology and the very source of creation.

The 129th hymn (*sukta*) of the 10th book (mandala) of the Rig Veda contains the **Nasadiya Sukta** which is contemplative of the cosmology and the origin of the universe. It begins with the term '*na asat*', that is when the unreal/non-existent and the real/existent, were not in existence. Hence this *sukta* acquires the epithet of *Nasadiya Sukta* and is also referred to as the hymn of creation. It conceives of the state when existed; neither the real nor the unreal, neither the physical realm nor the realms beyond it, neither death nor immortality, neither the light nor the darkness. And then only existed the cosmological water (fluid) in which by force of heat (energy) the Supreme being came into existence. The verse further states that the Eternal being, the Brahma which emanated from the Supreme knowledge and Consciousness, had the desire to manifest and from which emanated the primal seed of creation.

It further ponders **as to who knows, how and whence the Creation came into being, for even the Gods of the universe were created after it.** It contemplates and concludes that perhaps the **mystery of creation is known only to that Eternal being, or maybe not even to Him**.

The verse, though inquisitive and at times assertive, does not provide a conclusive statement as to the creation/origin of universe. Its conclusion of that 'Supreme being the knower of the secret of Creation or even He may not be having this knowledge', may be seen as a sceptical inquiry or a humble statement of the seer's/composer's lack of knowledge of the secrets of Universe beyond a point. This *Sukta* is **reflective of the deep philosophical insight of the age which is contemplative, questioning, transcending any dogma** and almost akin to a secular scientific inquiry.

Nasadiya Sukta: the Hymn of Creation

नासदासीन्नो सदासीत्तदानीं नासीद्रजो नो व्योमा परो यत्।
किमावरीवः कुह कस्य शर्मन्नम्भः किमासीद्गहनं गभीरम्।।1।।

nāsad āsīn nó sád āsīt tadānīm
nāsīd rájo nó víomā paró yát
kím āvarīvah kúha kásya śármann
ámbhah kím āsīd gáhanam gabhīrám

Then even non-existence was not there, nor existence,
There was no air then, nor the space beyond it.
What covered it? Where was it? In whose keeping?
Was there then cosmic fluid, in depths unfathomed? (Verse 1)

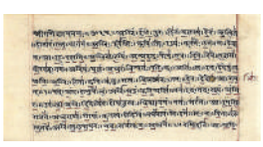
न मृत्युरासीदमृतं न तर्हि न रात्र्या अह आसीत्प्रकेतः।
आनीदवातं स्वधया तदेकं तस्माद्धान्यत्र परः किञ्चनास।।2।।

ná mrtyúr āsīd amŕtam ná tárhi
ná rātriyā áhna āsīt praketáh
ānīd avātám svadháyā tád ékam
tásmād dhānyán ná paráh kím canāsa

Then there was neither death nor immortality
nor was there then the torch of night and day.
The One breathed windlessly and self-sustaining.
There was that One then, and there was no other. (Verse 2)

तम आसीत्तमसा गूहमग्रे प्रकेतं सलिलं सर्वाऽइदम्।
तुच्छ्येनाभ्वपिहितं यदासीत्तपसस्तन्महिनाजायतैकम्।।3।।

táma āsīt támasā gūhálam ágre
apraketám salilám sárvam ā idám
tuchyénābhú ápihitam yád āsīt
tápasas tán mahinājāyataíkam



At first there was only darkness wrapped in darkness.
All this was only unillumined cosmic water.
That One which came to be, enclosed in nothing,
arose at last, born of the power of knowledge. (Verse 3)

कामस्तदग्रे समवर्तताधि मनसो रेतः प्रथमं यदासीत्।
सतो बन्धुमसति निरविन्दन्हृदि प्रतीष्या कवयो मनीषा।।4।।

kāmas tád ágre sám avartatādhi
mánaso rétah prathamám yád āsīt
sató bándhum ásati nír avindan
hrdí pratīsyā kaváyo manīsā

In the beginning desire descended on it -
that was the primal seed, born of the mind.
The sages who have searched their hearts with wisdom
know that which is, is kin to that which is not. (Verse 5)

तिरश्चीनो विततो रश्मिरेषामधः स्विदासीदुपरि स्विदासीत्।
रेतोधा आसन्महिमान आसन्त्स्वधा अवस्तात्प्रयतिः परस्तात्।।5।।

tiraścīno vítato raśmír esām
adháh svid āsīd upári svid āsīt
retodhā āsan mahimāna āsan
svadhā avástāt práyatih parástāt

And they have stretched their cord across the void,
and know what was above, and what below.
Seminal powers made fertile mighty forces.
Below was strength, and over it was impulse. (Verse 6)

को अद्धा वेद क इह प्र वोचत्कुत आजाता कुत इयं विसृष्टिः।
अर्वाग्देवा अस्य विसर्जनेनाथा को वेद यत आबभूव।।6।।

kó addhā veda ká ihá prá vocat
kúta ājātā kúta iyám vísrstih
arvāg devā asyá visárjanena
áthā kó veda yáta ābabhūva

But, after all, who knows, and who can say
Whence it all came, and how creation happened?
the gods themselves are later than creation,
so who knows truly whence it has arisen? (Verse 6)

इयं विसृष्टिर्यत आबभूव यदि वा दधे यदि वा न।
यो अस्याध्यक्षः परमे व्योमन्त्सो अङ्ग वेद यदि वा न वेद।।7।।

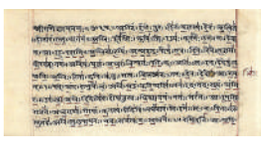
iyám vísrstir yáta ābabhūva
yádi vā dadhé yádi vā ná
yó asyādhyaksah paramé vyoman
só angá veda yádi vā ná véda

Whence all creation had its origin,
the creator, whether he fashioned it or whether he did not,
the creator, who surveys it all from highest heaven,
he knows — or maybe even he does not know (Verse 7)

Translation of A.L. Bhasham

Upanishads: The epitome of Vedic knowledge

The culmination of the Vedic cultural phase was indeed the conception of the Upanishadic philosophy also referred to as the **Vedanta.** This philosophy emphasized on *Jnana* (or knowledge) and explored metaphysical subjects and intriguing conceptions of the ***Brahman*** and ***Atman*** etc. While the former was equated with the cosmic being, the supreme creator, the primeval person and the infinite consciousness, the latter was described as the true-self or the soul of the sentient being. This doctrine laid greater stress on the acquisition of true knowledge and spiritual development, rather than on rituals and sacrifices. It propounded the enduring philosophy of unitism or monism as a part of the Vedantic thought which emphasised on the **unity** of the **Brahman** and the **Atman.** This unity enunciated as the ultimate **realisation of Brahman,** was hailed as the cardinal objective of a being's life.



Thus the **doctrine of Vedanta** emerged in this age. This philosophy and its significance, is very succinctly described by Dr. Radhakrishnan in the book, 'The Hindu View of Life', where he states, ***"Vedanta is not a religion but a religion in the most universal and deepest significance."*** Thus, the emergence of this profound and all-encompassing thought was indeed a marked departure from the early Vedic philosophy and led to the evolution of a totally new dimension and perspective of the culture in India.

Atman or the True Self: The Conversation of Prajapati and Indra

The concept of true self or *Atman* is well elucidated in the Upanishads, particularly in the *Chandogya*, *Mandukya* and *Katha Upanishads*. The *Chandogya Upanishad* (chapter 8. sections 7-12) recounts the explanation of the true self by Prajapati (the creator of the universe and a guru alike to *devas* and *asuras* who is also identified in the Puranas as Brahma). The gist of this metaphorical and illumining dialogue which dwells on the essential nature of the Atman is brought out here.

Prajapati announces *the Self (Atman) to be deathless, ageless and sinless, which knows no sorrow, hunger or pain. It is this Self which is worthy of seeking and worth all that is desirable and this Self must be known*.

Indra (king of the *devas*) and Vairochana (the leader of *Asuras*) approach Prajapati to reveal what is this *true-self*. But to be worthy of the divine knowledge, Prajapati asks them to do penance for 32 years. At the end of this period, Prajapati alludes to the physical body which one can see as the reflection of water, as the *true-self* (that is the self which can be known through the senses). Vairochana, satisfied with the explanation, advises his followers to serve and glorify the physical self. But Indra, though initially content with this elucidation, reasons with Prajapati as to how the physical body is the true self as it suffers sorrow and is prone to destruction and death.

Prajapati, to test Indra further, describes this *true self* to be the state of consciousness as we see ourselves in the dreams. Indra reasons that the self in dreams is a transient state and not an enduring one. Even this self is not immune to the suffering and pain that is experienced in dreams, so how can it be the *true self*?

Prajapati then alludes to the state of unconscious, in a dreamless sleep as akin to the *true self*. But this too fails to satisfy Indra. He reasons that such a state is a mere abstraction and the *self* in such a state is absolutely unconscious knowing and experiencing nothing and then how could it ever be the conscious and luminous one? Thus, though it does not experience the negative qualities associated with the physicalself, but squarely lacks the positive attributes postulated for the *trueself*.

Thus, after many years of yearning and inquisitiveness of Indra, Prajapati reveals what the *true self* is. He explains that *Atman* cannot be equated with the gross body, which is subject to decay and death, or the transient and ephemeral state of dreams. It is not even the unconscious state of oneself that does not have the knowledge or luminescence. *Atman* is beyond intellectual conception which is limited to physical senses and reason. *Atman* is the indestructible, self-embodied in the ephemeral physical or gross body. The body experiences the *doshas* or the attributes (viz. pain and pleasure) but *Atman* remains *nirdosha* or attributeless. Shackled by the body the *Atman* seems limited and restricted, but when freed from it, the Atman is again a part of the infinite and universal consciousness.

Varnashrama Dharma, a new socio-cultural and philosophical order

The Vedic period also saw the emergence of the philosophy of the **Varnashrama dharma**. This philosophy enunciated and integrated the concepts of social order and socio-economic concept of division of labour, with socio-cultural and ethical obligations and duties. These in turn were determined as per the stage and calling of life. The concept is said to be traceable to the ***Purusha Sukta*** of the Rigveda (*Mandal* 10, *sukta* 90). This *sukta* attributes the creation of the different varnas to the various parts of the body of the *Purusa*; the all-pervading cosmic being. Thus, this *sukta* brings out the cosmic connection between all the varnas. The different parts only symbolise their having different social duties. The concept later finds elaboration in the *Manusmriti* and the other *Dharmashastras*.

Purusha Sukta

पुरुष एवेदं सर्वं यद्भूतं यच्च भव्यम्।
उतामृतत्वस्येशानो यदन्नेनातिरोहति।।1।।

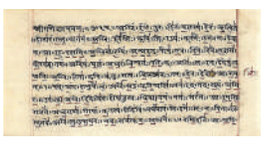
The Purusha is verily all this (Creation,) that which existed in the past, or will exist in the future;

Everything is woven by the immortal essence of the great lord (Purusha);

by becoming food of which (i.e. by getting consumed in whose immortal essence through surrender) one transcends the manifest world and becomes immortal.

त्रिपादूर्ध्व उदैत्पूरुषः पादोऽस्येहाभवत्पुनः।
ततो विष्वङ् व्यक्रामत्साशनानशने अभि।।4।।

The three parts of the Purusha is high above (in the transcendental realm),
and his one part becomes the manifest creation again and again;
There, in the manifest creation, he pervades all the living (who eat) and the non-living beings (which do not eat)



तस्माद्यज्ञात्सर्वहुत ऋचः सामानि जज्ञिरे।
छन्दांसि जज्ञिरे तस्माद्यजुस्तस्मादजायत।।9।।

From the great offering of his yagna (i.e Virat who was born of the Purusha); was born the Rigveda and Samaveda the chandas (Vedic meters) were born from him, and the Yajurveda was born from him.

ब्राह्मणोऽस्य मुखमासीद् बाहू राजन्यः कृतः।
ऊरू तदस्य यद्वैश्यः पद्भ्यां शूद्रो अजायत।।12।।

The Brahmanas were his mouth, the kshatriyas his arms,
the vaishyas were his thighs, and the shudras were his feet.

The word *Varnashrama Dharma* is composed of three distinct words. ***Varna*** (here referred to as the class), ***Ashrama*** (or stage/station in life) and ***Dharma*** (duty or obligation). Thus, based on *varna* (class) and *ashrama* (station) a person was obliged to discharge his duties. The *Shastras* identified four *varnas* and four *ashramas*. The four *varnas* are **Brahmans** (priests, preachers, teachers), **Kshatriyas** (kings, soldiers, warriors), **Vaishyas** (merchants, agriculturists, artisans etc.) and **Shudras** (labourers/service providers).

The four *ashramas* were ***Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa. Brahmacharya*** was the first stage of life where the objective was to acquire knowledge and lead a life of discipline and celibacy. ***Grihastha*** or the stage of house-holder was the next, where one was to choose his occupation as per *varna*, marry and raise a family. ***Vanaprastha*** was the third stage, which literally means 'proceeding to the forest'. After fulfilling the duties of a house-holder, with the onset of age, a person could retire from worldly matters and spend more time in spiritual pursuits. ***Sanyasa*** was the final stage where a person was to detach himself from society and fully pursue the attainment of salvation or *moksha*. Depending on the *varna* and *ashrama*, a person was required to discharge his dharma, as an enunciated duty.

Thus, this cultural philosophy was to serve as the lodestar of the seeker through the journey of life and beyond. The *Atman* in its physical embodiment was to pass through the numerous stages of life. It would acquire various attributes including knowledge and material wealth. It would also undergo the experience of the worldly pleasures and sufferings. A seeker was not to remain mired in the worldly pursuits, but the true purpose of life was to seek the salvation through integration of the *Atman* with *Brahma*. The virtuous pursuit of appropriate worldly duties or the right *Karma* was the key to emancipation in this eternal cycle.

The Story of Nachiketa and the Discourse on the Nature of Atman and its Journey Beyond Life

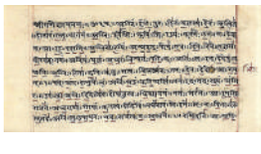
The *Katha Upanishad* (or Kathopanishad) contains the story of Nachiketa and his conversation with Yama (the god of death), who reveals to him the secret of life after death, the nature of *atman* and other metaphysical concepts. The discourse is in the nature of a conversation between the two with Yama answering the incisive and unrelenting queries of the young boy.

Nachiketa's father Vajrashravasa performs a *yagna*, after which he donates his worldly possessions. But Nachiketa sees his father as offering what has little value, viz. old and barren cows. He attributes this to his father's poverty and thinking himself to be the most valued possession of his father, questions him as to whom would he be donated. Being repeatedly queried, the irritated father utters that he would be gifted to the *Yama*. As per the story, to honour his father's words, Nachiketa makes a journey to the abode of Yama. Unfortunately, he awaits Yama's audience for three days without even being offered food and water. Yama, on his appearance after this period, is remorseful for this sinful oversight and to atone for it, tries to conciliate Nachiketa by offering him three boons (wishes).

As the **first boon**, Nachiketa seeks to return to his home from the abode of Yama and also seeks acceptance by his father who has offered him to Yama. Most importantly, he also seeks as his first wish, his father's wellness and he being unresentful towards him on his return. Thus, he seeks the good of his father and unification with him. As his **second wish**, he seeks Yama's instruction on appropriate conduct of the fire-rituals which would grant one the passage to heaven; where there is no sorrow, hunger, fear, old age etc. Thus, he seeks to have the knowledge to secure wellness of all and their becoming free of misery and sorrow.

As his **third wish**, Nachiketa seeks to know as to **what lies and happens after death**.

Yama readily endows him first two boons but is reluctant to grant his third. At first, he tries to dissuade Nachiketa by expressing that the knowledge is too subtle even for *Devas* to fully comprehend. Later, he tries to allure Nachiketa with the prospect of granting him long age, material wealth and any other wish of his. But Nachiketa remains steadfast and rejects the latter offers of material wealth, long age etc. as all being ephemeral. Thus, having duly tested the yearning of Nachiketa, his resolve and his credential to be a recipient of this eternal knowledge, Yama goes to explain it.



The story and its characters are all emblematic with Nachiketa being the deserving seeker and Yama being the celestial guru who is privy to life beyond death. What is relevant is the eternal concept of *Advaita* philosophy it propounds. The relevant parts and extracts of this conversation embodying the profound philosophy is briefly highlighted below.

Theory of *Preya* and *Shreya*: Yama first confers the knowledge of *preya* (dear or pleasant) and *shreya* (good, more appropriate and beneficial). He elucidates that the *preya* and *shreya* both approach a man but the wise distinguish and choose *shreya* over *preya*.

Thus, the first step to salvation was to make appropriate choice, of not the alluring but the more appropriate, beneficial and enduring. Expressed in verse (in *kathopanishad 1.2.1-1.2.2*)

अन्यच्छ्रेयोऽन्यदुतैव प्रेयस्ते उभे नानार्थे पुरुषँ सिनीतः।
तयोः श्रेय आददानस्य साधुर्भवति हीयतेऽर्थाद्य उ प्रेयो वृणीते।।1।।

Yama says, 'one is shreya (good) while another is preya (dear or pleasant). These two, serving different ends, bind men; happiness (salvation) comes to him who chooses the shreya (good); whosoever chooses the pleasant forfeits the true purpose of life.'

श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यमेतस्तौ संपरीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः।
श्रेयो हि धीरोऽभिप्रेयसो वृणीते प्रेयो मन्दो योगक्शेमाद्वृणीते।।2।।

The Shreya (good) and the Preya (dear) approach the man,
The wise ponder over both and distinguish between them;
The wise choose the Shreya (good) over the Preya (dear),
The fool, bound by craving, chooses the Preya (dear).

Yama further instructs that the pursuit of shreya is difficult yet enduring and eternal while that of *preya* is pleasant and easy, yet transient.

The existence of Atman & the essence of Vedas: As per Kathopanishad (verses 1.2.14 through 1.2.22) the Atman or the true self does exist although invisible to our senses. It is primeval and enduring and recognisable by means of *yoga* (meditation and appropriate karma).

तं दुर्दर्शं गूढमनुप्रविष्टं गुहाहितं गह्वरेष्ठं पुराणम्।
अध्यात्मयोगाधिगमेन देवं मत्वा धीरो हर्षशोकौ जहाति (Verse 1.2.12)

He (the Atman), difficult to be seen, full of mystery,
the ancient, primeval one, concealed deep within,
He who, by yoga means of meditation on his self, comprehends Atman within him as God,
He leaves joy and sorrow far behind.

The ultimate aim of the Vedas is to liberate a man from joy and sorrow, from his past and future and all his earthly bonds. This is possible through the right knowledge which liberates one from the darkness and ignorance pervading life and which leads to the realisation of *Atman* and *Brahman*. Further, the word *Om* is the reflection of *Brahman* which is the most elevated, the pure and the blissful within. Thus, the *Atman* itself was a reflection of the *Brahman*.

Nature of Atman: The true self of man, his *Atman*, is neither born nor dies, it is eternal, it is *Brahman*. Its nature is best expressed in the following verses of Kathopanishad. (verses 1.2.18 through 1.2.22)

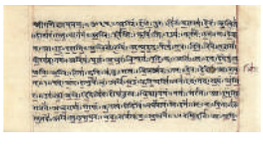
न जायते म्रियते वा विपश्चिन्नायं कुतश्चिन्न बभूव कश्चित्।
अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे।।18।।

The Atman, is neither born, nor does it die,
It does not originate, nor does it become anybody,
Eternal and ancient, it remains eternal,
It is not killed, even though the body is destroyed.

अणोरणीयान्महतो महीयानात्मास्य जन्तोर्निहितो गुहायां।
तमक्रतुः पश्यति वीतशोको धातुः प्रसादान्महिमानमात्मनः।।20।।

The Atman, subtler than the subtle, greater than the great,
is hidden in the heart of each creature;
one who is free from desire, free from avarice,
who has his mind and the senses composed, is peaceful and content,
he sees the supreme glory of Atman and is absolved from grief (attains salvation).

Further, the knowledge of *Atman* is acquired, not through textual knowledge of scriptures or discourses or reasoning. But it comes through self-realisation through meditation and appropriate conduct, through ethical living and a tranquil mind. Further, this knowledge eludes those who indulge in misconduct, live unethically and whose mind is not tranquil.



The allegory of Atman, mind, body and senses: The verses 1.3.3-1.3.4 of the Upanishad explain as to who can and who cannot attain the unison of the *Atman* and *Brahman*. Those who are unable to rein their senses through the powers of right reasoning, have their minds which are unbridled and they invariably remain entangled in the worldly life. But those who, through the right reasoning and power of intellect are able to harness the senses and rein the mind are the ones to attain liberation. Expressed in verse, it states;

आत्मानँ रथितं विद्धि शरीरँ रथमेव तु।
बुद्धिं तु सारथिं विद्धि मनः प्रग्रहमेव च।।3।।

The Atman is the rider in the chariot, and the body is the chariot,
the Buddhi (intellect and ability to reason) is the charioteer, and Manas (mind) is the reins.

इन्द्रियाणि हयानाहुर्विषयाँ स्तेषु गोचरान्।
आत्मेन्द्रियमनोयुक्तं भोक्तेत्याहुर्मनीषिणः।।4।।

The senses are the horses, whose objective is to travel the right paths,
Formed out of the union of the Atman, the senses and the mind, him they call the "enjoyer".

Unity and Plurality

The next verses explain that the understanding of 'the true self' is the grasping of inner knowledge and of Unity. This is the eternal knowledge of spiritual oneness. Thus, the knowledge of the oneness of *Atman* and *Purusha* or *Brahman* is the true eternal knowledge, signifying the unity of one with the All-pervading. This is the knowledge of *Advaita* (literally meaning 'no two') or **unitism**.

The knowledge of the external world on the other hand is the knowledge of plurality, where the self is separate from the external world and its subjects which are all transient.

Journey beyond the transient life: The verses in Katha Upanishad (verses 2.2.1 to 2.215) also describe what happens beyond death. It describes the *Atman* (soul) to be eternal and undying which exists even after the physical body perishes. The journey of soul further is defined by one's own *karma* as to whether it is liberated and becomes one with the *Brahman* or it takes a new life and form. Thus, these verses propound the '*karmic theory*' (described in verses 2.3.1 to 2.3.19) and that of the 'cycle of life and rebirth'. At the same time, they emphasise on the right knowledge and right *karma* for the emancipation of the soul and journey beyond.

योनिमन्ये प्रपद्यन्ते शरीरत्वाय देहिनः।
स्थाणुमन्येऽनुसंयन्ति यथाकर्म यथाश्रुतम्।।7।।

Some of these souls enter the womb and embody again as living beings,
others metamorphose unto what is Sthānu (immovable things),
according to their karma, and their shrutam (knowledge, learning). **(verses 2.2.7)**

Right knowledge and Yoga: The next few verses (in *adhyaya* 2, *valli* 3) prescribe the path of right knowledge and *karma* as means of knowing the *Atman* and its emancipation. This is achieved through the harnessing of senses with the mind (*manas*) and intellect/power to reason (*buddhi*). It is this unison which creates tranquillity (and not thoughtlessness). This is the path of Yoga and eventually leads to the unity of *Atman* and *Brahman*.

यदा पञ्चावतिष्ठन्ते ज्ञानानि मनसा सह।
बुद्धिश्च न विचेष्टते तामाहुः परमां गतिम्।।10।।
तां योगमिति मन्यन्ते स्थिरामिन्द्रियधारणाम्।
अप्रमत्तस्तदा भवति योगोहि प्रभवाप्ययौ।।11।।

When Manas (mind) with thoughts and the five senses is tranquil,
When Buddhi (intellect) does not waver, that is the highest state.
That is what one calls Yoga, the stillness of the senses, concentration of the mind,
It is not thoughtless heedless sluggishness, Yoga is creation and dissolution.

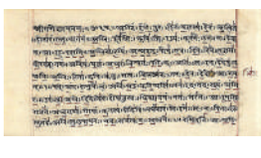
The last few verses describe, that the objective of life should be, acquiring this illumining knowledge and the instructions of Yoga by dint of which one can attain the Brahman. Thus, the treatise emphasises the right knowledge and action in this world itself and not any attainment in a yonder world.

The great treatise ends with a prayer of the student and the teacher seeking divine protection for any inadvertent faults of theirs in the course of receiving and imparting knowledge. It prays that the great lord may protect both by imparting the illumining knowledge and revealing the fruits thereof. Further, it wishes for the disciple and preceptor, to never hate each other, owing to blame incurred by them by improper recital or instruction due to oversight.

सह नाववतु। सह नौ भुनक्तु। सह वीर्यं करवावहै।
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै।।19।।

Let Him protect us both; let us exert together may what we study to be well studied; may we not hate each other.

ओं शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः।।



Varnashrama dharma and social mobility

As a basis for socio-economic order and division of labour, the Varnashrama system was egalitarian and flexible to begin with. The *Purusha Sukta* hymn sites the common origin of all *varnas* from the same cosmic entity the *Purusha*. Although some scholars believe this *sukta* to be a later addition to the Rig Veda, it is still a significant reflection of the conception of the ancient society of the spiritual unity of the cosmos and the inherent oneness of all emerging therefrom. Further, social mobility within the varnas was permitted as a matter of individual choice of occupation. The co-existence of different *varnas* in the same family is evident from the Rigvedic hymn;

I am a poet my father is a physician, my mother is a grinder;

earning livelihood through different means we live together (Rigveda IX.112)

Another Rigvedic hymn that elucidates existence of social mobility is hymn 3.43-5

O, Indra, fond of soma, would you make me the protector of people, or would you make me a king, would you make me a sage who has drunk soma, would you impart to me endless wealth.

Thus, the rigidities of birth-based *varna* do not seem to be existent as an early Vedic practice. But over the period of centuries, the **varna system** seems to have metamorphosed into a more stringent and rigid social system or the **caste system**. Varna was now determined by birth with the individual's choice in its determination altogether ceasing. Adding to it, there was the emergence of a dominant Brahmanical order of the priestly class, with an emphasis on rituals and sacrifices. Finally, with the marginalisation of the shudras in this socio-economic order, this system had ceased to be socially and culturally inclusive. The time was now ripe for a new thought to emerge and another cultural wave to sweep the land. This was provided by Buddhism and Jainism and their more inclusive philosophy.

Unitism and Vedanta: An enduring legacy of the Vedic age

From the perspective of cultural evolution, the Vedic age does not seem to have engendered an urban civilisation akin to the erstwhile Indus Valley Civilisation. It is only in the last phase of this period around 600 BCE that we see the emergence of bigger cities in *Mahajanapadas*. But the evolution of other tangible and intangible elements of culture, particularly of music and medicine, is indeed noticeable in the verses of Samaveda and Atharvaveda. Similarly, the growth of disciplines of mathematics, astronomy, metallurgy and other fields can be traced to developments in this period. However, the V**edantic philosophy** and the concept of **unitism** are truly unique and enduring cultural heritages of this age. If the highest perspective of culture is it's that element, that seeks to understand the true meaning and purpose of life, then the **Vedantic philosophy was the pinnacle of cultural evolution** and which indeed left an enduring legacy for all the ages and cultures which ensued.

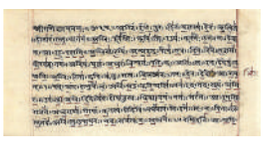
THE DRAVIDIAN CULTURE

The word *Dravida* in the Sanskrit language usually refers to the region in the southern part of India or the peninsular India. Thus, the culture of this region and the people domiciled therein are referred by historians as the Dravidian culture. As experts dwell on the elements of Dravidian culture and endeavour to define its contours, they invariably strive to identify, whether this culture was distinct from the Vedic culture? If yes, what were its unique features? Whether there was any confluence of these two streams? But the search for answers to the above queries also begets the question as to who were the Dravidian people.

The Dravidian People and their Origin

The origin of Dravidian people remains a subject of research and debate with many theories being proposed. The first being, that the **Dravidians were the Harappan people** who were pushed back to the eastern and southern parts of India because of the Aryan invasion. But with the Aryan invasion theory itself being discarded by experts, this notion too stands largely repudiated. Another hypothesis is that the Dravidians were the **aboriginal settlers**, who over the centuries, were pushed to the peninsular India, owing to the expansion of the Aryans. The contact between the two led to each influencing the language and culture of others. Historians and linguists point to the existence of many words in the Vedic texts that supposedly having origin in the Dravidian languages.

Another theory is that the **Dravidian** people could have indeed been the **Indus Valley settlers**, who abandoned the collapsing cities owing to the flooding of some of them and later because of draughts



1.14: Brahmani

1.15: Maheshwari

1.16: Kumari

1.17: Vaishnavi

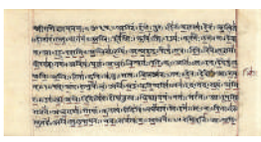
1.18: Varahi

1.19: Indrani

1.20: Chamunda

1.14 to 1.20: The *Saptamatrikas* having origin and strong presence in the Dravidian culture also had influence on the Puranic culture. Sculptures in grey sandstone from Saraikela from the 6th century CE; current location at Bihar Museum, Patna — photographs by Madhukar K Bhagat

of several centuries (the Meghalayan drought 2000 BCE to 1800 BCE) (see Chapter 2). Eventually, they moved eastwards and later southwards and settled in the peninsular region. Prof. Asko Parpola and Iravatham Mahadevan are proponents of this theory. They believe of there being a strong evidence for a proto-Dravidian origin of the ancient Indus Valley civilisation. The existence of a stone celt found in Tamil Nadu having markings similar to Indus signs and other evidences are adduced to support this hypothesis. Recent studies of the DNA samples, of a female skeletal-remains, found from Rakhigarhi (of 2500BCE) suggest, that it had DNA that is largely in common with the current South Asian population (see Chapter 2). Thus, the genetic connect of the Indus people with the current South Asian population is intact. This has led further credence to the migration of Harappan people and their, later being identified as *Dravidas*. Some theories also suggest their West/Central Asian origin



hypothesis. However, there seems to be no consensus as to any of these above theories and question of origin of the Dravidian people still remains shrouded in mystery.

Dravidian culture and its connect with Indus Valley Civilisation

Whether the Dravidian people were the Indus Valley settlers or not, remains not fully established, but the close contact between the two and the existence of the Dravidian civilisation prior to the Aryan culture establishing itself in North India, is duly accepted by the experts. Archaeological evidences, which suggest a close contact are; discovery of pots in Tamil Nadu with arrowhead symbols similar to that found on seals ofMohenjo-daro; pictograph symbols similar to Indus writing in a cave in Kerala; a stone celt belonging to the 2nd millennium BCE, found in Mayiladuthurai (Tamil Nadu) which is having many more Indus period symbols. The gold ornaments found in the Indus Valley had origin in the gold mines in southern India which suggests a possible trade between the two regions and cultural links. Discoveries at Adichanallur (in Thoothukudi district, Tamil Nadu), of an ancient burial site, indicate close similarity in practices of burial in urns and pots as found in some Indus Valley sites. Further, the Brauhi language spoken in parts of Baluchistan has a lot of words in common with the Dravidian languages.

Mutual influence of Dravidian and Aryan cultures

Whether the Dravida people got pushed because of an advancing Aryan culture, or whether they abandoned the Indus Valley cities due to extreme vagaries of nature, irrespective of the above, experts do agree that both cultures did come in contact with each other and the marks of this cultural influence on both is apparent.

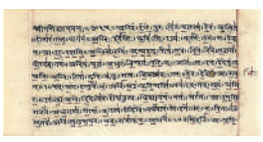
The Sangam period literature remains one of the most important sources of information about the Dravidian culture and society. This literature also talks about the three *Sangams* or academies of seers and experts of different fields which took place in the ancient city of Madurai. These academies or *Sangams* took place in different periods and are variously dated. Some experts believe the oldest Sangam to be held around 2500 BCE or even earlier. But it is generally believed that the last occurred around 300 BCE to 250 BCE. One of these academies is said to have been led by sage Agastya who was a prominent Aryan preacher from northern India. Agastya is said to have spent a substantial period in the Dravida region preaching the Aryan philosophy and other disciplines. His work *Agathiyan* is said to have been the earliest treatise on Tamil grammar. Further, his twelve disciples are said to have composed a number of treatises on literature, grammar, music and dance which are themselves considered salient works of the Sangam period. One such treatise, *Tolkappiyam,* is purported to have been composed around 1000BCE, by his disciple Tolkappiyar, after the loss of *Agathian* in a great deluge (flood). *Tolkappiyam*, extant even today, lays the foundation of Tamil grammar and reveals about the culture and society. The dates of its composition and authorship remain disputed. However, from a cultural perspective, what is relevant is that sage **Agastya**, who finds mentions in Rigveda, is believed to be the **first composer of Tamil grammar** and is largely venerated in the Dravidian culture and his disciples authored seminal works of this culture.

Dravidian influence on the Aryan culture

The **Dravidian influence on the Aryan culture** is evident in the number of words incorporated in Rigveda from the Dravidian languages. These words and their usage become more in the subsequent Vedic layers after the *Samhitas*. The worship of **Shakti** (or mother goddess) is believed to have permeated the Vedic culture apparently from the Dravidian worship of the mother goddess which is also evident from the Dravidian practice of worship of ***Sapt Matrikas***. This concept in the Puranic phase finds expression in the tradition of Shaktism and development of Puranic legends related to the different forms of the deity. The concept of **Rudra** and **Pashupati** in vogue in the Dravidian culture also seems to have merged into the Aryan god of Shiva/Mahadeva in the Later-Vedic period. Thus, the two cultures influenced each other over centuries and tended to have a greater confluence towards a culture that eventually emerged in the later Vedic period.

The Sangams and the Dravidian culture

Some of the literary works of the Sangam period which survive to this day, reveal a wealth of information about the people, society, the cultural evolution and the great height the Dravidian civilisation attained. Sangams usually refers to the **three academies** or **Sangams**, the first of which is said to have taken place in the ancient city of Madurai. The three Sangams include the head Sangam, the middle Sangam and the last Sangam. However, the first two Sangams are usually considered only legendary and it is only the last Sangam which is accepted as a historical fact and said to have occurred in the present Madurai. The Sangam period referred to by some experts spans the 6th century BCE to the 3rd century CE. The most important treatises of this period extant today are the *Tolkappiyam,* the *Pattupattu* and the *Ettuthogai*.



The original manuscripts of these treatises were lost for centuries and were rediscovered in a Shaiva monastery in Kumbakonam only in the 19th century.

The ***Tolkappiyam***, the oldest surviving literary work is the most ancient work on Tamil grammar and also the oldest non-Sanskrit text. Some experts believe this to be a work from the second Sangam or around the 1st millennium BCE. However, most scholars do agree to a date of 2nd to 1st century BCE for its creation/compilation. The entire work is divided into three sections or books (*atikaram*). It has nearly 1612 sutras which provide the rules of etymology, phonology, orthography, sentence structure, semantics, prosody etc.

The ***Pattupattu*** which is a collection of 10 long poems can be said to be the earliest work of Tamil literature. The poems in the anthology range from 100 to 800 lines and are thus truly a substantive literary work. The most important of this collection is the *Nakkirars Tirumurukarrupattai* (A Guide to Lord Murugan).

Ettutogai, or the 'collection of eight', is another poetic literary work from this period, which along with the Pathupattu/*Pattupattu* forms the compilation of 18 ancient great literary works. These eight anthologies are a compilation of 2371 poems, each with 3 to 40 lines. These poems are attributed to nearly 470 poets whose names can be arrived at from their works. Among these, nearly 30 are believed to be women. These poets in themselves were from different parts of the region and engaged in different occupations. However, in nearly 100 stanzas the names of their authors cannot be worked out.

The poems of the Sangam period are broadly classified as *Akam* or *Agam or Aham*, meaning, 'inner' or 'love' and *Puram*, meaning 'outer' or 'public life'. These poems are of varied themes, including love and emotion, worship of deities, veneration of the king and his works and even on the theme of war. Thus, these grand literary works were truly a reflection of the intellectual and institutional elements of the society and its culture.

Another monumental Tamil work was the composition of the *Thirukkural* by the sage Thiruvalluvar. The celebrated treatise divided into three books and 10 chapters, contains 1330 kurals which are short couplets of seven words. Each of the kurals enunciates precepts to guide humanity to a noble living. The subjects of these couplets are broadly based on virtue (*aram*; dharma) wealth (*porul*; artha) and love (*inbam*; kama). These three are to have the objective of attaining salvation (*veedu*). Also referred to as the Tamil Veda or the divine book, the *Thirukkural* is believed to have been composed around 300 BCE to 500 CE. While some scholars believe the period of authorship to be around the end of the third Sangam period, others, based on linguistics, assign a later date of around 500 CE. Kural which is also one of the earliest of Tamil works containing the disciplines of metaphysics and epistemology is also considered among the greatest of works of ethics and morality.

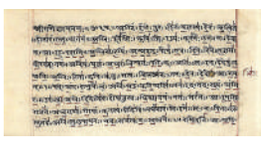
Dravidian Society and Culture and Its Salient Elements

The Dravidian society, like the early societies, had agriculture as the substratum of socio-economic activity. As evident from the period's literature and archaeological findings, the industry of weaving and dyeing of cotton and woollen cloth, besides shipping was in vogue. The making of gold silver and other jewellery with stone inlays, ivory products making, metal works, making of leather products was well known. Trade with land and sea was established, particularly with many Southeast Asian regions in the Malaya peninsula. Maritime trade existed even with far of Egypt and the Roman empire, the coins of which have been found.

The society was centred around kingship with the king, a monarch (also called *Mannam, Ko, Vendan, Korravan*, *Iraivan* etc.) being the centre of administration. Social division of labour and different classes existed and were partly based on birth and choice of occupation. A rigid caste system does not seem to have been the order of the day. Many Dravidian societies were matriarchal, and social standing and respect of women was much higher.

The religious beliefs and practices seem to be of an early form of ***Shaktism*** and ***Shaivism***. The reverence to the mother goddess and Saptamatrikas is believed to have existed in this period. Shiva was worshipped as *Rudra* or *Pashupati*. **Murugan**, (also known as Skanda, Karthikeya and Subrahmanya), the warrior lord, was another revered deity of this period.

The Dravidian culture seems to have flourished into larger settlements and cities. Reference to an ancient city of **Madurai** is received where the first Sangam was held, while the second in **Kaptapuram** and third in present **Madurai**, after the earlier two cities were lost in the deluge. There was substantial growth in scientific disciplines as seen in irrigational practices and the building of dams etc. A **system**



of calendars is known to be developed. A well-**developed script and language** with defined grammar and many **literary works** existed out of which only a few have survived. These are evident in the works of *Tolkappiyam*, *Pattupattu* and *Ettutogai*, whose manuscripts exist even today. The subjects and their depth are reflective of a literary and cultural evolution spanning multiple disciplines. Most importantly, the authors of these works were not a handful of seers, but many scholars including women distributed in the region, with works itself being indicative of the intellectual achievements of a society. Further, the **very conduct of these Sangams is reflective of a highly evolved culture** with excellence in different disciplines and great social respect for them.

EMERGENCE OF JAINISM, BUDDHISM AND SRAMANA TRADITIONS: THE AGE OF PLURALISM

With the emergence of **Buddhism, Jainism** and other **Shramana traditions** in the 6th century BCE, a cultural confluence of the Vedic, Buddhist and Jain cultures emerged. The latter were opposed to Vedic rituals, Brahmanical order, Varnashrama system, idol worship and animal sacrifices, which were some of the key features the Vedic system. This period from 600 BCE to 200 BCE was not only a phase of cultural confluence but also of socio-culture upheaval, as each faith vied for permeating in and occupying the socio-religious space. But what emerged from this social churning was a pluralistic and syncretic culture not bound by the dogma and capable of assimilating new thoughts and practices. Thus, **socio-cultural evolution and co-existence of multiple faiths** can truly be said to the characteristic of this age.

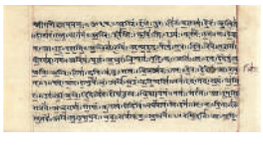
The doctrine of ahimsa or non-violence or non-injury to any sentient being was a defining socio-cultural and spiritual influence of this age. Although in vogue in the earlier Vedic systems too, the Jain doctrine followed by the Buddhist thought, brought the concept of ahimsa in centre stage of the religious and social life. The principle of ahimsa was the cornerstone of the Jain metaphysics, spiritual doctrine and its ethical conduct. It believed in the essence of life or soul to be existent in all sentient beings and thus there being a universal interconnect. Killing, or injury to such beings, meant a further entrenchment of the soul-body bondage, and further spiritual decay. Both Jainism and Buddhism strongly believed in the precept of Ahimsa and this meant **opposition to the Vedic sacrifices of animals**, a ritual accepted and practiced for centuries and even hallowed.

But most importantly, ahimsa was not just limited to the prohibitory precept of non-injury of any sentient being, but to the positive attribute of boundless and **loving compassion** for all. Termed as ***metta*** (*maitri* in Sanskrit), it was this attribute, which endowed **universalism** to the doctrine of ahimsa. This, in turn, was an integral element of *Panchamahavrat* in Jainism and *Tri-ratna* in Buddhism and thus it cast a profound social influence in this phase of cultural history. A few centuries down the chronology of time, we see the building of the colossal Mauryan empire by emperor Ashoka on the very foundation of ahimsa and universalism. This was an empire that in terms of the spread of political boundary reached a pinnacle and remained the most colossal of Indian empires even in the centuries to come. But more significantly, the essence of this philosophy and the socio-cultural-religious influence spread much beyond the vast boundaries of Bharatvarsha (India) and even to a significant part of the world, influencing it for the next two millennia and more.

Karma as the basis of salvation was also another spiritual concept emphasised by the two faiths. Although similar theories of karma were also propounded in the Upanishadic philosophy, what was significant was the singular emphasis by Buddhism and Jainism on karma and the rejection of ritualism as the basis of spiritual evolution. Even the concept of a **personal god** as the creator and the sustainer of the universe on whose grace the emancipation of the human soul was dependent or whose wrath was to befall on the vile, was completely rejected. The karma of the being was the basis of its salvation and its providence. The 'laws of the universe' were the sustainers of the cosmos. Thus, ritualism of appeasement, or the rites borne out of fear, had no role in the liberation of the soul and were summarily rejected. Hence, it shifted the complete onus of spiritual gain on the being and his/her endeavour.

Thus, emerged a heterodox school of thought that rejected the concept of a **personal god**, the infallibility of **ritualism in Vedas, (**which decried the **animal sacrifices)** and emphasized **universalism and ethical conduct**.

A new **inclusive social order** was clearly in the offing. The **Brahmanical supremacy** and orthodoxy were rejected. The Brahmins were not to be the only interpreters of the Holy Scriptures, and neither the spiritual education was to remain the exclusive preserve of a specific varna. The common folk irrespective of their birth and varna were all eligible to be a part of the religious order which included the Brahmins and Shudras alike. Thus, every being could strive and hope for salvation and spiritual evolution. The



Sangha of Buddhism and the order of monkhood of the Jainism made no class or varna distinction in admittance of people in its fold. The only requisite was the belief in its doctrine and acceptance of its practices. Further, the concept of a particular *ashram* (stage of life) for renunciation was not necessary in the two faiths, and a person could adopt the life of monkhood at any stage.

While the members of the royal household like Rahul (son of Buddha) were accepted in the Sangha, so were Amrapali (a courtesan) and Angulimal (the reformed dacoit). While Sariputta the chief disciple of Buddha and Mahakashyap, another venerated disciple, were from the Brahmanical order, Upali, a barber, was entrusted the responsibility as the chief disciple in matters of Vinaya, and Sunita, a scavenger later on became an *arahant*.

Even **women** whose social status had been ebbing over the centuries were admitted in monkhood and referred to as the ***sadhvis*** (in Jainism) and ***theris*** (in Buddhism). Mahaprajapati Gautami was the first woman to be admitted to the Buddhist Sangha. They made significant contributions to the spiritual cause. ***Therigatha***, a class of scripture that was a part of the *Khudakka Nikaya* of *Sutta Pitaka*, was composed by the elder *bhikkhunis* and *theris*. Thus, there emerged a formal and inclusive **order of monks** which steered the evolution of *dharma* and the conduct of the monks and laity over centuries.

The **spiritual discourses were in the Prakrit languages** (Pali, Ardha-magadhi etc.) and not limited to Sanskrit, enabling the common folk to comprehend the message and be integrated in this quest for socio-spiritual elevation. Further, the followers of Buddhism, Jainism and other Sramana traditions were not restricted to the monks who had denounced the household but also included the house-holders and laity, for whom more benign social-spiritual conduct was acceptable rather than the strict codes of monkhood. The reliance on the spoken language of the masses also gave a fillip to the **education of the common folk** in the Jain, Buddhist and other traditions, thus creating a more inclusive social order, a far cry from the social segmentation of the Varna system.

A rational approach to spiritual and epistemological inquiry was another seminal contribution of this age. The basic premise of Jain and Buddhist doctrines was the theory of cause and effect. This is best captured in the words of Buddha in **Dhammapada** where he states;

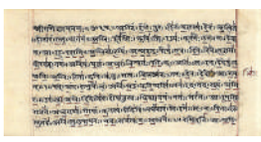
"*Everything has a cause and produces an effect. This simple principle governs the whole universe, gods and men, heaven and earth. It is applicable not only to this vast universe stretching through boundless space, with its dazzling world systems and endless series of alternations of growth and decay but also to the events of human life and affairs of history. If we can detect and eliminate the cause of suffering, suffering itself will disappear.*" (*The Dhammapada* by Dr S. Radhakrishnan)

A similar approach is adopted by the Jain doctrine which considers the interplay of karma in the framework of the governing laws to be squarely responsible for our lives and their events. Further, both the schools decried blind faith and emphasised on the understanding of the reasoning to be essential in the appropriate adoption of the doctrine and its practice.

The conception of the Jain theological fundamentals is best exemplified in **Tattvartha Sutra,** an authoritative Jain scripture containing its philosophy. The spiritual discourse displays a unique **scientific enquiry** where in it explains the fundamentals, not just of the theory of karmic causation of the soul-matter bondage (*bandha*), *samvara* (its prevention) and *nirjara* (its elimination) from the province of the soul, but also elucidates the basics of the material world. It conceives matter (*pudgal*) to be composed of *paramanu* (atoms or the primary building blocks of matter) which aggregate together two or more *paramanus* in bonds called *skandhas* (akin to a molecule) and eventually build the simplest of matters to the *panch-bhoot* (the five elements) to the whole of the universe. Indeed, it is a sterling scientific theory that could withstand the test of modern scientific knowledge and enquiry. The theory further considers matter (*pudgal*) to undergo a change in its characteristics (transformation) but the fundamental substance (*paramanu*) remains the same and is indestructible.

The Jain treatises, like the Agamas, further dwell on a variety of topics ranging from **philosophy to mathematics to logic** etc. displaying an abiding **scientific and rational outlook to the spiritual conception**. This scientific and rational approach was further tempered with a sense of **individual inquiry**, thus eschewing any dogmatism and blind faith. This is best exemplified in the following words of Buddha to his disciples in the **Anguttara Nikaya** (fourth *nikaya* of the Sutta Pitaka).

"This I have said to you O' Kalamas: but you may accept it not because it is the report, not because it is a tradition, not because it is so said in the past, not because it is given from the scripture, not for the sake of discussion, not for the sake of a particular method, not for the sake of careful consideration, not for the sake of forbearing with wrong



*views, not because it appears to be suitable, not because your preceptor is a recluse; **but if you yourself understand that this is so meritorious and blameless, and when accepted, it is for benefit and happiness, then you may accept it.***

The emergence of the **many sramana traditions** and **the plurality of faith** and belief systems was another salient aspect of this cultural phase. Literally, the word sramana refers to **'labour and toil'**. Thus, it implied the spiritual-toil of the class of seekers and ascetics. This phase oversaw the emergence of a number of faiths that professed its distinct philosophies at times radically different from the mainstream Vedic thought. Thus, the Sramana tradition began to refer to those schools of philosophy and spiritualism that were **non-Vedic and did not accept the infallibility of the Vedas.** They were also referred to as *nastik* or **heterodox schools** for rejecting the Vedic epistemology.

While Jainism with its emphasis on **Ahimsa** and ethical conduct and Buddhism eulogising the **middle path** and *Dhamma*, soon rose to prominence and had greater social acceptance than the rest, schools like the **Ajivika**, the **Carvaka**/Charvaka, the **Ajnana** etc., also arose around this time. Some of these existed even prior to Mahavira and Buddha and had a good following. But down the centuries they did not enjoy the same social acceptance as the other two faiths. However, they did contribute their unique philosophies to this age of **spiritual seeking**.

The ***Ajivikas***, led by Makkhali Ghosal, were a **school of fatalists**, believing in the soul and consequences of nature and its laws. They professed asceticism akin to Jainism. However, they denied the existence of free will and role of karma in altering the predetermined course of our lives.

Ajita Kesakambli of the ***Lokayata-Charvaka*** school believed in **materialism**, and denied the philosophy of karma, after-life or rebirth etc. It believed that with death, humans disintegrated into the constituent elements and thus there were no fruits of good or evil deeds.

***Ajnana* School** led by **Sanjaya Bellathiputta** was **agnostic and sceptic** disbelieving in the existence or non-existence of afterlife, good, evil, karma, soul etc. The **school of amoralism** propagated by **Purana Kasyapa** did not believe in inherent morality or immorality of any act.

However, the most important aspect of this phase was the questioning of the extant theology and breaking away from the dogma. The support these faiths enjoyed, particularly Jainism and Buddhism, is a clear indication of their social acceptance. Thus, there was the emergence of numerous doctrines that struck root in the socio-cultural soil and sprouted the saplings of **pluralism.**

Coexistence and tolerance of different faiths and their believers is another salient characteristic of this cultural age. Each of these traditions sincerely believed in its own correctness and at times were critical of the other, but all coexisted and competed for social and political acceptance. **Anekantvada**, a fundamental doctrine of Jainism on non-absolutism, talked of relative perspectives and coexistence of multiple aspects of the same truth. Thus, it was non-critical and accommodative of differing perspectives. Buddha himself preached to his disciples to be tolerant of critics.

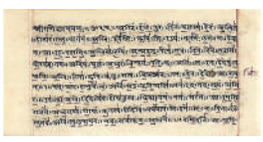
Although political patronage was extended to these theologies, the professing of others was never prohibited or discouraged by the royalty or its administration. Bimbisara, a contemporary of Mahavira and Buddha is believed to have supported both faiths. Ashoka, one of the most important patrons of Buddhism, respected and supported other sects too. The Barabar caves were built by him for the Ajivikas as well as for the Buddhists. But the respect for all faiths is best exemplified in the rock edicts of Ashoka where he exhorts all to respect one's own as well as other faiths, thus proclaiming one of the greatest gospels of **peaceful coexistence based on *Dhamma***.

Ashokan Rock Edicts: A Message of Plurality of Faiths and Peaceful Co-existence.

'The Beloved of the Gods, the king Piyadassi, wishes that all sects may dwell in all places, for all seek self-control and purity of mind. **(Major Rock Edict No.7, Girnar and Dhauli)**

*'The beloved of the Gods, **King Piyadassi, honours all sects** and both ascetics and laymen with gifts and various forms of recognition. But the beloved of the Gods does not consider gifts or honour to be as important as the advancement of the essential doctrine of all sects. This advancement takes many forms but its basis is control of one's speech, so as not to extoll one's own sect and disparage another's on unsuitable occasion, ...*

*...For **whosoever praises his own sect or blames other sects**; all out of pure devotion to his own sect, with the view of glorifying his own sect, if he is acting thus, he rather **injures his own sect very severely**. But concord is meritorious, (i.e.) that they should both hear and obey each other's morals. For this is the desire of Devanampriya (emperor Ashoka) (viz.) that all sects should be both full of learning and pure in doctrine. And those who are attached to their respective (sects), ought to be spoken to (as follows). Devanampriya does not value either gifts or honours so (highly) as (this), (viz.) that promotion of the essentials of all sects should take place.* **(Major Rock Edict No.12, Girnar and Dhauli).**



The Mutual Influence and Confluence

The mainstream theological belief systems and the Vedic culture though remained intact and flourished in this age but did not remain uninfluenced by these new thoughts. The concept of ahimsa permeated deep in the Vedic society too. The emphasis on ethics and spiritualism was reignited. Thus, *dharma* and *moksha* started to receive due significance as compared to *artha* and *kama* and the Upanishadic ideals too came into prominence as compared to the oft-emphasised ritualistic practices.

Down the centuries, new philosophical schools of thought emerged within the Vedic system viz. the Samkhya, Yoga and others which assimilated some of the views of the Sramana traditions. Rather, the emergence of these thoughts and the changes in the Vedic system brought a palpable influence on Buddhism too. The religion that decried idol worship became an inspiration for the Gandhara School of Art, which later saw sublime statues of Buddha. This influence was not limited to merely art and other tangible elements. Several aspects of the Vedic thoughts and the belief in a personal god were soon imbibed in mainstream Buddhism which is believed to have later given rise to Mahayana Buddhism. Soon, **Buddha** the heterodox, was to become the **divinity** he decried.

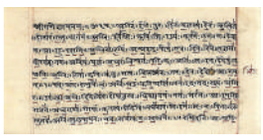
The Shad Darshanas and the Diverse Schools of Hindu Philosophy

The conception of the Shad-darshanas also took place in this period. These were the six branches of Hindu philosophy—***Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Purva Mimansa*** and ***Vedanta***. Some scholars hold that the development of these philosophies took in the period of 200 BCE to 200 CE. These six philosophies are also referred to as the ***astika philosophies*** or the orthodox school, as they accepted the authority of the Vedas and believed in the validity of its doctrines, unlike the *nastik* or unorthodox schools of Buddhism, Jainism and others.

The **Samkhya** was a **rationalist school** whose philosophy revolved around the dualistic concepts of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. While *Purusha* was the Supreme Consciousness, *Prakriti* implied nature whose bond with the *Purusha* created the *jiva* (the living being). Its belief system of the true knowledge being an emancipator of the *jiva* is considered a combination of rationalism and spiritualism. While ***Nyaya***, a **realist school** of philosophy dealt with formal reasoning and logic, ***Vaisheshika***, a **naturalist school** postulated the composition and functioning of the physical universe to the fundamental units called *paramanu* (atom). Thus, a spirit of logic, metaphysics and even other sciences were combined with spiritual seeking. The ***Yoga*** system of philosophy, propounded rationalism, analogous to the *Samkhya* but also expounded the virtues of ***karma*** (righteous action) as a means of salvation.

The other two schools comprised the **Vedic philosophy**. The former emphasised the rituals and practices and thus was a form of school of **philosophical realism**. The latter emphasised the right knowledge of *Advaita* philosophy or **non-dualistic monism** for salvation. Thus,

1.21: A sublime standing statue of Buddha from Gandhara School, personifying him as Godhead; location National Museum, New Delhi — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat



these diverse schools embodied a **liberalist and rational perspective of religious culture**, eventually laying the foundation of a **pluralistic approach to the seeking of the Divine**.

Overall, this was an **age of diverse thoughts and liberation from orthodoxy**, where numerous competing faiths emerged. At times, these multiple faiths exercised mutual influence; however, they did not converge to a singular belief system. Nor did it see the emergence of a predominant theology that could annihilate or subsume the others.

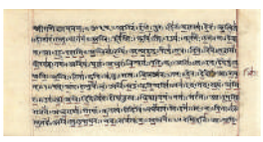
The tangible and non-theological cultural elements of this age were a marked departure from the erstwhile Vedic age. The socio-political administration saw the emergence of the **16 Janapadas** with Magadha amongst the most powerful of all. The **concept of a republic** also saw its birth in the Vajji Sangha of the Licchavis. However, **kingship** remained the main form of political administration. The emergence of Chandragupta Maurya who vanquished the Greeks and the Nandas, led to the emergence of a strong political establishment hitherto unseen. By the time the Ashokan regime ended, the **largest empire ever** whose boundaries covered the entire Indian subcontinent and even beyond, was founded. This influenced all elements of the socio-cultural life.

1.22: Lord Vishnu with consorts, the supreme deity in the Puranic age; sculpture in black stone, 12th century CE, Bihar Sharif, Pala period; location Bihar Museum, Patna — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

The emergence of **large human settlements and cities** were seen for the first time in more than a millennium (see Chapter 6). Agriculture, trade and commerce were much better organised and expanded. Political administration was diversified as seen from the appointment of officers/administrators for specific fields of work. This is best evident in Ashokan rock edicts where he proclaims the appointment of *mahamatras* (officers in charge for administration and justice) for *dhamma*, welfare of women, family, animals etc.

Stone as a building material gained prominence along with wood, with exquisite palaces such as Ashoka being built. New architecture was flourishing in chaitya, viharas and stupas. The stone pillars carrying Ashokan edicts with large capitals atop, weighing several tons and having mirror-like finish, and dexterous carving of petals, were **engineering and sculptural wonders** of this age. One such pillar at Sarnath, with a lion capital, has bequeathed an enduring legacy to the modern Indian Republic in the form of its **national symbol**. (see Chapter 6)

Literature and other intellectual elements too had a fair share of evolution. Seminal works such as *Shushruta Samhita*, a treatise on medicine and surgery; Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*, the earliest of works on Sanskrit grammar; *Arthashastra* of Kautilya which laid the rules of political-economic administration; *Panchatantra* by Vishnu Sharma and *Charak Samhita*, another fundamental work on medicine; all had birth in this phase. A range of non-canonical literature of Buddhists and Jains in the form of *Jatakas* and others



emerged. Schools of logic, mathematics and other sciences and important works in them developed. But most importantly, the emergence of the ancient university of **Taxila**, was truly the crowning glory of this **age of lore and reason**, reflecting the yearning for knowledge and education, of its people.

THE PURANIC AGE

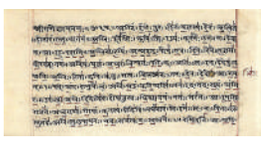
The next cultural phase saw the emergence of **Puranic culture**. The ensuing 800-900 years are referred to as the **golden phase** of the Hindu religion. This also coincided with the emergence of the **Gupta empire**. **The composition of Puranas,** the seminal canonical literature defining this age took place. The Absolute or the Brahman, which was God without attributes, continued to be the core of the Vedantic philosophy, but there was also the emergence of the **personal god** who was the supreme manifest with attributes. The religious emphasis shifted from the Vedic gods who were elements of nature to the **trinity of Brahma, Vishnu** and **Mahesh**. Cults of Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti emerged. Brahmanism saw a revival. *Dharmashastras* or the various schools of personal law and social code and ethics emerged. This was also the **Classical Age** and the next **cultural confluence.**

Puranas: The Texts Defining an Age

The word *Purana* means old or ancient, or historical. The Puranas are a part of the Smriti texts and cover a vast repository of canonical literature. Reference to Puranas is also seen in some Vedic texts such as Atharvaveda where the word *Itihasa-Purana* is referred to in Shatapatha Brahmana, thereby reflecting their antiquity. However, it was only in this age (200 BCE to 700 CE) that they attained popularity and were compiled in the present form (around 400 CE) thus ushering in the **Puranic age**. Overall, 18 Puranas are said to have been composed, which are often recognised as the *Mahapuranas* (main Puranas) and 18 other *Up-Puranas* are also recognised. The *Mahapuranas* are categorised into six main groups in terms of the central deity around which the anthology of tales or the narration of eulogy is built. Thus, there emerged an **age of polytheism.**

1.24: Harihar, a conception of unity of Vishnu (Hari) and Shiva (Hara). The right half depicts Shiva shown with a trishul (trident), left half depicts Vishnu holding a chakra (discus); sculpture 10th-11th century CE, Madhya Pradesh; location State Museum, Bhopal — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

1.23: Bhagavata Purana, one of the Mahapuranas, manuscript on palm leaf, 16th century West Bengal; current location, Los Angeles, Museum of County Art — Wikimedia Commons



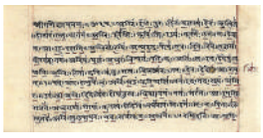
From Profound Monotheism to Vibrant Polytheism

While the Advaita philosophy and Vedic dharma continued to remain the cornerstone of the canonical belief, over a period of time there was a gradual assimilation of the popular beliefs, regional traditions and even local conception of divinity. The notion of the Brahman without attributes remained the pinnacle of the conception of the Supreme, but now the religion also recognised the personal god or the conditioned Brahman. Thus, the belief in divinity as Supreme consciousness expanded to include its physical manifestation. God with attributes became the mainstream thought. This God was perceived varyingly, as **Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti** etc. Further, the emergence of the divine trinity took place, which posited the three cosmological roles of the Supreme in the three physical manifestations of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. The Vedic gods like Indra, Agni, Varun, Mitra, Soma etc. remained to be significant, albeit with the status of demi-gods or *devas* and not that of the cosmological creators. Hence, there emerged a religious tradition that harboured a **profound monism as well as a vibrant polytheism.**

A Syncretic and Assimilative Culture

The Puranic tradition was not only assimilative of divergent philosophical traditions that perceived the Supreme as that with or without attributes but also imparted a vast firmament under which the numerous sectarian traditions flourished and even integrated. The *Mahapuranas* were classified as per a central deity such as Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, Surya, Agni, Ganesh, Skanda etc. Thus, it recognised the extant traditions revolving around the different personal gods and accepted them as a part of the vast Puranic pantheon. Though the sectarian tradition of devotion as seen in Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism etc. found consonance in them, the Puranas in themselves were pluralistic. The union of **Shiva-Shakti** brought out in the Puranas, is incomplete without the cardinal conception of the female divinity. Thus, this very notion emphasises on integration and harmony of the seemingly diverse forces

1.25 & 1.26: Goddess Durga (left) & and Goddess Gauri (right) the forms of Shakti and expression of female divinity in the Puranic age; whose worship was popularised by Markandeya Purana and Devi Mahatmya; sculpture 10th-11th century CE, Madhya Pradesh; location State Museum, Bhopal — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat



of the cosmos. Similarly, lord Shiva and lord Vishnu the godheads around which two distinct traditions flourished are considered often the manifestation of the same deity. Even the **trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh** find a merger in one singular deity referred often as **Mahavishnu** or **Mahashiva**, thereby creating a convergence of the pantheon of Gods and believing in monism and Unity.

The Puranas encompassed the multitude of beliefs, seeing the Divine in all Its grand manifestations. They were not exclusionary or prescriptive as to corral the belief systems into a singular perspective or a dominant doctrine. As **Dr. Radhakrishnan** puts it in the book, *The Hindu View of Life*, '*Puranic Hinduism accepted the significance of different institutions of reality and the different scriptures of the peoples living in India, (sarvagama pramanya).'* Thus, it engendered a theistic pluralism and accommodative culture.

The cult and belief in the Dravidian conception of the ***Saptamatrikas*** and the pre-Vedic mother Goddess finds reflection in the worship of **Shakti** and her numerous manifestations. The concept of **Pashupati** of the pre-Vedic period and **Rudra** of the early Vedic period is integrated into the worship of **lord Shiva**. As per scholars, the legend of one of the chief Dravidian warrior-philosopher gods, **Murugan** or Subramanya gets integrated with the Kartikeya or Kumar in Puranic culture and his legends find expression in the Skanda-purana. While monism and convergence with the Vedantic philosophy remain the cornerstone of Puranas, their all-embracing outward manifestation, offered sufficient space for numerous faiths and belief systems to flourish and even integrate.

The Fountainhead of the Culture of Bhakti

While earlier Vedic traditions were centred on the ritualistic culture (*karma-kanda*) or the profound knowledge (*jnana*) based *Advaitic* spiritualism, the conception of a Supreme manifest with attributes, enabled the evolution of a tradition, centred around a **personal godhead**. Thus **Bhagavata-Purana** (*Srimada Bhagavata* or *Bhagavatam*), amongst the most important and well-known Puranas, is dedicated to the Bhakti (devotion) of Lord Krishna. Many other Puranas are dedicated to Lord Vishnu. **Shiva-Purana**, **Skanda-Purana, Markandeya-Purana, Linga-Purana** and other Puranas which capture the legends of the Lord Shiva, have formed the central tenets of Shaivism. The **Markandeya-Purana** which incorporates ***Devi Mahatmya*** has been the sacred scripture of Shaktism (worship of Goddess Durga and the numerous forms of female divinities). The conception of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu also came in vogue. Of these, the incarnations of Sri Ram and Sri Krishna were the most popular.

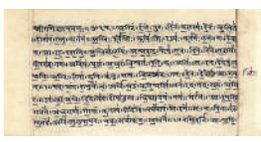
The Age of Smritis

The Puranic culture also paved the way for the popularity of Smriti texts such as **Ramayana**, **Mahabharata** and other traditions that were centred on the reincarnation of the Godheads. These Smritis by some accounts are said to have been compiled in this age, while some scholars believe them to be of much greater antiquity. However, there is a general acceptance that it was in the Puranic age that the Smritis of Ramayana and Mahabharata became popular. Along with these Smritis emerged a culture inspired by their values and ethics. These manifested in the canonical literature and **other tangible elements of this age**.

An Encyclopedic Account of a Civilisation

The Puranas were not just literature reflecting the theological beliefs of the age. They were indeed more than a treatise on the practice of devotion. Their extensiveness and the bewildering diversity of topics covered by them are truly encyclopaedic. Five key subjects referred to as the *panch-lakshanas* (five signs) are integral to Puranas. These include; ***Sarga***-the subject of the creation of the universe; ***Pratisarga***-their recreation after dissolution or secondary creation; ***Vansha***-the genealogy of gods and also of sages; ***Manvantra***-the creation of the human race and the account of the first human beings (*Manus)* in the numerous secondary creations and ***Vansanucharitam***-the genealogical and historical account of the solar and lunar dynasties. Thus, they functioned as a repository of cosmological hypotheses as well as a historical account of its age.

The **description of the various gods and their incarnations** is also an integral element of their composition. The **Bhagavata** comprising nearly 18000 shlokas (verses) describes the numerous *Avatars* of lord Vishnu (Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Narasimha etc.), besides that of the *bhakta avatars* (incarnation of devotees) such as Prahalad, Narada, Kapila etc. The **Skanda Purana**, the longest of Puranas comprising a mammoth 81,100 verses, recounts the birth of Skanda (also known as Kartikeya and Murugan,) the son of Shiva and Parvati. It describes the narratives of him as the leader of the army of *devas*. The **Garuda Purana,** which centres around lord Vishnu is arranged as a dialogue between the deity (lord Vishnu) and his

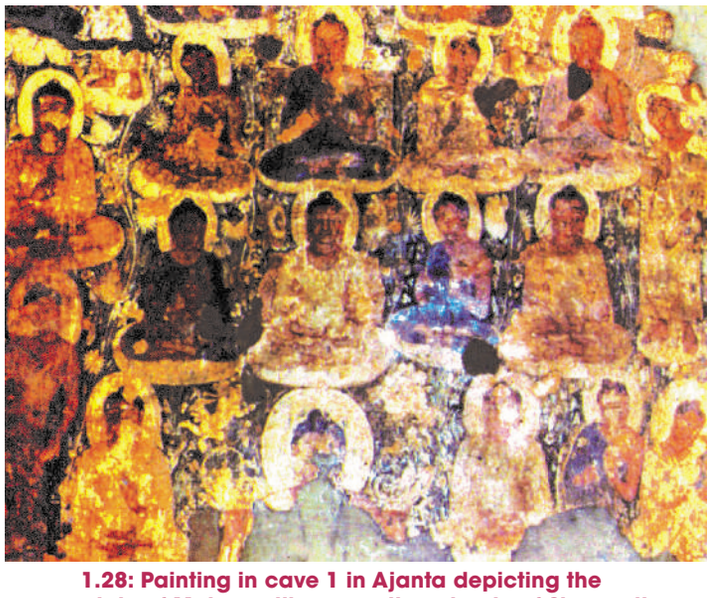


vahana (celestial vehicle) *Garuda*. This Purana covers an astounding range of topics including cosmology, numerous gods and their relationship, philosophies of *Yoga* and *Samkhya*, *moksha*, *karmic* cycles, rebirth and even the Upanishadic philosophy. The geography of *Bharatavarsha* (India), sites of pilgrimage, account of the salient rivers, diseases and medicines, astronomy, astrology and Hindu calendar system, architecture of homes and temples, rites of passage, different virtues to be emulated, duties of king and statecraft and even rules of grammar and genre of literature are some of the topics described in its wide array. Thus, the Puranic culture also engendered a tradition of repositing the diverse social knowledge for posterity.

The Golden Age

This was also the golden age of Hinduism. The Brahmanical religion staged a resurgence. Support of royalty from some of the Kushana rulers and later from the Gupta dynasty fuelled the growth of Hinduism for the next half a millennium and more. Although Buddhism and Jainism too remained in reckoning, the Brahmanical religion had again become the mainstream theology. The religious philosophy now incorporated not only the Vedantic thought and the Varnashrama dharma but also the tradition of personal god and devotion to the deity.

1.27: Buddha (left) and Maitreya Buddha (future Buddha) depicted in a painting on a door panel in cave no. 17 in Ajanta

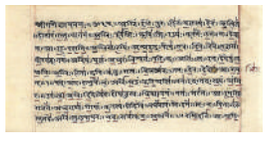


1.28: Painting in cave 1 in Ajanta depicting the anecdote of Mahapratiharya or the miracle of Shravasti. The story depicts one of the rare incidents where Buddha performs miracles. This was to affirm his spiritual powers before King Prasenjit of Kosala, in a challenge by six ascetics doubting his spiritual powers.

Another defining feature of the Puranic age was the conception of the **Dharmasutras** and the **Dharmashastras,** a genre of theological texts that prescribed the codes of righteous conduct, ethics and moral principles (*dharma*). These governed the discharge of individual and social duties for different classes (*varna*) in different stations (*ashramas*) of life, be it for *Brahmacharya* (student-hood), *Grihastha* (house-holdership), *Vanaprastha* (retirement from

1.29: Painting in cave 17 Ajanta depicting people of different lands/non-natives listening to Buddha's sermon of Dharma on his descent from heaven

1.27, 1.28 & 1.29: Ajanta Paintings, an epitome of the tangible elements of ancient Indian culture — Courtesy, Maharashtra Tourism



1.30: Rockcut Kailasa temple at Ellora Caves; largest monolithic temple, a wonder of ancient age — Courtesy, Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation

social affairs) and *Sanyasa* (renunciation). The codes of ethics and duties of different sections, be it the kings or the brahmins etc. were all governed by these treatises. They also contained the rules of inheritance and the laws of civil and criminal justice for society.

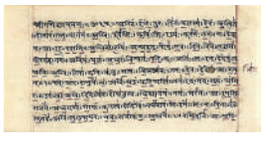
The Dharmashastras are said to be many in number (between 18 and 100). They emanate from the Dharmasutras, which in turn are a part of the Kalpa *Vedanga*. While the Dharmasutras of Apastambha, Gautama, Baudhyayana and Vashistha have survived to this day, the Manu-smriti, Yajnavalkya-smriti, Narada-smriti and Vishnu-smriti are the extant Dharmashastras. Thus, through these treatises the codes of conduct and specific personal and social laws were codified, thereby integrating and providing a force of sustenance for the Aryan society. Since their conception in the Puranic age, the Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras have shaped the discourse of Hindu society for the next two millennia.

The Puranic age also encompassed the **golden period of Indian history**, besides that of Hinduism, particularly in the reign of the Guptas (320 CE to 550 CE). This was also **the Classical Age**, the period in which culture, art, sciences, philosophy, economy, literature, mathematics, astronomy, architecture, sculpture, agriculture, trade commerce administration and other pursuits of human life reached unsurpassed heights. The political stability and sovereignty over a large part of India coupled with an efficient and people-oriented administration heralded an age of prosperity and progress.

This was the age when the **Nalanda Mahavihara** was founded and flourished. Along with the other Mahavihara universities of this age, including the **Vallabhi** (Valabhi) in Gujarat and **Pushpagiri** in Orissa, the dawn of an age of learning took place. The world-famous murals of **Ajanta**, the rock-cut caves and sculptures of **Ellora, Elephanta, Udayagiri** and **Khandagiri** were the contributions of this age.

The field of sculpture saw the emergence of the indigenous **Mathura** and **Sarnath** schools of art which were worthy successors of the **Gandhara** and **Amaravati** schools which too flourished in the Puranic age. The beginning of **free-standing temples** as seen in the Dashavatara temple at Deogarh and Chaturmukhlinga temple at Nachna, marked the beginning of a new age of temple construction and architecture.

The Puranic age also witnessed the emergence of a range of canonical literature of Hinduism like Puranas, Smritis and Dharmashastras which were either composed or compiled. Buddhist Pitakas and



1.31 & 1.32: The sculpture of the 'The House of Courtesan, Vasantasena', a unique work with carving on both sides of the stone slab of a red sandstone, a work of Mathura school, Kushana period, 2nd century CE; location National Museum, New Delhi — photographs by Madhukar K Bhagat

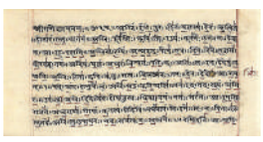
Jain Agamas and sutras (like Tattvarthasutra) were the other canonical texts that were compiled in written form and widely propagated.

This was also the age of **classical Sanskrit literature**. Notable literary figures like **Bhasha, Sudraka, Ashvaghosha, Kalidasa, Bharavi, Bhatti, Magha, Vishakhadatta, and Dandin**, among others contributed richly to Indian literature. *Swapnavasavadatta* of Bhasa, *Mrichhaktika* of Sudraka, *Abhijnanashakuntalam* (and other texts) of Kalidasa, *Mudrarakshasa* of Vishakhadatta and many other literary creations of this age are considered all-time great classics.

This was an era of unprecedented growth of arts, science mathematics, astronomy, medicine and other disciplines. **Natyashashtra** of Bharata, a treatise on different art forms, Panini's **Ashtadhyayi**, a treatise on Sanskrit grammar, **Kamasutra** of Vatsayayana, **Yogasutra** of Patanjali, **Panchatantra** of Vishnu Sharma, **Aryabhatiya** of Aryabhatta, **Brihat-Samhita** of Varahamihira and many other singular treatises were composed in this period.

Approximation of the **value of (Pi),** the concept of **earth rotating** on its axis, explanation of **solar and lunar eclipses** (by Aryabhata), concept of **planetary motion** (by Varahmihira), formal rules for **computing with zero** (by Brahmagupta), writing of numbers in the **decimal system** form, and the use of a circle for zero (by Bhaskara-1) were some such ground-breaking concepts which the European nations had to wait for another millennium to understand and discover.

It was an age of great prosperity for the **Dravida region** too, which saw similar progress in all realms of society; under the Vakatakas in central India and the Pallavas further south. The region also flourished in the reign of the Chalukyas and the other dynasties. The Puranic age also overlaps with the third of the Sangams which saw unprecedented progress and laid the cultural foundations of the society for the coming centuries. Treatises of the Sangam period extant today including the *Tolkappiyam*, the *Pathupattu* and the *Ettutogai* reveal the growth of language and literature. Trade and commerce with kingdoms in Srilanka, Burma (Myanmar) and Mainland Southeast Asia were established, eventually leading to the emergence of the maritime power of the Cholas in the ensuing centuries. The Brahmanical traditions also saw an upsurge in the region, and by the end of the Puranic age culminated in the Nayanar and the Alvar movements of Shaivism and Vaishnavism, which heralded the next epoch of the cultural evolution.



The Golden Prime of India: The Rule Under the Guptas

The cultural uprising was based upon the central idea underlying Dharma from early times. It predicated an unalterable faith in human endeavour, self-restraint (*samyama*) and self-discipline (*tapas*). Emphasis was laid on individual experience and becoming, rather than on belief and the scriptural word; it was reached only when a man could shed his limitations and become divine in this life. Running through a diversity of religious beliefs and social outlooks, it also laid an emphasis on the observance of the great vows— *mahavratas*—of non-violence, truth, non-stealing, continence and non-possession as essential steps in progress. All conduct, in order to be worthy of respect, had to be harmonised and regulated by ethical and spiritual values calculated to help the fulfilment of this ideal. The four Gupta emperors, (omitting, of course, the ignoble Ramagupta) in maintaining the ideals of a *chakravarty*, made the state at one and the same time powerful, stable, dynamic and happy. The age saw the speculative thought among others of Vasubandhu and the Nayanmars; the perfect lyric and drama of Kalidasa; the astronomical discoveries of Varahamihira; the iron pillar of Delhi; the beginnings of the structural temples; the beauty of the early Ajanta frescoes; the rise of Vaishnavism and Shaivism; the completion of the Mahabharata and the composition of Vayu-Purana and the Matsya-Purdnas. The empire was not merely based on conquests or administrative efficiency; its greatness lay in its integral outlook. Its strength was based as much on military strength as on internal order and economic plenty; the sap of its vitality was drawn from the roots of ancient tradition and race memory which they maintained, re-interpreted and replenished. The upsurge of the Kshatriya hierarchs of Madhyadesa and Magadha, loyally pledged to stability, constituted the steel-frame of the imperial structure. Nor was the splendour of the empire an isolated phenomenon surrounding the individuality of the rulers. The people, having discovered in their traditional way of life something noble and splendid, only saw it reflected in the greatness of their rulers.

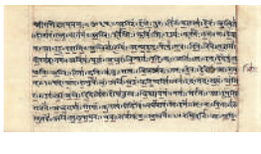
…The Gupta emperors became the symbols of a tremendous national upsurge. Life was never happier, **our culture never more creative than during the Golden Prime of India.**

Dr. K.M. Munshi

(Excerpts from the foreword to the book,' The Classical Age'; A Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan publication)

The Enduring Legacy

The **Puranic age shaped the coming centuries like no other**. It left an enduring legacy in all walks of life, be it the emergence of the personal god, the cult of devotion, the popularity of the Smritis, the concept of incarnations, the codification of laws in the Dharmasutras, the emergence of grand universities, the free-standing temples, the literary classics, the scientific theories and mathematical concepts or the flourishing trade and commerce. But the most significant legacy of this culture was the **syncretic tradition** of devotion which encompassed even the seemingly divergent beliefs and which proved to be a **singular factor of integration** of the society for the coming millennium and more.



GKP

Unravelling

Indian Culture

The Essence of Bharat

Medieval India

MADHUKAR KUMAR BHAGAT

8

The Cultural Eras: Medieval India

Culture is the widening of the mind and the spirit

– Jawaharlal Nehru

8.1: Taj Mahal, a dream in marble — Courtesy, Uttar Pradesh Tourism

BHAKTI: THE CULTURE OF DEVOTION

In the latter half of the first millennia emerged the next cultural phase. It was a **wave of devotion** that endeavoured to shed the accumulated debris of centuries and infuse life in the socio-religious domain hitherto becoming moribund. It strived to regain the dulled sheen of Dharma and to revive the religious philosophy to its pristine self. It worked to purge the religion of its Brahmanical orthodoxy and evils like untouchability, and loosen the grip of the hardened caste system while reinvigorating the essence of the Santana Dharma. Its tenets were **based on devotion to God** and the **equality of mankind, eschewing ritualism and dogma, while emphasising on simplicity and love for fellow beings**. The movement reached its zenith in the 15th and 16th centuries and is referred to as the **Bhakti movement**, which was truly a cultural renaissance.

The Emergence of the New Wave

This period of the 6th century CE and onwards was witness to diverse influences on the Hindu religious thoughts. The Vedic traditions had given way to the Puranic culture. While the Brahmanical ideas were getting disseminated in the society, at the same time local beliefs and practices were also influencing the broader Hindu thought. The influence of Buddhism and Jainism had started to stagnate and even decline. In the later centuries, the Upanishadic philosophies of *Advaita* and *Dvaita* were being again reaffirmed. Amidst all the turbulence in society, there was the emergence of theological systems of belief and practice, which emphasised upon devotion to God and reform of religious belief and practices.

8.2: Lord Shiva as Bhikshatan Murthi (supreme mendicant); a culture of worship of Lord Shiva, popular in South India post the emergence of the Bhakti movement and expressed in different art forms. A sandstone sculpture (medieval period), Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu; Vijayanagar period; location Government Museum, Chennai — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

This was the wave of Bhakti which emerged in South India in **the 6th century CE** with the preachings of the **Alvars** (Vaishnavites) and the **Nayanars** (Shaivites). It was a distinct departure from the Puranic religious thought process and was a philosophy more egalitarian and inclusive. Their Bhakti tradition was characterised by the penning of songs and poems in service and love of God. The saints and devotees followed the tradition of travelling from place to place, singing hymns in praise of the Lord. Over the period of centuries, the movement in the southern part of India saw the emergence of 12 prominent Alwars including **Periyalvar** and his daughter **Andal.** The history of Nayanars identifies 63 saints who contributed significantly to the philosophy of Nayanars and their corpus of devotional verses. Amongst these, the most important were **Sambandar, Sundarar, Appar** and **Manikkavasagar**. Later, in the movement of the **Lingayats** (Virshaivas) spearheaded by **Basavanna** in the 12th century, besides the cult of devotion, there also emerged the opposition to the caste system, Brahmanical orthodoxy and support to widow remarriage and the status of women.

The regions of Northern and Eastern India were witness to this parallel movement much later. Though movements like that of the **Naths, Yogis** and **Siddhas** did appear in the North in the latter half of the first millennium and had some following, they could not take the shape of a larger movement. These movements however did question the caste rigidities, Brahmanical superiority and Vedic ritualism and brought out its own unique conception of attaining salvation through yoga, ascetism and other practices. Their messages were exemplified in the lives of their religious leaders who practised a life of simplicity, asceticism and renunciation as a means of salvation, thus inspiring others. However, they did create certain monastic orders which provided continuity to their teachings.

It was only with the emergence of **Madhavacharya** (13th century), **Jnaneshwar** (13th century) **Namdeva** (13th-14th century) and **Ramananda** (14th-15th century), that the first waves of Bhakti began to sweep

8.3: Sheshashayi Vishnu (Vishnu lying on Shesh Naag), a medieval sculpture symbolic of the devotional art forms of Bhakti culture; Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

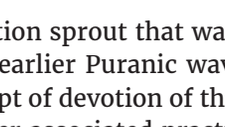
the North and Central India. A couple of centuries later, this would be a momentous movement. The character of the Bhakti movement of the medieval period was not only as vibrant as the earlier movement of the South, but took shapes even more diverse. Rather than being a homogenous singular mass or just following the Puranic trend of devotion to a personal god, the culture of Bhakti now manifested itself in forms of different philosophical schools such as *Advaitism* (dualism) or *Dvaitism* (monism), the *Saguna* and the *Nirguna*. Besides, there also emerged different Bhakti sects (*sampradayas)* which were based on devotion to different Gods and deities such as *Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism, Smartism,* etc.

This wave reached its peak in the 15th–16th century, period. It encapsulated the teachings of many mystic saints and preachers like **Ramananda, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Chaitanya, Mirabai, Namdeva, Narsinh Mehta, Soordas, Tulsidas, Ravidas, Sankardeva, Dadudayal, Tukaram** etc. The bevy of philosophers and poets did not profess or follow a singular tradition like did the Alvars or the Nayanars. Many of these like Ramananda, were the initiators or *gurus* of a *sampradaya* (sect). Some like Jnaneshwar, Namdeva, Tukaram and others were followers of the *Varkari* tradition of Maharashtra. The Chaitanya movement in the Bengal region metamorphosed into Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Mira's bhakti was resplendent with her love for her spiritual consort. The teachings of Kabir bordered around the *Nirguna Brahma* with influences of Sufism. The teachings of Guru Nanak which emphasized upon *Shabad* and *Naam Simran*, metamorphosed into a separate religion a few centuries later.

Thus the movement in its entirety could not be considered a monolith, nor this wave of Bhakti could be defined by a common theme of a sect, a common religious aspiration, devotion to a singular personal god, common religious practice or even a singular practice of attainment of salvation. But they all invariably decried ritualism, caste rigidities, social inequalities and other evils. Most importantly, they emphasized on devotion to God, love for the Supreme, faith and surrender to Him, equality of all beings and piety for fellow humans. Their messages were transmitted through the language of the masses, emphasized human goodness and thus touched the very lives of the common people.

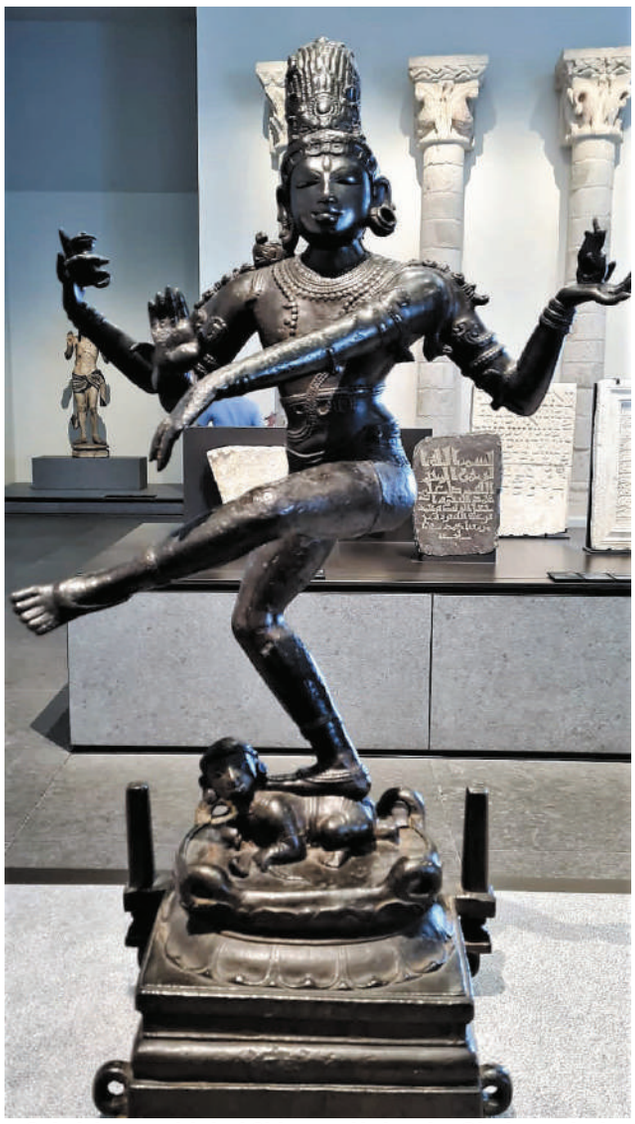
The Ground for Bhakti

But why and how did this culture of devotion sprout that was spread over a period of a millennium and bloomed into a new cultural epoch? The earlier Puranic wave had already introduced the concept of a personal god which emphasised the concept of devotion of the individual to the Divine. However, in later years, the emphasis on ritualism and other associated practices again emerged. A section of historians believe that the Bhakti movement was partly a response to the **Brahmanical orthodoxy** and rigidity in the **caste system**. Unlike the mainstream Brahmanical thought process, the philosophy of all the Bhakti



schools provided an inclusive platform to the marginalised sections of society with its emphasis on the equality of mankind. While the Brahmanical superiority mandated that the performance of the *yagnas* and the reading of the scriptures was the exclusive preserve of a specific *varna*, Bhakti streams made no such distinctions or imposed any such fetters. Thus, it offered **hope for salvation to all**, including women, artisans, weavers, cultivators, and untouchables who were hitherto relegated to the side margins in the Brahmanical spiritual scheme. Gradually, it gained appeal in the large underprivileged sections of society and on certain occasions even drew followers from amongst the Brahmans and upper caste. At times, it even emerged as a divergent religious thought as was seen in the case of Veershaivas/the Lingayayts in southern part of India.

By the 8th century CE, the **stagnation and decline in Buddhism and Jainism** had already commenced. This was partly owing to pollution in their thoughts as in the case of Buddhism. Besides, the decline in royal patronage also withered their social influence. The emergence of tantric Buddhism and streams like Vajrayana, with a belief in a myriad of Gods and ritualistic practices, obliterated the difference between the so-called *naastik* (unorthodox) traditions and the mainstream *Puranic* beliefs. There was growing disenchantment of masses from them which also enabled the emerging religious thought based on devotion, to occupy the ceded spiritual-religious-social space.



8.4: A bronze idol of Shiva as Nataraja, Chola period, a confluence of the culture of Bhakti and the art of bronze idol making which reached its zenith in the medieval Chola rule; Location, Louvre Museum, Abu Dhabi — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

Political patronage was another factor helping the growth of Bhakti. Most illustrative of this trend was the support of the Chola kings in Tamil Nadu to the Shaivite movement, which was critical in its growth and spread. Political patronage of the emerging movement also lent credibility to the rule and imparted greater popularity to the king's administration.

The **emergence of Islam and the spread of Sufism** too influenced the growth of this culture, particularly in its later phases. Islam, with its philosophy of monism, is believed to have inspired social and philosophical thinkers. Its outlook of an egalitarian social order touched the masses. More importantly, the growth of Islam and its proselytising impact, particularly due to the support of the political regime, may have spurred the religious men to peer at the essence of the traditional faith of the land. Sufism too had an important influence on mainstream society, particularly its emphasis on the unity of God and equality of mankind. But more importantly, the tradition of Sufism, which was based on purity of thought and conduct, asceticism, mysticism, and opposition to dogma and materialism, made it readily acceptable amongst the masses and royalty alike.

But the persona of the **Bhakti saint-poets** exemplified in their spiritual messages imbued in devotion, and their pious and endearing personal conduct was perhaps the soul of this movement. Their simple discourses in the **local languages** followed the oral traditions. These were often disseminated as songs and poems by the wandering saints. These were easy to grasp and emulate and readily accepted by the masses. The endeavour of their disciples in reaching out to the masses with the teachings of the masters, was particularly significant in the spread of the movement.

The **Upanishadic philosophy of Advaita Vedanta** and the efforts of **Adi Shankaracharya** who founded the four *mathas,* thus imparting a formal structure to the Hindu religion and initiating the order of monkhood, could be considered the very substratum of the movement. The *Vishistadvaita* philosophy of **Ramanuja** which emphasized on Bhakti as a means of emancipation, and the philosophy of *Dwaitavaad* of **Madhavacharya** which glorified the tradition of a personal god with attributes, were the additional layers. The teachings of the ***Varkari*** saints like **Jnaneshwar**/(Gyaneshwar) and **Namdeva,** the traditions of **Ramanand, Nanak, Vallabhacharya, Kabir, Chaitanya, Sankardeva, Raidas, Mirabai, Tulsidas** etc., were the superstructures on this firm ground. These and other mystic saints and their message of devotion heralded and sustained this movement for the centuries to come.

Salient Philosophies of the Bhakti Movement

This culture of Bhakti was not the product of a singular theological canon but indeed a fusion of a multitude of belief systems although analogous in essence. **Pluralism of thought** and **philosophies** was indeed a singular feature of this cultural epoch. The period of centuries saw a number of philosophies and practices taking root and influencing each other. These include the different schools of Vedantic philosophy, the *Nirguna* and the *Saguna* streams of thought, many regional traditions and even Sufism.

Vedantism and the Dvaita and Advaita philosophies

The Upanishadic teaching, particularly that of Shankaracharya (*Advaitavaad*), Ramanujacharya (*Vishista Advaitavaad*) and Madhavacharya (*Dvaitavaad*) had a salutary effect on reformation of the Hindu religion. It emphasized upon the deeper spiritual and philosophical traditions of Vedanta as enunciated in the Upanishads, reducing the influence of ritualism of the Mimansa school and orthodoxy of the Brahmanical order.

The Bhakti movement incorporated in its fold both the ***Advaita*** philosophy, or monism, and the ***Dvaita*** philosophy, or dualism. The former believed in the *atman* being a reflection of the *Brahma* and the two not being separate entities hence the name Advaita (or no-two). The latter philosophy identified both as separate entities with the *Atman* eventually merging with the *Brahma* through salvation. Elements of both philosophies can be found in the teachings of Bhakti saints.

Nirguna and Saguna

The Bhakti movement also saw the emergence of two distinct streams of devotion, the ***Nirguna;*** or those who believed in a formless and attributeless God (*Brahma*) and the ***Saguna;*** where God was perceived to having distinct attributes and was even personalised. Some preachers like Kabir, who believed in a formless God were the exponents of the *Nirguna Brahma* school. Kabir's reference to *Hari* in *dohas* (couplets) is not with reference to Lord Vishnu as is otherwise implied by *Hari*, or to his incarnations of Rama or Krishna, but to that creator who is formless and infinite. Similarly, his reference to Rama is not to the Rama who was the king of Ayodhya but to the divine God. This was akin to the *Brahma* of the Vedantists.

Many saint poets like Mirabai, Tulsidas and Soordas, were devotees of the *Saguna Brahma* school of Bhakti. Their teachings centred around a specific god with attributes, or a god who was a human incarnate. Thus, Mira's songs were penned to express her love for Krishna (an incarnation of lord Vishnu) who was her spiritual consort. The Ram of Tulsidas was the crown prince and (later) the king of Ayodhya. He was the human incarnate lord Vishnu, with all the attributes and manifestations of a mortal form.

Similarly, the *padas* (hymns) of Soordas were in the glory of Sri Krishna, capturing the beauty of his childhood, the tender motherly love of Yashoda, the pranks of young cowherds and the unconditional love of the *gopikas* for Krishna. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the proponent of *Achintya Bheda-abheda* philosophy and the founder of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, popularised Krishna *bhakti* through the means of songs and dance.

8.5: Devotion to lord Vishnu, a pivotal feature of medieval Bhakti, represented in the Dashavatar (from Matsya avatara on right of the picture to Kalki avatara on left of the picture); bronze idols, 18th-19th century South India, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

The teachings of Guru Nanak, like Kabir, were not centred around a personal God or any specific manifestation of God and were a part of *Nirguna* school. Nanak's teachings which also emphasized *Shabad* (the name of God) and *Naam-Simran* (remembering the god) by means of singing of devotional hymns had means of expression of the devotion akin to the *Saguna* school, albeit in a framework of monotheistic philosophy and attributeless God.

Thus, while devotion was the nucleus of this cultural wave, there was diversity in the fundamental philosophies that characterised it, and in the practices adopted by the schools. Evidently, this movement was characterised by **the singularity of its essence and plurality of manifestation**.

The Essence of Bhakti Culture

The essence of the culture of Bhakti is described by eminent historian R.C. Majumdar, as **devotion to that one and only one God, as the only means of salvation**. In the book 'The History and Culture of the Indian People, The Delhi Sultanate, (Vol VI), he describes the salient characteristics of this cultural phase as below.

……the most characteristic feature of the religious evolution of the period was the prominence attained by a number of devotees who are generally labelled as saints or mystics. These medieval saints, who have shed lustre on the age, possessed certain distinctive characteristics in common. They were ***non-sectarian*** *in the sense that they were not affiliated to, or at least were not leading members of, any particular sect, and* ***had no desire to establish a separate religious sect of their own****. These saints were free from the bondage of any particular creed and had* ***not blind faith in any sacred scriptures****, they attained illumination by individual exertion through* ***freedom of thought and self-culture.*** *They* ***did not observe any rituals or ceremonies, nor followed any dogma****, and most of them severely* ***denounced idolatry****. They* ***condemned polytheism, believed in one God****, and what is more important, realized the* ***unity of God*** *invoked by various religious sects under different names such as Krishna, Rama, Siva, Allah, etc.*

They believed in ***Bhakti (love or devotion) as the only means of salvation*** *and gave a very comprehensive interpretation and profound psychological analysis of the conception of Bhakti. This may be said to be their chief and permanent contribution to the religious thoughts of India. With them Bhakti meant single-minded, uninterrupted and extreme devotion to God without any ultimate motive, growing gradually into an intense love. This love was akin to the love of a man for dear and near ones and is graded by some into clear categories by analogies with human relations, such as devotion of a servant to a master, love between friends, affection of a mother for a child, and lastly the all-absorbing passion of a lover for his beloved. Brahman, the Supreme God, or ultimate reality, called as Rama, Hari, Krishna and by any other name or abstract idea, was the source of all joys or eternal bliss and was conceived as the supreme beloved.* ***God, it was maintained, does not live in a temple but in the heart of man****, and the physical body was regarded as the abode of all truth. The realization of all this, and* ***the approach to God through personal love and devotion alone, form the foundation of religious life****….*

RC Majumdar, chapter XVI titled 'Religion' in *The History and Culture of the Indian People, The Delhi Sultanate Vol VI*

Bhakti Culture and its Enduring Legacy

While the Bhakti saints did not profess any philosophy, tenet or belief system that could be described as fundamentally new, novel or unique, or which was not already in vogue in the theological landscape, yet, **culturally it engendered a new epoch**. The most significant of its legacy was indeed the **singular emphasis on devotion as the means of salvation** and devotion to that one God which was manifest in all though perceived differently. This indeed was a **syncretic and inclusive philosophy**. It also inherently implied equality of all, denial of caste prejudices, opposition to Brahminical order, shunning of ritualism and other religious dogma. To this extent, social reforms and Protestantism to religious orthodoxy could also be considered a social spin-off of this religious movement.

As **true Bhakti, faith in the divine and surrender to Him**, were considered to be the only prerequisite of salvation, it offered a ray of hope to all and in particular to the marginalised. The realisation of that true knowledge as that required by an Upanishadic scholar, that mandated a higher intellect and reasoning, was no more a necessity. A spirit imbued with love and surrender were the only ingredients essential for Bhakti, and hence its **fold was wide and encompassing,** and not restricted by the limits of scriptural learning. **Social Inclusivity** was indeed a hitherto forgotten virtue which this culture emphasised and which further influenced the society in the centuries to come.

The culture of Bhakti, with the essence of devotion, but permitting multiplicity of approach, was essentially **pluralistic**. Even though there was the unintended emergence of different sects, they were neither dismissive of the mainstream religion nor antagonistic to each other. Rather, the later emerging faith like Sikhism, was assimilative of the teachings of different saints and streams.

The preaching of these mystic saints was invariably in the **vernacular language** and even the texts composed by them were in these regional languages, as opposed to the classical Sanskrit, a tradition of the previous millennium. The compositions of Jnaneshwar (*Jnaneshwari* and *Amrutanubhav*) and Namdeva were in Marathi. Ramananda authored *Gyanlila* and *Yoga Chintamani* in the local dialect of

Hindi. Similarly, the compositions of Kabir (*Kabir Bijak*), *Sur-sagar* of Surdas, *Ramcharitmanas* of Tulsidas were in Braj and Avadhi. The works of Vidyapati (in Maithili), Meera (in Braj), Basavanna (*Vachnas* in Kannada) Guru Nanak, Narsinh Mehta, Rahim, Chaitanya and others were also reflective of this trend. Thus the growth of Bhakti also propelled the growth of *Apbhramsa* and the regional languages, from which the current-day Indian languages evolved. Besides, it also enriched **medieval literature** with a large corpus of theological and philosophical works.

A profound impact of Bhakti was indeed on the **regional culture**. Be it the teaching of Guru Nanak which was popular in the Northwest and formed the kernel of Sikhism which later spread in the region; the message of Chaitanya which heralded Gaudiya Vaishnavism with its rich cultural tradition in the East; the religious and cultural reforms engendered by Sankardeva in the Northeast which forms the cultural moorings of the region; the traditions of Varkari saints in Maharashtra region with the large mass of *Vachnas*; the household tradition of devotion to Sri Rama ushered by the following of Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas in Central and Northern India; all are indeed **cultural legacies of different regions, living and vibrant even to this day**.

But by far the most **significant contribution of the Bhakti culture** was to **bring out the essence of religion** hitherto lost in the morass of centuries of ritualism and orthodoxy. It thus endeavoured to **elevate this everyday religion to the highest levels of spirituality** which was yet comprehensible and compliable by the common folk. Thus, it enabled **Bhakti as a spiritual tradition to seep into every fibre of the social fabric**.

THE ISLAMIC WAVE AND THE CONFLUENCE OF CULTURES

With the advent of Islam, emerged another cultural phase of the country which was starkly unlike the previous epochs and was to make an indelible impact on the socio-political and cultural realm for the next half a millennium and more.

Although India came in touch with Islam through the Arabic traders in the 7th century CE and eventually post the conquest of Sind in the early 8th century, however, its reach within the country and its influence on the society was limited for the next five centuries. It was only with the establishment of the **Delhi Sultanate** post the Ghurid conquest in the early 13th century that the Islamic culture started to permeate far and deep. Later, with the emergence of the **Mughal rule** in the 16th century, it began to soak comprehensively into the societal mass.

The Early Phase of Islamic Culture

Islamic culture did not emanate from within the region and hence its advent and progress over the centuries was marked with tumult, particularly in the early phase of its arrival. Unlike the Sramana traditions, which though partly inconsistent with the Vedic Dharma, but still had an organic growth within the Indian society and evolved over a period of time, Islam, its principles and practices came to be superimposed on the social and cultural landscape of India. The larger exposure of Islam in the Indian subcontinent was not through the congenial sermons of the holy men who truly understood its divine essence, but post the bitter and bloody wars and conquests and ravages of decades. It was preceded by the destruction of the temples of Hindus and Jains and the Mahaviharas of the Buddhists, which were the repositories of the knowledge and the culture of the land.

The likes of Bakhtiyar Khilji who burnt the Mahaviharas of Nalanda and Vikramshila, or the likes of Mahmud of Ghazni and Timur who unleashed unparalleled barbarity, did little favour to the noble cause of the Islamic religion, if ever their motive was the establishment of Islamic rule in its true sense. The extensive campaigns of the Khiljis and Tughlaqs, which established the Islamic dynasties in India, were far from beneficent to the Hindus and other communities of the region. To begin with, rancour and bitterness between the Islamic and other communities was a natural consequence of the violent imposition of the purported Islamic dynastic rule. Thus, in the initial phase of the advent of Islamic culture, it took roots and grew as a foreign culture, aloof and at an arms-length of mainstream indigenous society. At this stage, there was little hope of intermingling of the two cultures which was later to become.

The initial followers of Islam in the country would have been those who came to India from outside, including those from Arabia, Turkey, Persia, and Afghanistan. Their culture was a legacy of what they inherited from their native societies of origin and brought to this land. They did not abandon their own cultural traits or accept in totality the socio-cultural practices of their newly adopted land. Hence

these cultural elements were not completely subsumed in the Indian milieu. In the first few decades of the 13th century, Islam and the Islamic culture were largely limited to the class of aristocracy, nobility and rich. Their lifestyle to an extent was characterised by their limited intermingling with the local population and lesser dependence on it for social discourse. Hence this inherited Islamic culture retained its identity but remained limited to certain social pockets without having a widespread distribution.

The initial decades of Islamic dynastic rule saw the displacement of the existing classes from their position of power to a certain extent. Be it the nobility, the Brahmins or others who had a position or a say in the kingship or administration, all of them found themselves disposed of their authority. The new classes enjoying these authorities were not indigenous. Understandably, the bitterness in these classes persisted. The peasants and the commoners were miffed at the levy of a tax like *jizya* or policies that were partial or inimical to their interests. As such, the social impact of the political transition was still raw to allow a congenial intercourse of the two cultures.

But **Islam** with its belief of **monotheism and equality to all** within its fold, had a proselytising impact particularly on trodden and marginal communities in the Brahmanical order. Over a period of time some of the indigenous population started to accept Islam. Although this class of people would not have been looked upon kindly by their earlier brethren, yet this set of population was critical in building the bridges between the two communities and the cross-cultural confluence happening later.

The messages of the **Sufi saints** particularly of the **Chisti** order were significant in the spread of Islam at this stage. Imbued with spiritualism and humanity, the teachings of **Moinnuddin Chisti, Qutubuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, Fariduddin Ganj-e-Shakar, Nizamuddin Auliya, Nasiruddin Chirag-e-Dehlvi** and others, transcended the religious dogma and myopic perspective of the traditional Islamic clergy. Their preaching based on the essence of monism and devotion to the Supreme found a familiar echo in some of the Vedantic and Bhakti traditions. The Sufis were respected even by the Hindu communities and thus they built a few bridges of cultural interchange across the communities.

8.6: The Qutab Minar, one of the earliest Islamic architecture and the tallest stone minar; it ushered in the concept of minars, a new architectural feature in the country — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

Over a period of decades when the tumult of the political invasions had subsided and the regular contact between the communities had become an integral part of daily lives and social necessity, the cultural influence started to permeate and grow. This influence was visible in both the **tangible** and the **intangible** elements of culture. But the very first confluence of Islamic culture and traditions was borne out of sheer necessity. This was visible in the earliest of the **Islamic architectures.**

8.7: Surface decoration at the base of the Qutab Minar. The fluted exterior pilasters (an ornamental element giving the appearance of a supporting column) have circular and projected designs to appear in the horizontal plan as whorls of a lotus. Inscriptions also reveal a floral design with Quranic verses and other inscriptions — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

Early Islamic architecture

With the establishment of the Delhi sultanate came the need for the construction of Islamic monuments. The earliest in these categories was the **Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque** in Delhi and the **Adhai din ka Jhopra** at Ajmer. Indian architecture was quite advanced by this age and boasted of some great monuments, temples, palaces and forts as seen in the tradition of Chalukyas, Chandelas, Cholas and others. However, these were based on trabeated construction (based on columns and beams) and arches were rare or were not true arches. The Islamic mosques on the other hand were arcuate (based on arches) with domes as an integral element instead of spires. However, the earliest Islamic structures were constructed by Indian craftsmen and not by foreign craftsmen who understandably had not accompanied the invading armies. These Indian craftsmen used the indigenous techniques and local materials to construct structures that were as per the Islamic tradition. This led to the **confluence of the two styles of architecture**.

8.8: Arches at Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque (late 12th & early 13th century), the earliest of Islamic structures built using the indigenous technique of trabeation — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

8.9: Floral motifs and calligraphic design patterns are also seen on the walls of other monuments at the Qutab Minar Complex (early 13th century) — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

The five arches of the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque built by Qutb-ud-Din Aibak, were not built as true arches i.e. by using interlocking bricks and keystones, but in the traditional architectural technique of trabeation. Thus, the arches were essentially false, or an ornamental element, and not a real load-bearing one. Different indigenous elements of surface decoration particularly the lotus flower motif and other iconography also found expression here which can also be seen in other structures of the **Qutab Minar complex**. A similar architecture of corbelled arches is also seen in Adhai Dinka Jhopra at Ajmer. Further, other elements of Hindu architecture also find their way either because of the use of material from the debris of the earlier temples or the use of remnants of the temples that were broken by the invading army. In any case, this led to the fusion of styles. But Islamic architecture also ushered in many **new elements** in the form of **domes, true arches, minars** and **minarets,** besides other structures like **mosques** and **mausoleums**. A variety of surface decoration also was incorporated such as **calligraphy** of **Quranic verses**, floral motifs; stone **lattice works** (*jali work*) pietra-dura and other art forms which evolved later. Thus, emerged what was known as the **Imperial Style of architecture of Delhi Sultanate**.

With the disintegration of the Delhi sultanate and the emergence of the regional sultanates of Bengal, Awadh, Gujarat, Malwa and Deccan, emerged the **provincial schools of architecture**. These not only led to the evolution of Islamic architecture and art in India but brought greater integration of indigenous art and local traditions. The **Gujarat School's** finesse, which had inherited the crafting skills of once flourishing Maru Gurjara style, was later reflected in the structures such as Jama Masjid, Ahmedabad, Siddi Sayyid Mosque, Rani Rupavanti's mosque, Rani Sipri's mosque and other structures. These boast of some exquisite carvings and are resplendent with the beauty of merger of the two art styles and the skills of the local craftsmen.

The **Malwa or the Mandu School** came up with some very original monuments such as the Jahaz Mahal resembling a floating ship and the Hindola Mahal designed like a swing in motion, Taveli Mahal, Hoshang Shah's Ashrafi Mahal, besides others that reflected the regional culture. The **Jaunpur School and Kashmir School of architecture** also saw the expression of many local elements and traditions. The Shaivite traditions and the Islamic traditions found a confluence in Kashmir. Besides the use of wood, another unique feature of this school was the Buddhist pagoda-style pyramidal multi-layered roof, which is seen in the Jamia Masjid of Srinagar.

8.10: Rani Rupavanti's/Rupmati's Mosque (mid-15th century) in Ahmedabad, with beautifully crafted pillars, projected balconies and latticed windows reflecting the fusion of architectural styles — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

The **Deccan School of architecture** too was markedly different from the earliest Imperial style. It had its own grandeur and assimilation of local traditions as witnessed in the structures in Gulbarga, Bidar, Bijapur, Ahmednagar, Golkonda and Hyderabad. The forts of Bijapur and Gulbarga, the Jami Masjid of Gulbarga, the Chand Minar at Daulatabad, Madarasa Mahmud Gawan, the royal tombs of Bidar etc. are some grand examples of this school in this phase. One of the most distinguishing monuments is indeed the Gol Gumbaj (or Gol Gumbad), of Bijapur (now Vijaypura) which is the second largest dome in the world and was built as a mausoleum of Muhammad Adil Shah in the mid-17th century. Thus, Indian Islamic architecture assimilated many of the Turkish, Persian and Saracenic architectural practices as well.

The use of sloping roofs and curved cornices which came to be known as the highly aesthetic **Bengal roof** was a uniqueness of the **Bengal School of architecture**. The use of baked bricks as the chief construction material which was locally available was another singular indigenous feature of this school. Adina Mosque in Pandua, Dakhil Darwaza in Gaur (Malda), the mosque city of Bagerhat, the Eklakhi Mausoleum, and the Choto Sona Mosque are some examples of this school of architecture. Besides, The Jor Bangla Temple and the Panch Ratna Temple at Bishnupur are some fabulous examples of baked-brick and sloped-roof architecture of Bengal School.

8.11: Hindola Mahal, Mandu (1425 to the end of 15th century), its sloping faces gives the appearance of a swing in motion, an example of the Malwa or the Mandu School of architecture — Courtesy, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board

8.12: Gol Gumbad Vijaypura (mid-17th century), the second largest dome in the world, a glorious example of medieval Deccan School of architecture — Courtesy, Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation

Food and clothing

Though architecture was one prominent and visible element that evolved under Islamic influence, there were many other areas like **food** and **clothing** that saw subtle influence of the new culture. The dishes such as *pilau* and *qawrma* which apparently had origin in Iran, Afghanistan or other central Asian regions, had assimilated Indian spices and food seasonings as per the local taste and culinary traditions. The new dishes were especially popular with the rich and the nobility class, especially on festive occasions. The development in the culture of dress was also palpable. India was known for its fabric, particularly of fine cotton and silk, a luxury less available in the Arabic regions. These fabrics were hence quickly integrated into the Islamic dresses which were otherwise earlier of coarser material. The practice of wearing headgear was also apparently assimilated, particularly by the Muslim nobility from the Indian tradition of Rajputs. A significant evolution in the dresses was the development of the art of stitching of clothes. The tight-fitting cloak for men and trouser-like dress to be worn by women below the loose skirt, developed in this phase. This tradition was absorption of foreign influence, whereas earlier the use

8.13: Pancha Ratna terracotta temple (mid-17th century) in Bishnupur, curved roof and baked brick structures, a uniqueness of Bengal School of architecture — Courtesy, Department of Tourism, West Bengal

of stitched dresses was less in vogue in India. A tradition of craftsmen who were of either of foreign origin or were weavers who had converted to Islam, grew, and this over the centuries led to the flourishing of the fabric industry, particularly in the regions of Deccan, Gujarat, Bengal and Bihar.

Music and painting

The influence of cultures on each other was especially visible in the **arts of music and painting** which were not as pronounced in the early Islamic traditions as were architecture and other elements of culture. Owing to perceptions of music and playing musical instruments (not singing) being prohibited in Islam, there was lesser evolution per se of musical traditions. Similarly, the painting of images of sentient beings was considered to be prohibited in Islam. But India had very ancient traditions of both art forms as seen in the *Natyashastra*, the other treatises, the Ajanta murals and temple arts of the Chalukyan, Pallava, Pandya, and Chola periods. While these exemplified the art forms of the previous millennium, Pala School of art (9th to 11th century), the schools of western India of Gujarat, Malwa, and Rajasthan (12th–15th century) Vijayanagara murals (14th to 16th century), Nayaka Paintings (14th to 17th century), Kerala Murals (16th to 18th century) represented the indigenous schools in the medieval period which flourished in different parts of India.

The Islamic culture could not remain untouched from the arts which were so deeply ingrained in the social fabric. The art of music in royal courts and even the tradition of *qawwali* in *khanqahs* developed. While the likes of Balban were great patrons of Indian music, Moinuddin Chisti is said to have permitted the singing of devotional *qawwali* every evening, a tradition that endured. This cultural confluence was also personified in eminent musicians like Amir Khusrau who is said to have popularised **khyal** form music which assimilated the Persian and Arabic elements of music in it. Khusrau also influenced other forms of medieval music and is even considered the father of Indian **qawwali**, **ghazal**, and **Urdu poetry**.

The art of paintings in the early phase of Islam was restricted to calligraphic work, floral designs, flower vases, arabesque patterns etc. These were particularly depicted in the monuments and buildings on columns and walls. The use of varied colours, tendrils, and figures of plants, birds and animals became more frequent with time. Greater evolution of painting as an art and progress to miniatures was yet to take place in the early phase of Islamic culture.

Literature and language

The influence of Islam and the establishments of the sultanates of Delhi and Deccan also led to the growth of a range of **Persian and Arabic literature**. Persian, which occupied a place of importance in the establishment as the official language of the Delhi Sultanate, was also the language of expression of the many poets from the 13th century onwards. A variety of texts ranging from Sufi to historical, biographical and secular literature were composed. The earliest and the most prominent of these authors was **Amir Khusro** (middle 13th century). His works are largely in Persian and are also credited with the popularization of *Hindavi* (Hindustani). Among his most important literary compositions, were the ***Diwans*** (collection of poetry) includes *Tuhfat-us-Sighr* (The Gift of Childhood), *Wasat-ul-Hayat* (The Middle of Life), *Ghurrat-ul-Kamat* (The Prime of Perfection), *Miftah ul-Futuh* (Key to the Victories), *Qiran-us-Sa'dain* (meeting of the Two Auspicious Stars), etc. **Amir Hasan Dehlvi** was another Sufi poet and contemporary of Amir Khusro who wrote a collection of poems or *Diwan-i- Hasan-I sied Dehlvi.*

Many works of **historical and political accounts** were composed such as, *Khaza'in ul-Futuh* (The Treasures of Victory) which describes the wars and the administration of Allaudin Khilji. *Tughlaq Nama* (book of the Tughlaqs), written by Khusro was another historical treatise that gave an account of the Tughlaq dynasty. *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi* by **Ziauddin Barani** (13th–14th century) contains a history of the Delhi Sultanate. Another of his works, *Fatwa-i-Jahandari* contains political ideas to be pursued by the Muslim rulers in consonance with the teachings of Islam. **Minhaz-i-Siraz Jujzani** (historian of the Mamluk dynasty 13th century) was another important author of political and historical accounts of this period. *Padmavat* written by **Malik Mohammed Jayasi** in the 16th century is a classic of this age.

One of the most significant aspects of the confluence of cultures is seen in the evolution of the **new language of Urdu** under the influence of the extant Indian languages, Persian and Arabic. While it retained the Persian script, the vocabulary and grammar were deeply influenced by the Indian languages. The new language proved to be a cultural bridge and a prominent repository of literature and other works in the centuries to come.

Religion and philosophy

Perhaps the most significant influence of the Islamic culture was on the intangible elements of religion and philosophy. Rather, the Islamic traditions and practices were as much influenced by the traditions of Hinduism as the latter was influenced by the former. Islam's emphasis on monism and equality to all within

its fold, inspired the Indian thinkers as well to purge the elements of caste rigidity, Brahmanical orthodoxy and ritualism. Gradual acceptance and conversion to Islam, particularly amongst the marginalized in the caste hierarchy, would have been akin to a wake-up call to the traditional Hindu order. Scholars believe that these factors were also significant in shaping the Bhakti movement. In the spiritually awakened saints of Bhakti and the revered Sufi saints, ran a common thread of philosophy that emphasized upon the devotion to that one Supreme as the means of salvation. Eschewing the external trappings, overcoming religious and caste/social divides, love for humankind etc., were some of the unequivocal messages of all. Thus, **in Bhakti and Sufism, a common meeting ground of the two religious philosophies emerged, where each influenced the other**. This was best exemplified in the teachings of **Kabir** and **Nanak** who imbibed from the culture of both traditions. They emphasized the essential sameness of the central tenets of the philosophy of each and exhorted their followers to shed the divide between Hindu and Muslim.

The emergence of a class of Islamic followers who were earlier Hindus brought in certain new elements of culture in Islam. These communities, over the period of centuries, had been governed by their own personal law, customs and practices. While they accepted Islam as a faith, they also continued to follow some of their own inherited traditions. Thus, the Islamic culture saw some infusion of traditional Indian customs, family laws and practices. These customs and laws had their own pros and cons, but what emerged was a gradual **Indianisation of the Islamic culture**.

The Growth of Islamic Culture

The Islamic culture remained on a trajectory of gradual growth since the 13th century. This phase owed less to the efforts of the monarchs and more to the social contact and connect of the people of two faiths and cultures, which living on the same land afforded and necessitated. With the advent of the Mughal empire in the 16th century and particularly during the reign of Akbar since the mid-16th century, the foundations were laid for the next phase of the cultural confluence. The political stability that the 50 years of the rule of Akbar afforded, his positive vision and inclusive outlook to the religious and social diversity of the land, coupled with the people-centric policies, enabled greater closeness of the two communities.

Akbar's disposition was not that of an alien ruler, but rather there was a conscious effort on his part to merge and integrate with the Indian society and to rule as its own. Discriminatory taxes like *jizia* and pilgrim tax were abolished which exhibited his communal impartiality. Even his forging matrimonial relationship with the Rajputs and having eminent Hindu kings like Raja Todar Mal and Raja Man Singh as his trusted minister and general respectively, among others, was reflective of his inclusive personal conduct and state policies. His reign was an **age of communal harmony** which immensely benefited from his respect for Hinduism and other religions. This was best exemplified in the harmonisation of the spiritual and philosophical elements of different religions in the syncretic faith of **Din-i-Ilahi** propounded by him.

Built on this inclusive socio-political platform, the next hundred years was a phase of incessant mingling and cultural growth. The Indo-Islamic cultural evolution was at its apogee and reached heights unseen in the past several centuries. Be it architecture, music, painting, literature or even the intangible elements like religion and philosophy; they all blossomed and displayed new hues. This age was truly an epoch of the confluence of two cultures and the meeting of the two oceans which led to the emergence of the **Hindustani culture**.

Later Islamic architecture

The period of the 16th century onwards saw a greater maturity in Islamic architecture and it's truly coming of age. The early promise was evident in some of the structures of the Lodi dynasty such as the tomb of Sikander Lodi; the *Sheesh Gumbad* (located in the Lodi-garden, Delhi) the mausoleum of Sher Shah Suri (at Sasaram), the Purana Qila (Old Fort, Delhi) and other structures in this complex. However, it is in the **Humayun's Tomb** that many elements of Persian architecture combine with Indian traditions to display grandness unforeseen in the past. **Fatehpur Sikri** and its monuments like **Panchamahal** which integrates many indigenous elements, reflected the vision of Akbar and the **confluence of the Islamic and Indian styles**. Other architectural marvels that ensued were **Agra Fort**, **Sikandra,** (Akbar's mausoleum) **Red Fort** and many others that came up during the reign of Shahjahan. But it is in the sheer grandness, ethereal beauty and sublime proportions of the **Taj Mahal,** that we find the **pinnacle of Indo-Islamic architecture**.

8.14: Ramparts of Purana Qila. The moat surrounding it is believed to have been connected with the river Yamuna on the banks of which it was built — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

Thus, the Mughal architecture synthesized different features of the Indo-Islamic architecture. It evolved over centuries, integrating the Islamic, Persian, Turkic and Indian styles. In its journey, it ushered many **new architectural features** such as the large bulbous domes as seen in the Humayun's tomb and Taj Mahal, the slender minarets added to corners of the monuments, large vaulted gateways leading to the main monument, tombs surrounded with gardens of the *Charbagh* style, landscaped Mughal gardens amidst others. There was an increasing deployment of red sandstone and white marble. The use of exquisite *jali* work (latticed screens), dexterous inlay, pietra-dura and other techniques of surface decoration also became popular. In a way, it also contributed many features to the other schools that emerged later viz. the Rajput, Sikh, Indo-Saracenic British architecture etc.

8.15: Buland Darwaza at Fatehpur Sikri, (a view from inside the fort); with the architectural elements of chhatris and arches; it represents the amalgamation of the Indian and Islamic architectural styles — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

8.16: Lal Qila (Red Fort), an irregular octagon-shaped fort spread over 255 acres and considered the epitome of medieval fort architecture. In view, the Lahori Gate, the thick bastions and the ramparts of the fort — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

8.17: Taj Mahal (mid-17th century) in Agra, a dream in marble and an epitome of medieval architecture; an evening view of the Taj with overcast sky and a brimming Yamuna — Courtesy, Directorate of Uttar Pradesh Tourism

Miniature painting and the Mughal School

By the medieval period, India already had a rich tradition of paintings which included cave paintings, murals and frescoes. Miniature paintings also flourished in the earlier Pala School and later in Gujarat, Malwa and Rajasthan, particularly under the Chalukyan kings. Besides the art of Jain miniatures also thrived. But in terms of sheer technique, naturalistic presentation, detailing and spatial depths, Indian paintings reached great heights with the emergence of the **Mughal School of miniature painting**. This school was a synthesis of the indigenous **Indian style** as well as the **Persian style** of painting and flourished from around 1550 for the next few hundred years. The tradition of Mughal painting particularly portraiture had its birth during the reign of Babur. But it was Humayun who had hired master painters from the Persian court and even established a *Nigaar-khana* (painting workshop). Painting, like other arts, got a fillip during the reign of Akbar, who had an avid interest in it and even established an atelier (studio/workshop) of paintings in Fatehpur Sikri. He also had a number of Indian Sanskrit manuscripts translated into Persian which were also illustrated with miniatures. Besides, he also commissioned many new original manuscripts with paintings. This included works like **Hamzanama** which had more than 1400 miniatures, **Tutinama** which is considered amongst the earliest of Mughal miniatures; **Razmanama,** a translation of Mahabharata into Persian with nearly 169 miniature illustrations and **Akbarnama**.

8.18: A painting signifying the confluence of cultures of the medieval period; a scene from Mahabharata depicting a discourse by Bhishma Pitamaha to Yudhisthira on the virtues of charity; a miniature painting in Razmanama commissioned by Akbar, artist Kanhara, 1598, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

The art of **miniatures** reached its pinnacle during the reign of **Jahangir** when paintings of flowers, plants, birds and animals, hunting scenes and imagery of royal courts became more in vogue. With **Shah Jahan,** the **portraits** were the more celebrated miniature art. But with the reign of Aurangzeb, the Mughal miniature art started to decline. This was also the period when many celebrated painters exited from the Mughal court and got patronage from the regional kingdoms, thus influencing the regional schools like the **Deccan Schools of Ahmednagar, Bijapur and Golkonda.** Even the various **Rajasthani Schools and Pahari Schools** imbibed some of the techniques of the Mughal miniatures particularly the concept of perspective and the use of vibrant colours. Thus, Indian painting, particularly the various regional schools saw the confluence of Persian style (which in itself was influenced by the European Renaissance art) and indigenous technique and subjects.

Music and Islamic influence

Indian music which had a very rich and ancient tradition was another tangible cultural element that was deeply influenced by the seeping in of the Persian-Arabic culture. This influence was most evident in the evolution of the Hindustani classical music as a separate branch of music, distinct from the Carnatic musical tradition. It is believed by the scholars that North India which came in contact with the Islamic rule earlier was substantially influenced by the Persian-Arabic musical tradition. This was particularly true during the Mughal reign where Arabic and Persian musicians were often a part of the courts. Over a period of time, traditional Indian musicians also assimilated some of their features. Besides the music that received patronage from the courts such as **dhrupad** and **khyal**, the Sufi tradition of music such as **qawwali** also played a role in further shaping the North Indian music. It is said that this influence added new *ragas* and also led to the development of musical instruments like **sitar** and **sarod**. During the course of centuries, it took the form of what we refer to today as **Hindustani Classical music.**

Akbar's patronage of the legendary Tansen, the association of six *gharanas* of Gwalior, Kirana, Agra, Patiala, Delhi, and Atrauli-Jaipur with the musical genre of Khyal, the association of Muhammad Shah Rangila and Hussein Shah Sharqi with this form of music and later evolution of other medieval musical forms such as ***dhamar, thumri, dadra, tappa, tarana, ghazal*** etc., are some of the important milestones of the Indian music of this period. Even the North Indian dance of ***kathak*** which was essentially a form of story storytelling, (*katha*; meaning a story) incorporating expressions and body movements and was a temple dance form, assimilated this medieval influence. It received royal patronage, particularly during the reign of Akbar. Gradually, it evolved more as a dance of royal courts. With this, there was a greater emphasis on *nritya* element (*bhava-* expression), grace and sensuousness. The performance also shifted to the accompaniment of different forms of medieval music. Hence there evolved, a new dance tradition from the ancient Indian roots.

Growth in medieval literature

The medieval literature under the Mughals and also in the regional sultanates experienced the confluence of literary culture. Persian had emerged as the language of the courts and continued to remain so in the Mughal period and even in the regional sultanates. The Mughal rule in the 16th and 17th centuries saw several significant works in Persian such as; ***Tuzk-e-Babri*** or *Baburnama* (an autobiographical account in Chagtai language later translated into Persian by **Rahim),** *Akbarnama* (written by **Abul Fazal)**, ***Ain-i-Akbari*** (or the administration of Akbar, the third part of Akbarnama). ***Tuzk-e-Jahangiri*** (or *Jahangirnama),* ***Shahjahanama*** amongst others. Besides, some other historical works in Persian included ***Tarikh-e-Khandane Taimuria*** which recounts the history of Timurids among others and ***Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi*** (history of Sher Shah) which was also commissioned by Akbar to document the administration of Sher Shah.

Akbar also commissioned the translation of a number of texts in Persian. These include ***Hamzanama,*** containing the exploits of Amir Hamza, ***Razmnama***, a translation of Mahabharata in Persian, ***Tutinama*** or the '*Many Tails by the Parrot'*, a translation of **Ramayana** in Persian, a translation of ***Yoga Vasistha*** (a book of Advaita Vedanta philosophy) *Anwar-i-Suhayli*, a Persian translation of Panchatantra. *Ayar-i-Danish*, an animal fable book, *Tarikh-i-Alfi* (history of thousand years), *Gulistan* of Sadi (compilation of poetry and prose of Persian author Sadi), *Darab-nama* (Persian prose romance), *Diwan of Hafiz* were some other works of the Mughal period. There was gradual acceptance of Persian as a language even amongst the Hindus, driven by the necessity of courts and administrative work. But it also found social acceptance and continued to serve as the predominant language of administration till the British rule in the early 19th century.

Akbar's Endeavour of Cultural Integration and Carving a National Identity

No Muslim ruler had during the 300-odd years that had elapsed since the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, the insight to look under the superficial currents of history at the inner current striving to come to the surface, to see behind the outward diversity of Indian life the soul of unity struggling to realise itself. It required an Akbar in whom the adventure and enterprise of a Chagtai, the large-hearted toleration of a Sufi and the liberal rationalism of a philosopher, had combined to produce the courage and the strength to free himself from the shackles of the past and to strike the path of a new life.

The most important characteristic of the new Indian nation which Akbar brought into being, was that it was based not on the community of religion but on the citizenship of the same state.

……. That the conception of a secular and non-communal state was quite clear in Akbar's mind is reflected in the following extract from his letter to Shah Abbas Safavi of Persia.

"The various religious communities are divine treasures entrusted to us by God. We must love them as such. It should be our firm faith that every religion is blessed by him and our earnest endeavour be to enjoy the bliss of the evergreen garden of universal toleration. The Eternal-king showers his favours on all men without distinction. Kings who are shadows of God should never give up this principle."

Abid Hussain in the book *The National Culture of India* **(Chapter 10; The Hindustani Culture-I)**

The **integration of languages and literary tradition** was best exemplified in the emergence of **Urdu** as a spoken language which had a Persian script but had words from the extant Indian languages. It was initially developed as the 'language of the camp' or the *Zaban-i-Ordu (Ordu* in Turkic meaning army). Over a period of time, it flourished in a large part of North India and the Deccan. A rich body of literature developed in Urdu with different forms of expression viz. *ghazals* (lyrical couplets), *marsia* (elegy), *qasidah* (ode of praise), *masnavi* (rhyming couplets), *rubai* (poems of four lines) etc. Many renowned Urdu poets emerged in the 18th century which included **Sauda, Dard, Mir Tariq Mir** and others. Among the great Urdu poets of the 18th–19th century was the renowned **Mirza Ghalib,** who composed over 1700 Urdu poems, while his oeuvre of Persian works comprised a mammoth 11000 poems. **Zauq** was another famous Urdu poet of this age, a contemporary, and even a rival of Ghalib. Urdu as a language truly represented a mingling of cultures and was accepted as a language spoken and understood by a vast section of India even in the Deccan sultanates. Later, in the British rule, it even replaced Persian as the language of the courts.

The **integration of cultures** which was the culmination of the centuries of their intermingling was in a way personified in **Dara Shikoh** (the elder son and heir apparent of Shahjahan) and his works. ***Majma ul- Bahrain*** which literally means the confluence of two seas, was a landmark work of his on comparative religion. It emphasizes the essential harmony of the Sufi philosophy of Islam and Vedanta philosophy. One of the earliest works of its kind, it explored the unity of core tenets of Islam and Vedantic Hinduism, thus bringing out the universal elements of both philosophies. Dara Shikoh, though a prince by birth, was deeply inspired by Sufism and continued the legacy of Akbar of finding a universal common path and meeting ground for the two religions. He was also a disciple of Mian Mir (a Sufi saint). Besides, he conferred with many scholars of different faiths including the 7th Sikh Guru (Guru Har Rai). His endeavour of many years resulted in the syncretic treatise of ***Majma ul-Bahrain.***

He had also translated the Bhagavad Gita, Yoga Vasistha and many Upanishads into Persian. His translated version of the Upanishads in Persian was compiled in a treatise ***Sirr-i-Akbar*** (or the Great Mystery). The book was later translated as *Oupnek'hat* or the *Upanischada* in the late 18th century into Latin, Greek and Persian and then to other European languages, thus bringing the Upanishadic philosophy to the European world. This universal perspective of Dara Shikoh was contrarian to the orthodox clergy. Post the fratricidal war with Aurangzeb, which Dara Shikoh lost, his views provided a formal basis for charging him with apostasy for 'abandonment of Islam' and the execution of the Sufi prince. With this, Aurangzeb came in power.

Though some architecture and monuments were seen during the reign of **Aurangzeb**, including the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, the Moti Majid (Pearl Mosque) in Delhi and the Bibi ka Maqbara in Aurangabad, the golden phase of medieval architecture was far behind. Music, painting and other art forms suffered a steady decline as they found little patronage in the reign of Aurangzeb. However, the regional sultanates and kingdoms offered some succour to the artists who gradually migrated from the Mughal court to the kingdoms in Rajasthan, Bengal, West and Central India, Deccan and other places.

The loss of the Mughal court was definitely a gain of the regional kingdoms. This was visible in the paintings of the Deccan schools of Ahmednagar, Bijapur, Golconda, Hyderabad, Tanjore (now Thanjavur), Bengal school, and the numerous Central Indian, Rajasthani and Pahari schools. The naturalistic style of painting with perspective and three-dimensionality, which emanated from European Renaissance art and permeated the Persian and hence the Mughal school, now diffused in the regional schools of India. The core art form remained indigenous with the subjects largely drawn from mythology, folklore and the royal scenes, but the technique underwent some changes marking a fusion of the art forms.

With the coming of Aurangzeb on the Indian political scene also ensued a period of socio-political discord, bitterness and turbulency which not only marked the beginning of the end of the political fortunes of the Mughal dynasty but also the nadir of the cultural integration and **end of the Islamic-cultural phase**. Though there were occasional cultural spurts like in the reign of a later Mughal, Wajid Ali Shah, which was somewhat conducive to the various art forms, otherwise, the age of a singular cultural monolithic influence which was hitherto based on a political dynasty, was over. From the period of an overarching culture having influence over a large part of the land, what emerged was the provincial cultures reposited in the regional and even local traditions and patronised by the dynasties and rule that emerged. It was definitely a phase of subnational and territorial cultures to emerge.

The Provincial and Regional Cultures

Among the indigenous regional cultures that grew despite the domineering presence of the Mughal empire, was the culture in the **Hindu kingdom** of **Vijayanagar**. Its heydays which continued from the mid-14th to mid-17th centuries witnessed an unmatched prosperity, stability and cultural growth, reminiscent of the rules of the Guptas and Palas of the previous millennium and also proving a worthy successor of the Chalukyas and Cholas. The ruins of **Hampi** (now a UNESCO World Heritage Site) are a testimony to its architecture, town planning, painting, music and other art forms. The seven layered fortifications and protective walls of the city with separate royal centre, religious centre, market and residential areas, with royal palaces to general purpose monuments, reflect the advanced town planning of this once buzzing metropolis.

The Lotus Mahal in the Royal Centre which is shaped like an intricate flower, and the Virupaksha Temple around which the whole city is believed to have been developed, are reflective of its amazing architecture. The Vitthala Temple, the Stone Chariot Shrine and the adjoining *mandapas* which are iconic monuments of Hampi, are also indicative of the significance the religious culture had in socio-political life. The large *sabha mandapa* also called the *Rangamantapa* (located in front of the Chariot Shrine) has the presence of 56 monolithic stone columns which are beautifully carved and produce different musical notes when struck. Truly an epitome of art, architecture and scientific knowledge of the Vijayanagar Empire, the musical pillared hall is also a reflection of the evolution and significance attached to the musical art form (also see chapter 9). The mural paintings on the walls of the Tiruparakunram Temple (near Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu), Virupaksha Temple (at Hampi, Karnataka) and Veerabhadra Temple at Lepakshi (near Hindupur in Andhra Pradesh) signify the growth of the art of painting as well.

Post the downfall of the Mughal empire, another powerful empire of the **Marathas** rose in large parts of India in the 18th century. Its foundations were laid under the able leadership of **Chhatrapati Shivaji** in the 2nd half of the 17th century. Though the Maratha power lasted for less than a century, it did leave a more enduring cultural impact, particularly in central and western parts of India. **Architecture**, a key element of tangible culture, was one of the foremost aspects to witness this influence. This was most evident in the **military architecture** of the Maratha forts, a precarious need of the hour, considering their long-standing conflicts with the Mughals, later with Afghans, other regional powers and even the colonial naval powers attempting to make inroads via seas in the Indian mainland. The Maratha military architecture is best exemplified in the ensemble of 14 hill forts (these now also fall under the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites) which include those at Raigad, Rajgad, Torana, Shivneri, Lohagad, Mulher, Salher, Ankai

8.19: The Vitthala Temple, Hampi, with the stone chariot in the foreground (early to mid-16th century) — Courtesy, Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation

and Tankai. A unique feature of Maratha architecture was its sea forts, most significant of those were the Kasa Fort, Sindhudurg, Alibaug Fort, Suvarnadurg Fort and Khanderi Fort. (also see chapter 10)

The **religious architecture** of their Maratha temples was also unique and marked a revival of and a spurt in the construction activity of Hindu temples. The temples of this period also bear distinct features of erstwhile Yadava temple architecture and the Islamic features which were in vogue then in different structures. While the Maratha temple architecture emulated the Nagara temples of Gujarat and Rajasthan, the use of arches in porches and certain forms of Islamic surface decoration could also be seen. The temple *shikhara* could be of the traditional conical style which was decorated with motifs, or could even be a plain dome. Omkareshwar temple in Pune is an example of this distinct architecture which is notable for its Nagara style *shikhar* and Islamic style central and adjoining domes.

Besides the above, the *wadas* or the residential places were another kind of significant Maratha architecture. The Shaniwarwada in Pune is one of the finest examples of Maratha fort cum palace complex and includes; palaces, court halls, large reservoirs, beautiful fountains and extensive gardens. The Vishrambaag Wada of Pune is another example of *wada* architecture and was purely a residential place of the Bajirao Peshwa II. Another notable feature of the Maratha culture was the tradition of *Varkari/Warkari* bhakti saints, which included Eknath (16th century), Tukaram (17th century) who have also enriched spiritual culture as well the Marathi literature with the *Abhanga* tradition of devotional poems.

The **Sikh** Empire formed at the end of the 18th century with the capture of Kabul by **Maharaja Ranjit Singh**, heralded another chapter of regional culture in the northern and northwestern part of India, which lasted for nearly 50 years. Besides the Marathas and the Sikhs, the Rajputs in the west, the Jats in the north, the Nayaks in the south, the Nawabs of Bengal in the east, the Nizams of Hyderabad, the Nawabs of the Oudh/Awadh province and other political powers exerted regional influence in different phases of the tumultuous history of the 17th–19th century. Each regime had certain poignant elements of culture which were based on regional and local traditions. But in the late 18th and early 19th century no regional culture had a pan-India influence.

In the century that followed the decline of the Mughal empire, the country was divided and run over by different regional powers and was later to see the rise of foreign powers in different parts of the country. In the latter half of the 18th century, the British had acquired a domineering presence in the larger part of the country. With colonialism and British imperialism which was to ensue for the next couple of centuries, India was to witness a dark cultural phase.

8.20: Shaniwar Wada, Pune; a glorious example of fort cum palace, Maratha architecture — Courtesy, Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation

GKP

Unravelling

Indian Culture

The Essence of Bharat

Modern India

MADHUKAR KUMAR BHAGAT

14

Cultural Eras: Modern India

A nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people.

— Mahatma Gandhi

14.1: Rashtrapati Bhavan and the two secretariats, North Block (right image as seen in the picture) and South Block (left image), a view from Kartavya Path before Vijay Chowk — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

INTRODUCTION

Another wave of cultural influence, which had a considerable impact on the culture, society and polity of India, emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This was a wave that arose owing to the **colonisation of India.** Politically, socially and culturally, this was a phase of great tumult and drastic transition. It was a period unlike any other in the past several centuries of India's political and cultural history. The span of the next two centuries shook Indian society, wrenched its very fabric, and jolted it from the socio-cultural stupor induced by centuries of orthodoxy, dogma, complacency and inward look. It was indeed also a period of great pain and suffering. There were phases of abject despair, darkness and gloom. The socio-political edifice of the medieval era which had been entrenched for centuries, crumbled. It compelled the people to question the status quo, to reform their socio-religious and cultural practices, to challenge the inimical and exploitative political system and eventually, after nearly a century and more of struggle, to remould themselves into a new nation. But this was not without great sacrifices, acute tribulations and irreparable losses. However, there did emerge a new dawn, and with it the hope of peace, prosperity and cultural regeneration.

DIFFERENT PHASES OF EMERGENCE OF MODERN CULTURE

The culture of India transitioned over a period of time, from the medieval Hindustani culture- a confluence of Indo-Islamic elements, to the **modern Indian culture** — an assimilation of different cultural streams with indigenous roots. The period of transition oversaw the **decline of the Mughal Empire** in the 18th century. The **early European influence** of the 18th century was marked by the rise of different colonial powers which were competing to protect their mercantile interests and had clandestine designs that were beyond their ostensible trade and commercial interests. **The growing phase of British/English culture** of the late 18th century and the 19th century was a phase of growth and consolidation of the authority of the British. It was a period synonymous with economic despair and degeneration and marked by the complete erosion of the Indian political authority and the decay of the indigenous culture. The **rise of Indian nationalism in** the late 19th and early 20th century eventually leading to India's independence, besides being a period of creation of political and national consciousness, was also a period of increasing cultural consciousness.

The **post-independence culture** and the first few decades thereafter, were not only harbingers of a new hope, but also a period of great struggle. The division of the country, the communal bloodshed in its wake, and the multifarious challenges of an emergent nation struggling to find its feet, all had a profound impact on its culture. The following phase of economic and political reconstruction of the nation was characterised as well by a search for cultural identity and cultural regeneration. The last, but not the least can be said to be the period of the three decades after economic liberalisation, and in particular the quarter century of the new millennium. This is the phase of a **modern assimilative and inclusive culture**, which is marked by the economic buoyancy of a growing country and the confident strides of a nation effusing self-belief. Its changing demography, rising aspirations of its human resource, technological prowess and global interconnect, are redefining Indian culture. Now, while the country is proud of its ancient roots, it is also embracing modernity in full measure. It has hope. It has challenges. It is the harbinger of a culture where its ancient philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (all world is a family) has the space to grow and be a beacon of universal interconnect and inclusiveness.

THE EARLY EUROPEAN INFLUENCE

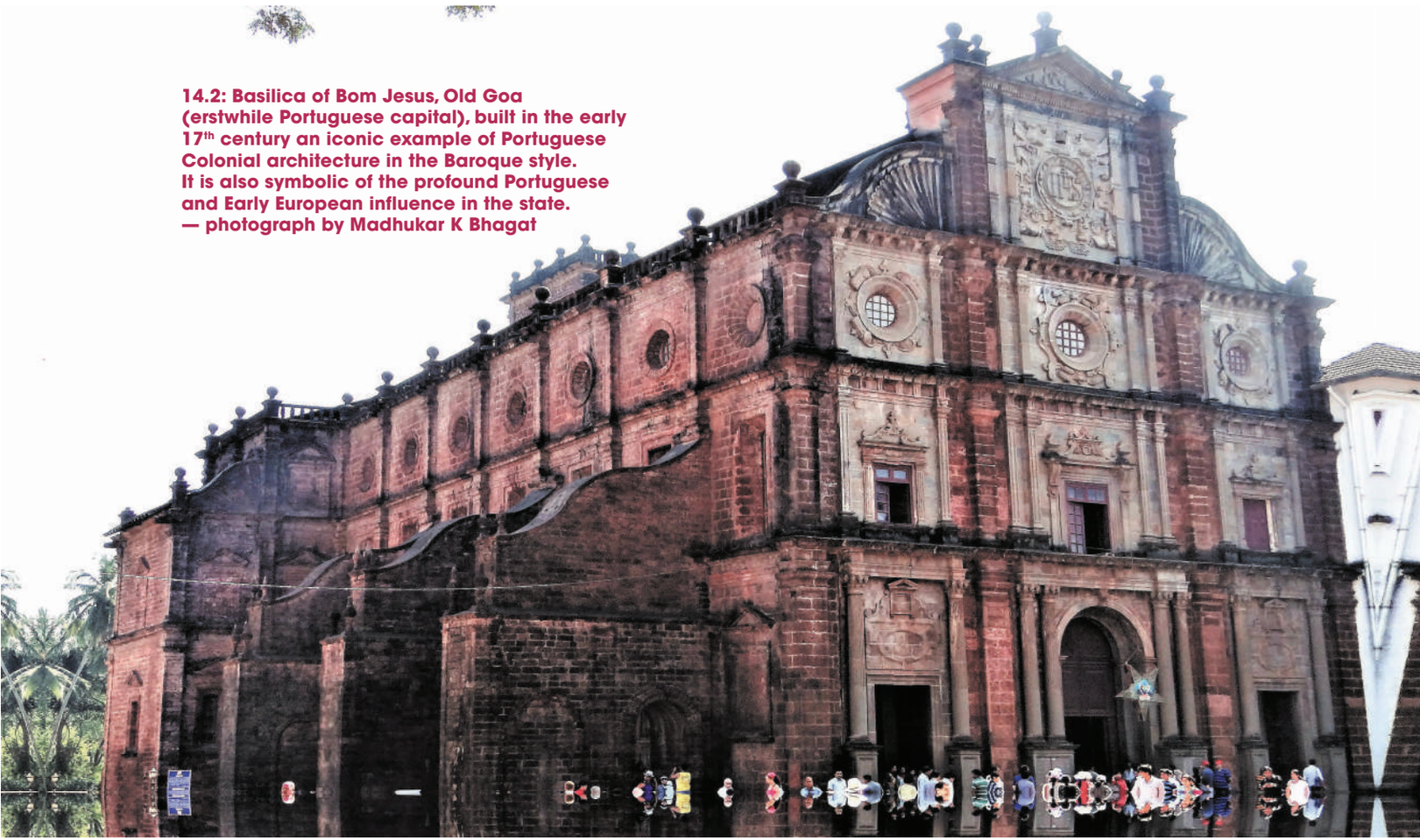
The European powers arrived in India as merchants in the 16th and 17th centuries in search of spices. This marked a direct contact between the Indian civilisation and the Western world on Indian soil. This, however, was a phase of limited European influence on Indian culture as the colonial trading companies had minimal interconnect with the masses and lacked socio-political authority to cast any meaningful influence. But in a century, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, the French and the Danish managed to establish their respective presence and pockets of their stronghold. The political chaos of the 18th century gave space to the colonial powers to make deeper inroads within the country. The Mughal empire was on a steady decline post the reign of Aurangzeb. The Maratha and Sikh empires provided brief periods of strong regional Indian authority. But in the latter half of the 18th century, amidst sweeping political changes, the British emerged as the singular most powerful political authority.

The victory of the British East India Company forces in the Battle of Plassey in 1757 over the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daulah, gave them sizeable territorial rights. Later, the acquisition of *Diwani* of Bengal in 1765 from the Mughal emperor, endowed them with the right to collect revenue. In the Carnatic Wars (1744-1763), the British East India Company had emerged victorious over the French East India Company, their most powerful European rival in India. The Portuguese, once having a powerful presence in South and West India, by now had their authority limited to regions such as Goa and some regions in present-day Gujarat (including Daman, Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli). The influence of the French was curtailed to small regions of Pondicherry on the Coromandel coast, Mahe on the Malabar coast and Chandernagore in Bengal. By this time, the Dutch had negligible political authority in India and neither did the Danish. Thus, by the mid-18th century, the British had wrestled and established a significant presence and reasonable political control in India. Their authority in India had grown from mere trading rights to territorial rights. With this, also came the **European or Western influence on Indian culture**.

Socially and culturally, the European influence up to the 18th century was restricted only to certain regions and certain segments of Indian society and was not as profound as it would become in the 19th century. By this period, the colonial companies' major interest was mercantile. This necessitated a certain degree of military presence and even fortification. At times, the colonial powers asserted their authority and established political control in the adjoining regions as in the case of the Portuguese in the 16th century. This also brought them and other colonial powers into conflict with the regional rulers and the Mughal dynasty. This did have a socio-political impact; however, their cultural impact was limited. The adversarial position of the colonial companies, which was initially bereft of any political authority, allowed for limited interaction with the common folks and for cultural interchange. At times, the local population was suspicious or opposed to the foreign powers, and in some instances, at the receiving end of their excesses and cruelty.

The early European cultural influences in the late 17th and 18th were not as geographically widespread as they were to become later. Further, except in certain regions of a political stronghold as that of the Portuguese in Goa and others, they could not cast a deep social influence. The majority of the Indian society, entrenched in its age-old cultural traditions was largely aloof of the European influence. However, this period did witness the introduction of some European cultural elements to the Indian landscape.

Architecture was the foremost of the European cultural influences which struck roots in India. This was borne out of the need of the colonial traders to protect their merchandise and personnel. There was also the need to have a place of residence, worship and other structures in the European settlements. The Portuguese, among the earliest of the colonial powers, had a significant presence in Goa. Some examples of the architecture of the 17th and 18th centuries can be witnessed in the churches and forts of Goa. Old



14.2: Basilica of Bom Jesus, Old Goa (erstwhile Portuguese capital), built in the early 17th century an iconic example of Portuguese Colonial architecture in the Baroque style. It is also symbolic of the profound Portuguese and Early European influence in the state. — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

mansions and houses of Goa are also reflective of the Portuguese architectural influence. Similarly, the Dutch architectural influence of this period can be seen in the areas colonised by them in Ahmedabad, Surat, Bharuch, and Kochi. Puducherry (Pondicherry), a French stronghold, reflects the cartesian grid plan of the old city referred to today as the French Quarters' which has the old colonial-style villas. A variety of British structures came up in the port cities and presidency towns of Madras, Calcutta and Mumbai. Fort St. George in Madras (built 1639-1644) is the oldest British structure in India. Fort William in Calcutta (built 1696-1706 & 1758-1781) and Fort in Bombay (first built in 1665 and expanded in 1715-1722) were other centres of British East India Company which were witness to the early British architecture.

Religious Beliefs and Christian Missionary Activities

Although Christianity had come to India in the first millennium, and as per some scholars, in the very first century CE, it had a limited presence in India, restricted largely to the Malabar Coast. Post the arrival of the Portuguese and their establishment of political authority in Goa and some other regions, Christian missionary activities increased. With this, came up the establishment of new churches in different parts of Malabar and Goa region and the conversion of the local population to Christianity. The Portuguese, who also married the local women in Goa, are believed by scholars to have started the conversion of these women to Christianity. This intermingling of the populations also had a deeper cultural impact, whereby the Portuguese culture, besides the Christian religion, was entrenched in the region. Later, the arrival of the Dutch, the English and the French, further enabled the spread of Christian missionary activities to different parts of the country and in particular to the Madras, Bombay and Bengal regions. While the St. Thomas Christians who were settled in the Malabar region since the first millennium were the earliest practitioners of Christianity in India, with this 'wave' of European influence in the 17th and 18th centuries, other sects of Christianity, including the Catholic and the Protestants, established their presence and churches in India. These were the harbingers of the Christian faith and traditions that grew in India in the next couple of centuries.

While, with the exception of the Portuguese, the other European powers remained largely aloof from the local population, it was the missionary activities that brought some degree of people-to-people contact between the Europeans and Indians. However, this interconnect too was marked with animosity and suspicion to begin with. Another fringe effect of the missionary activity was also felt in the **Indian languages**. The missionaries had to converse with the local population to explain the philosophy, precepts and practices of Christianity. They learned the local languages and published the Bible and other religious publications in these languages. Scholars believe that for this they also understood and wrote the basic grammar of those languages, brought out the primer of Indian and European languages and started a trend of writing prose in these languages. The development of the first printing press also happened in Goa in the 16th century to print material for missionary activities and this trend continued in the subsequent centuries.

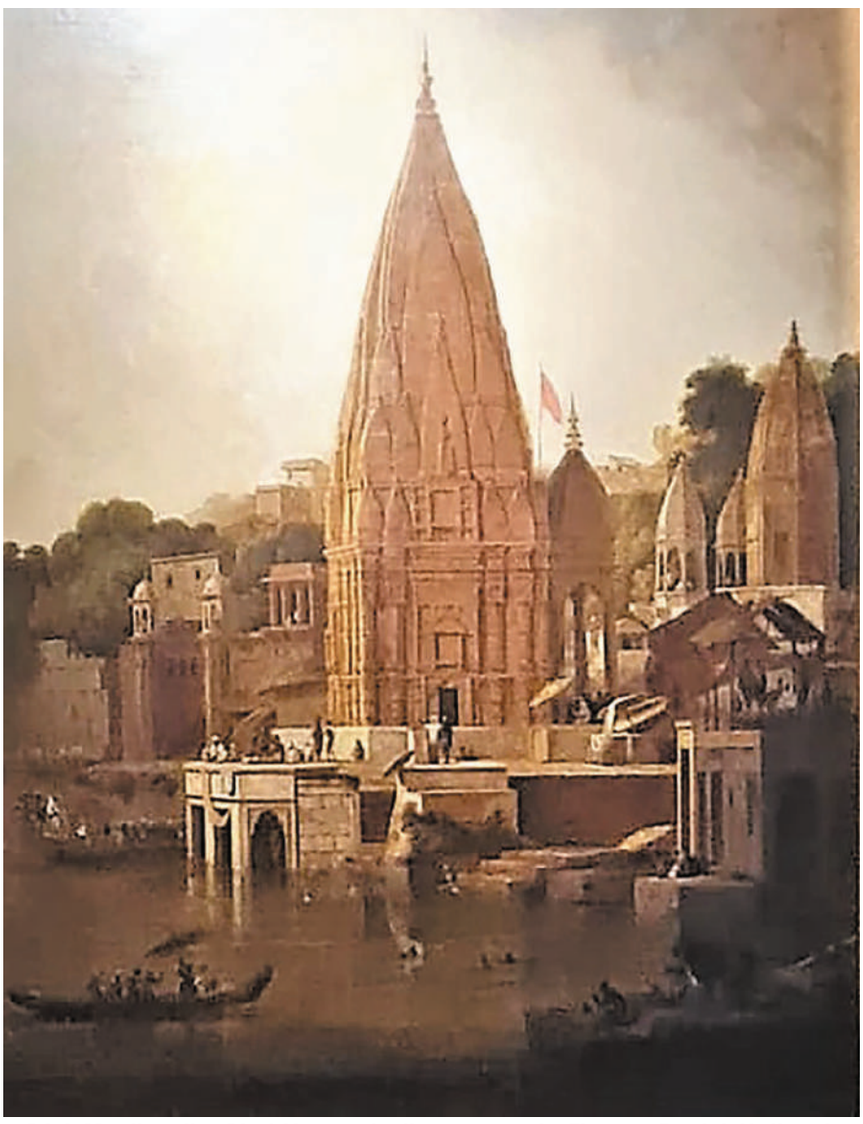
14.3: A primer of Portuguese-Tamil published in1554 and considered to be one of the earliest known Christian books in an Indian language — Wikimedia Commons

European Languages and Their Influence

European languages and their introduction in India happened in this phase. The earliest of the European languages to be understood was the Portuguese. Marrying with the local women in Goa, interaction

with the local population elsewhere, and the needs of trade and commerce necessitated the learning of the Portuguese language to be learnt by some section of the Indian population. The Portuguese were the unrivalled colonial power of the 16th century and thus had an early bird advantage. As this was the European language somewhat understood by a few in the Indian population, it for some time served as a bridge language for other European powers in the later period. As per scholars, Lord Clive who is credited with defeating the forces of Siraj-ud-Daulah (in the battle of Plassey-1757) and thus laying the foundation of the British empire, understood a bit of Portuguese which helped him to communicate with the local population, by whom this language was partly understood. The influence of this language can be seen in the fact that several words in Hindi/Urdu/ Hindustani having Portuguese origin, have entered the local language lexicon since then and fully become a part of vocabulary. This includes words such as अलमारी (*almari:* cupboard)-*armário* (in Portuguese), इस्पात (*ispat:* steel, sword)-*Espada* (in Portuguese); कमरा (*kamara:* room)- *câmara* (in Portuguese), गिरजा (*girija:* church)- *igreja* (in Portuguese), बाल्टी (*balti*: bucket)- *Balde* (in Portuguese) साबुन (*sabun*: soap)- *sabao* (in Portuguese) besides several others. The entry of such words of common usage in the vocabulary of Hindi and other languages reflects people-to-people contact and the cultural influence it casts.

However, in the 17th century, the Portuguese were largely displaced by the Dutch. Thus, the cultural influence of the Portuguese remained limited to certain pockets such as Goa and a few others, while in other regions it waned over a period of time. The Dutch in turn were uprooted by the French and British in the 18th century. Each of these colonial powers introduced their respective languages in their region of political authority. Thus, in this phase, India witnessed exposure to a variety of European languages. Through them occurred a certain degree of social intercourse and hence certain European cultural influences permeated the country. But as the British were the colonial powers that outlasted the other rivals, it was the English language that had a profound and indelible impact on the Indian culture and society. The other European linguistic and cultural influences gradually faded from most parts of the country over the next couple of centuries.



14.4: Manikarnika Ghat, Varanasi; oil on canvas by Thomas Daniel; National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

Art and Other Influences

Paintings were one of the art forms that experienced European influence in this early phase. The presence of European powers enabled many European painters to explore India and paint Indian landscapes, Indian

subjects and portraits. Among the prominent European painters in India of this period were; **Tilly Kettle** (the first prominent English painter in India, late 18th century) **Johan Zoffany** (German Neoclassical painter; late 18th century), **William Hodges** (English, landscapes and portraits, late 18th century) **Thomas Daniell** (English, landscape painter late 18th century) and **William Daniell** (English, landscape painter late 18th century), **George Chinnery** (English, portrait and landscape painter, late 18th & early 19th century), besides others. Many of these paintings were in oil medium. Further, their perspective and style were Western. Hence, European techniques and styles of painting were introduced in India.

European paintings were among the few art forms that had a confluence with the Indian genre of painting. In the later years, the mingling of the Indian art style with the Western influence brought out what was referred to as the **Company style** of painting; as it emerged during the period of influence of the British East India Company. It was a set of paintings done by Indian painters usually working under British patrons, or hired by them temporarily, to capture indigenous subjects/topics in the form of a portfolio. Such paintings were popular with the British and other European travellers who wanted to take back images of the country. However, the Indian painters had to adopt some of the techniques of the European school, as this was the genre with which the European patrons and buyers were familiar and such paintings were valued by them. This led to the emergence of the Company style which was a blend of the European/British influence and also the extant Mughal, Rajput and other traditional styles of painting. Subsequently, this style spread to other centres in Calcutta (now Kolkata), Murshidabad, Patna, Benares, Agra, Lucknow, Delhi, and parts of western India, thus developing into regional and local Schools.

14.5: Chowk and the main street of Patna, 1814-15, by Sita Ram; a Patna Kalam painting, a regional school influenced by the Company style and local traditions; British Library — Wikimedia Commons

European presence also touched Indian society and people in other aspects of life. Several new **food items** were introduced. These include vegetables considered now to be a staple part of Indian cuisine such as potatoes, sweet potato, cauliflower, tomato, cabbages, red chilli, capsicum, cashew nuts and fruits like guava, papaya pineapple, sweet lime and oranges. These were brought by the Portuguese to Goa from where they spread to other parts of the country. The baking of *pao* (a form of bread) now popular in Goa and western India was also introduced by the Portuguese and so was the cultivation and use of tobacco. **Tea**, now a ubiquitous and pan-Indian drink, was introduced by the British in the early 19th century. In the decades to come, India was to become a major producer and consumer of tea.

THE GROWING PHASE OF ENGLISH CULTURE

The period of around 100 years since the last quarter of the 18th century was indeed a period of the growing phase of English culture in India. This cultural phase was accompanied by and was a direct consequence of the establishment of British political authority in India. Post the **Battle of Plassey** (1757) and the **Battle of Buxar** (1764) the British East India Company had acquired the *diwani* of Bengal-Bihar (which included the undivided Bengal and the States of Bihar and Odisha). Thus, the Company had transitioned from being a commercial trading venture in India to a collector of revenue and the de facto ruler of the region. The success in different wars of the 1750s and 1760s and the ensuing political

events helped to lay the foundations of British rule in India through its agent, namely the British East India Company. The **Anglo-Maratha Wars** (1772-1818) enhanced their political authority considerably. Meanwhile, with the British Parliament's **Regulating Act** of 1773 and the **Pitts Act** of 1784, there was greater parliamentary control over the Company and its administration in India. With the annexation of the Sikh empire post the **Anglo-Sikh war** of 1845-1846, the British, hegemony extended to a larger part of India. The **Doctrine of Lapse** of Lord Dalhousie (1848-1856) was the proverbial last straw on the camels' back. It culminated in the annexation of many of the states under the Indian rulers, thus making the British East India Company the undisputed ruler of India.

This period of around a century was marked by increased economic exploitation by the East India Company. Its oppressive policies, misrule and considerable drain of Indian wealth had impoverished a large section of Indian society. It brought a transition of the country from a medieval economic powerhouse to a distressed economy. Undoubtedly this had a profound impact on Indian society and cultural life as well. There was growing resentment in the masses and antagonism, particularly of the Indian nobility and zamindars. This combined with other socio-political factors culminated in the **First War of Independence** in **1857** (considered by the British as a Sepoy Mutiny). The use of the cartridges greased with cow and pig fat, which had to be bitten to be used, was a **religious-cultural** trigger for the revolt of the soldiers of the Hindu and Muslim communities in the ranks of the army of East India Company. The brutal suppression of the revolt in 1858 marked a turbulent and bloody period of Indian history. The rule of the Company ended and henceforth all the powers of it were taken over by the British Crown vide the **Government of India Act** of 1858. Hence began the direct rule of the Crown.

14.6: "The Sepoy revolt at Meerut", wood-engraving from the *Illustrated London News*, 1857 — Wikimedia Commons

An Impoverished India - A downtrodden India : A Perspective of Derozio

By the early 19th century, the rule of the British East India Company had substantially impoverished the country. The days of its past glory were over. India was culturally degenerating and the self-belief of the people was flagging. Henry Vivian Derozio (1809–1831) a young poet, and radical thinker who inspired a generation of students at Hindu College, Calcutta has best expressed the plight of India in his poem 'To India My Native Land'. He bemoans how India a land of riches and glory now lies in the dust. Although the poem in itself is not an account of the economic distress of the country or the region, it is emblematic of the perspective of cultural despondency and demoralisation of the common man of this country at that point in history.

To India – My Native Land" –

by Henry Louis Vivian Derozio

My country!
In thy days of glory past
A beauteous halo circled round thy brow
and worshipped as a deity thou wast—
Where is thy glory, where the reverence now?

Thy eagle pinion is chained down at last,
And grovelling in the lowly dust art thou,
Thy minstrel hath no wreath to weave for thee
Save the sad story of thy misery!
Well—let me dive into the depths of time
And bring from out the ages, that have rolled
A few small fragments of these wrecks sublime
Which human eye may never more behold
And let the guerdon of my labour be,
My fallen country! One kind wish for thee!

In this period of 100 years since the establishment of the political control of the British, numerous facets of socio-political life were significantly impacted. Unlike the earlier period of European influence, the administration of the land was in the hands of the British and thus there was an unavoidable contact and interconnect between the two civilisations and cultures. **The 'growing phase of English culture' deeply influenced the Indian consciousness and the very cultural identity of the land and its people.** The transition was a rude shock to the Indians who after successive losses to the British, seemed to have lost their very self-believe. The concept of the **White man's burden**, a facile moral justification for the British rule that rubbed their racial superiority had demoralised the Indian masses. Indian cultural identity was fading, self-worth was eroding, and gradually at least a section of Indians, were looking up to their colonial masters for deliverance. The solution to India's socio-political, economic and cultural woes was now being searched in the English culture and political system believing in its inherent superiority. The very cause seemed now to have become the panacea.

The period was also marked by the beginning of the **English education** and exposure to **Western concepts of state**, **systems of governance** and the **study of sciences**. This was to bring a substantial shift in the Indian thought process in the coming decades. The Indian traditional and local systems of education were adversely affected and began to collapse. There was a relook and questioning of the socio-religious orthodoxy and ills by the Indians. This was instrumental in ushering in a wave of social reforms. The era of printing and publication came and hence emerged newspapers, journals and press. The launch of railways and the beginning of the Industrial Age marked a new epoch. The new means of transport enabled the movement of people over large distances, raw materials from the Indian hinterland and British goods from the ports. It provided for quicker connectivity to the different parts of the country. The industries were later to become the engines of economic growth which attracted the manpower from the villages, drew the raw material from the hinterland and caused the development of new cities. A new urban culture emerged and with it the migration of people and the attendant socio-economic challenges. A rich social class was to gradually replace the old nobility and create economic disparities like never before. The industries and railways were also becoming the apparatus to suck out the economic wealth of the nation and reduce the country to an impoverished market. This had far deeper socio-cultural as well as political and economic consequences.

Different streams of culture were also influenced in this phase. Some elements like **writing of proses** came up as a new trend and enriched the regional languages and literature. On the literary horizon of India there also emerged **English literature** and in the later years, even some Indian authors took up writing in English. **British colonial architecture**, which had a limited presence in the previous century, now spread to different parts of the country through some more imposing and majestic structures, and gradually replaced the other European styles. The **European Proscenium theatre** emerged, gained popularity and took deep roots in the coming decades. The traditional Indian painting including the Mughal, Rajasthani, Pahari and other medieval styles, took a back seat with the **European Academic art** occupying centre stage. There was little growth in Indian music, and Indian dances declined, many of which were banned by the British.

With the growing influence of English culture over decades, there came a realisation that Indian salvation could not be sought as a part of the British political system or within the English culture. A singular political authority over a larger swathe of the land that was patently inimical to the people had fired their imagination as to their own identity. This brought in a growing realisation of the need for **Indian consciousness**, a realisation that was to usher in the next cultural phase.

The Growth of English Education in India

English Education was a crucial element of this phase of cultural confluence. Till now India had its system of traditional education which was based on the *pathshalas* and the *madrasas*. It had served well in the preceding centuries. These were distributed throughout the country and provided education in orthodox subjects through the medium of Persian, Sanskrit and other languages. Although the distribution of schools was wide and these existed even at the village level as per the reports of those times, they lacked more contemporaneous education and a study of modern disciplines. These schools laid emphasis on learning of traditional streams of language, grammar, regional literature, astrology, philosophy and basic arithmetic. Furthermore, there existed centres of higher learning which imparted higher standards of education for similar disciplines with the addition of ayurveda, ancient treatises and other disciplines. Contemporaneous disciplines of education in vogue in Europe such as modern maths and geometry, natural sciences, geography and modern medicine etc. were however not in vogue. However, the extant system of education served the masses for ages.

The divergent schools of thought on Indian education

The British wanted European education and modern sciences to be brought to the Indians. The motives of different thinkers and authorities were different. The belief in the superiority of European race and civilisation and the philosophy of the **'white man's burden'** was one school of thought. At the other end of the spectrum, there were some orientalist thinkers and administrators like **Mountstuart Elphinstone** (Governor of Bombay Presidency, 1819–1827) and **Thomas Munro** (Governor of Madras Presidency 1820–1827) who had some degree of interest in the general well-being of the Indians and believed education to be a tool of emancipation of the masses. Christian missionaries were another set of players for whom English education and its spread could aid in their objective of the spread of Christianity. However, the interest and intent of all three sections, were in a way, instrumental in starting schools in different places which brought English education to India.

There was also a section of Indians like **Raja Ram Mohan Roy** who were completely dejected by the orthodoxy and decay in the social set-up and valued the Western sciences, the system of learning and the spirit of enquiry. He sincerely believed that these could be accessed by Indians only through English education. He and other Indians also opined for the beginning of English education in India. They also felt that there was no dearth of vernacular education, and that the British further supplementing it would not make much of a value addition to the Indian society. English education to them meant a liberal and contemporaneous education that could enable the Indians to participate in the administration. However, there were orthodox sections of Indians that were opposed to this view.

Thomas Munro: A Proponent of Vernacular Education

The advocates of improvement do not seem to have perceived the great springs on which it depends; they propose to place no confidence in the natives, to give them no authority…. but they are ardent in their zeal for enlightening them by the general diffusion of knowledge. No conceit more wild than this was ever engendered in the darkest ages.

— **Sir Thomas Munro**, *December 31, 1824*

Sir Thomas Munro the Governor of Madras Presidency (1820-1827) was the earliest of the British officers to look into the educational needs of the Indians and also start educational reforms. He conducted a wide range of educational surveys to ascertain the status of schools and educational institutions in the region. He was also the author of the "Minutes of the Native Education' (1822 and 1826) which shed valuable light on the status of education in the region at that time and recommended grassroots educational reforms.

As per these Minutes, the Madras Presidency had 11758 schools as well as 740 centres of higher education at that time. Most of these schools and their expenses were managed at the level of the community. The number of boys and girls in these schools and institutions was 157644 and 4023 respectively. These represented 1in 6 boys of school age as compared to 1 in 8 boys of school age of the Bombay Presidency. In this minute, Munro also suggests the construction of new schools by the company with the provision of textbooks and payment of stipends to the teachers to supplement the existing system of education in the region.

Munro was a proponent of vernacular education and of supporting the native effort. Munro's proposal was accepted by the Board of Directors of the Company. Several higher schools at the level of collectorates and lower level tehsildari schools were created, where vernacular education was provided. The study of English was confined to a central collectorate school and was elementary in nature. However, post the decision to impart English education as per the proposal of Macaulay in 1835, these schools were abolished.

The early educational institutions

The earliest educational institutes established by the Company were the **Calcutta Madrasah** (1781) by Warren Hastings and the **Benares Sanskrit College** (1791) by Lord Cornwallis. However, these institutions provided traditional education in the extant languages of Persian and Sanskrit. One of the earliest to moot the idea of English education was Sir Charles Grant, who in 1892, moved a proposal to the Directors of the Company in this regard; however, it remained unimplemented. In 1813, the renewed charter of the Company had provision for spending of Rs. 1,00,000/- exclusively on education. However, this also remained unimplemented for the want of clarity as to the format of education to be adopted. The dilemma was whether the amount was to be spent on oriental education or the teaching of the English language and Western sciences. In 1823, the company opened **Delhi College** and **Agra College** to provide oriental education and made provision for translation of English books in the oriental languages. However, for a variety of reasons the endeavour did not become popular with the Indians. Meanwhile, with the private initiative of Englishman David Hare, Sir Hyde East, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and other Indians, **Hindu College** was established in Calcutta in 1817. Here English was taught, besides Persian and Bengali, and it soon became popular. This was later to become the Presidency College of Calcutta.

Besides the above, there were some other initiatives, but no major change in Indian education happened till 1835. This year proved to be a watershed in the educational history of India. Lord Macaulay who was the Chairman of the 'Committee on Public Instructions', wrote his famous note on Indian education which was later to become the permanent policy of British education in India. Macaulay recommended teaching Western sciences in the English language in schools and colleges, with English not only as a compulsory subject but also as a medium of instruction. This was accepted by the Governor General of India Lord William Bentick. With this, the other schools of thought that espoused the cause of oriental education or education of Western sciences in Indian languages were completely shut.

Early English education and its impact

The decision to impart English education to Indians had far-reaching consequences. Over the years, a number of schools and colleges were opened that imparted English education. These started to become popular among the masses. The prospect of securing a job with the Company and later with the British government in India, was a major allurement for the young Indians to take up English education. The language and the education were also becoming windows for the impressionistic young minds to understand the English culture and the sciences. These were begun to be looked upon by different sections of the society. Post the decision of 1835 of William Bentick, efforts were also made to open a school in every district. Later, more schools also came up. Many colleges and universities were also started including the **Calcutta Medical College** (1835), **Madras Medical College** (1835), **Bombay Grant Medical College** (1845), **College of Civil Engineering, Roorkee** (1847), **University of Calcutta** (1857), **University of Bombay** (1857), **University of Madras** (1857), **Central College Lahore** (1864), **University of Punjab** at Lahore (1882) and **Allahabad University** (1887). This was the phase of the beginning of the modern education system in India.

Impact of English Education in India

The introduction of English education broke the barrier which had hitherto effectively shut India from the Western world. The great Muslim scholar, Al-Biruni, remarked about 1000 AD that the Hindus kept themselves aloof from the outer world and were ignorant of the arts and sciences of the West. This glaring defect of Hindus was equally evident eight hundred years later. But a great change came over them at the beginning of the 19th century A.D. English education opened the floodgates of Western ideas which almost overwhelmed them at the beginning. 50 years of English education brought greater changes in the minds of the educated Hindus of Bengal than the previous thousand years.

The principal reason for this is that India came into contact with Western ideas at the most opportune moment. It was the age of French illumination when the spirit of rationalism and individualism dominated Europe and thought. It proclaimed the supremacy of reason over faith, of individual conscience over outside authority, and brought in its train new conceptions of social justice and political rights. A new ideology suddenly burst forth upon the static life, moulded for centuries by a fixed set of religious ideas and social conventions. It gave birth to a critical attitude towards religion and a spirit of enquiry into the origin of state and society with a view to determining their proper scope and functions.

To put it in a concrete form, the most important result of the impact of Western culture on India was the replacement of blind faith in current traditions beliefs and conventions- characteristics of the mediaeval age- by a spirit of rationalism which seeks to enquire and argue before accepting anything….

R.C Majumdar and K.K. Datta in *The History and Culture of the Indian People, British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, part II, chapter II (page 106)

Over the years traditional oriental education started to collapse. The local schools and high schools which were run based on community support were finding fewer takers. The support from the Indian rulers for some schools which was there in the early part of the 19th century had already ceased. This created a void in the educational apparatus of the country. The demand for education could not be met by the schools and colleges set up by the Company and later the British Government. Further, English education had its limitations, to the extent it could spread despite its contemporaneous nature. Although private initiatives of the likes of Raja Ram Mohan Roy or other Englishmen did open some schools and colleges, these were insufficient. A part of the education institutional space was also taken up by the missionary educational institutions which had a reasonable presence in different parts of the country. However, overall there remained a dearth of schools and colleges in India. English education was largely limited to the upper section of the society. The British expectation of the trickle-down effect taking Western sciences and English education to the masses did not materialise in the 19th century. Further, English education had little focus on vocational education and preserving Indian values.

The education system despite the reforms brought by **Wood's Despatch** (1854) and **Hunter Commission report** (1882-1883) broadly functioned in the same direction, with English as the medium of education and some other relevant improvements. Macaulay's efforts had also earlier helped in replacing Persian with English as the language of administration. Now the British needed more Indians who could understand the language, communicate with the masters and fill the lower rungs of bureaucracy. English education served this well. It was also creating a new generation of Indians who believed in English culture, dressed, ate, and conducted themselves like the English. They believed in the inherent superiority of the English and owed allegiance to the colonial masters.

However, English education did have some significant and positive impact on Indian society. It provided for a modern education infrastructure ranging from schools and colleges to technical institutes and universities. It created awareness of the western thought and sciences in a section of the Indian society. Indians of the richer section, who could afford the English education and in particular the costlier higher and overseas education, were not only exposed to the British pedagogy of learning, the Western sciences and other disciplines, but also to the modern systems of governance. India and the Indian political establishment, in the late 18th and even in the early 19th centuries, had largely been aloof of the wave of democracy sweeping the Western world post the French Revolution of 1789 and the emergence of democracy in the United States of America in the late 18th century. With the arrival of English education, there was exposure to the concepts of democracy and representative governance which once had birth in India but was long forgotten thereafter.

The consciousness towards the country and society began to evolve. Equally significant was that the exposure to English education also fired up some of the Indians, a spirit of questioning the status quo and inquiry, which seemed to have become dormant in the past centuries. There was questioning of the orthodoxy. The culture of rationalism was revived. This was to prove crucial in ushering in a wave of educational and social reforms by Indians and later in creating a national consciousness.

The Press: The harbinger of change

The advent of the press and the printing of newspapers and periodicals in India was an outcome of the British presence in India. In the coming two centuries, the press had a pioneering role to play. The printing press had already made its appearance in some parts of India in the 16th-17th century. By the late 18th and the early 19th century, some newspapers were also printed in India. **Hicky's *Bengal Gazette***, started in Calcutta, in 1780 by James Augustus Hicky was the first newspaper in India. This was followed by; *The Indian Gazette* (Calcultta, 1780), *The Calcutta Gazette* (Calcutta, 1782), *Bombay Herald* (Bombay, 1789), *The Bombay Gazette* (Bombay, 1791), *The Madras Gazette* (Madras, 1795), *Samachaar Darpan* (Calcutta, 1818), *Sambada Kaumudi* (Calcutta, 1821), *Bombay Samachar* (Bombay, 1822) etc. The earliest newspapers and periodicals were started by private English individuals and catered largely towards the Anglo-Indian community in India. Later, there emerged the vernacular press which was started by the Indians.

These newspapers, including the English papers, owed little allegiance to the Company and were at times critical of the Company and its policies. Accordingly, the Company officials looked at the press suspiciously. They frequently adopted the policy to muzzle it, despite protests and appeals from many quarters, including eminent Indians like Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The **Press Ordinance of 1823** introduced stringent regulations against the Indian press. It was only after **The Press Act** was passed in 1835, that the Indian vernacular press (in particular) received the essential liberty. It was henceforth that the growth of the press and newspapers started to take place. **Sir Charles Metcalfe** the acting Governor-

General (1835-1836) who brought this ordinance sincerely believed that it was through the freedom of the press that true knowledge could be disseminated among the masses, and it was their duty to spread the knowledge and civilisation and the arts and sciences of Europe over the land. His views were only to prove prophetic, and the press was to play a yeoman's role in heralding the social change and national consciousness in the coming decades.

Freedom of the Press and the Perspective of the English in the Early 19th Century

As a matter of fact, the real grounds of opposition to a free press in India had always been the fear that it would alienate against the British government, not only the people but, what mattered more, the Indian Army on which rested the main strength of the British in India. The Court of Directors actually expressed the fear that "free discussions of political questions in newspapers might goad the sepoys to revolt".

Sir Charles Metcalfe made this argument in a few words which deserve to be placed by the side of the more well-known speech of Macaulay in the same tenor. "If their argument be", said he, "that the spread of knowledge may eventually be fatal to our rule in India, I close with them on that point". He expressed his hope that the increase of knowledge in India would strengthen and not destroy the British Empire. But he maintained that "whatever may be the consequence, it is our duty to communicate the benefits of the knowledge". Then he observed:

"whatever however, be the will of the Almighty Providence respecting the future government of India, it is clearly our duty, as long as the charge be confided to our hands, to execute the trust to the best of our ability for the good of the people. The promotion of knowledge – of which the liberty of the press is one of the most efficient instruments – is manifestly an essential part of that duty. It cannot be that we are permitted by the divine authority to be here merely to collect the revenues of the country, pay the establishment necessary to keep possession, and get into debt to supply the deficiency. We are doubtless here for higher purposes; one of which is to pour the enlightened knowledge of civilisation, the arts and sciences of Europe, over the land and thereby improve the condition of the people. ***Nothing surely is more likely to conduce to these ends than the liberty of the press."***

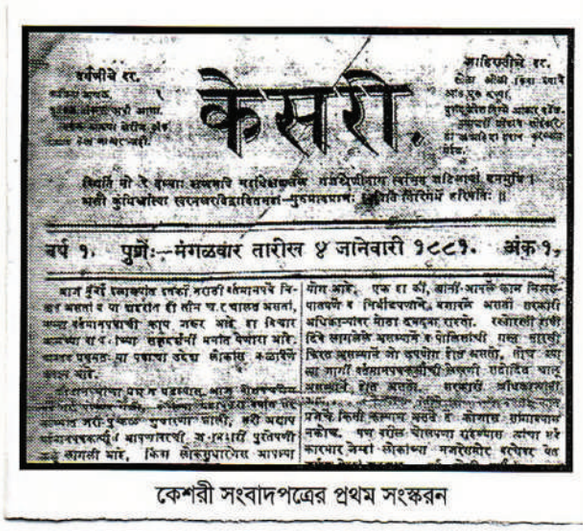
R.C Majumdar and K.K. Datta in *The History and Culture of the Indian People, British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, part II, chapter II

In the coming years the press, and in particular the vernacular press, played a stellar role in highlighting the emerging social issues as well as critiquing the government and its policies. The movements in social reforms spearheaded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and Keshub Chandra Sen in Bengal were highlighted through the press and so were the works of other reformers and educationists in later years. **Raja Ram Mohan Roy** established and was editor of **Samvad Kaumudi** (established in 1821), which was launched to campaign against the practice of Sati. **Keshub Chandra Sen**, a leading reformer in Bengal wrote articles for the **Indian Mirror**, a weekly journal of the Brahmo Samaj in Calcutta in the 1860s. He also wrote for the **Hindoo Patriot**, a leading Bengali journal in the 1850s and 1860s. **M.G Ranade**, who was associated with Prarthna Samaj, which led to socio-religious reforms within Hinduism, particularly in the Maharashtra region, was the editor of **Bombay**, an Anglo-Marathi daily paper. He also founded **Induprakash**, a bi-weekly Anglo-Marathi paper that championed the cause of social reforms and later criticised the British policy and supported the Indian national movement. **Rast Goftar** (literal meaning 'the truth-teller'), an Anglo-Gujarati journal, was started by **Dadabhai Nauroji** and others in Bombay (in 1854) to pioneer social reforms amongst the Parsis in western India. Later, it also echoed political views. **Sir Syed Ahmed Khan**, an eminent educationist and Islamic reformer started the journal, **Mohammedan Social Reformer** (1870) to promote liberal ideas among the Indian Muslims.

14.7: The First Edition of Mohammedan Social Reformer dated 24th December 1870 brought out by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan — Wikimedia Commons

During the revolt of 1857, the regional and local press played a significant role in highlighting the Indian perspective and also spreading disaffection towards the Company government. While the English press, post 1857-1858, was very critical of the revolt and its comments were bitter and acrimonious, the vernacular press despite the fear of retribution and government restrictions, portrayed the Indian perspective boldly. On socio-economic issues the Indian press was unrelenting. The *Hindoo Patriot* had staunchly denounced the indigo planters and highlighted the plight of the oppressed cultivators who were being subjected to terrible miseries. ***Amrita Bazaar Patrika***

also wrote extensively about the Indigo revolt of the Bengal. **G. Subramania Iyer**, a social reformer and nationalist, founded ***The Hindu*** (English newspaper) and ***Swadesamitran*** (Tamil newspaper) in 1878 and 1882 respectively. **Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak**, a leading figure of the Indian nationalist movement in the late 19th century, launched ***Kesari***, a Marathi newspaper and ***Mahratta***, an English newspaper in 1881. Both newspapers were crucial in the expression of the political views of Tilak, in furthering Indian consciousness and taking the idea of Indian nationalism amongst the masses. In later years, press also played a stellar role in the growth of Indian nationalism.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वर्ष १. पुण्यें:--मंगळवार तारीख ४ जानेवारी १८८१. अंक १.

केशरी संवादपत्रेचा प्रथम संस्करन

14.8: The first edition of *Kesari* newspaper dated 4th January, 1881 — Wikipedia

The growth of the press also aided the growth of **Indian literature** which prospered in the second half of the 19th century. As many vernacular newspapers and journals were established, journalistic writing grew. It also afforded space to the literary as well as non-literary articles. The art of writing **prose** developed. An eminent author like Bankim Chandra, a towering figure of Bengali literature, had his earliest of publications in a weekly newspaper **Sangbad Prabhakar**. His much-acclaimed novel *Anand Math* first appeared in the public domain in a serial form in the literary magazine ***Bangadarshan*** founded by him (in 1872). Like him, for many other authors, newspapers and journals were the first medium of literary expression. Further, while the books had their reach and specific market, newspapers and magazines could penetrate deeper into the Indian hinterland and could connect better even with the villages. Thus, they opened the world of literature to the common man.

The advent and growth of the press touched the Indian life deeply. It was a powerful instrument for the diffusion of ideas and knowledge. The rationality and reasoning induced in Indian thought as a result of European influence and English education were further disseminated through the press. Diverse issues ranging from social reforms to economic policy of the government, were discussed and analysed in it, which enabled the formation of public opinion. This enabled the launch as well as sustenance of many social and nationalist movements. While the vernacular press criticised the exploitation of the Indigo cultivators, it also criticised the social evils like *sati* and untouchability and raised public awareness about it. The role of the press in the growth of nationalism can hardly be overemphasised. The press aided in the growth of literature. It also helped in the creation of awareness about other elements of regional culture that were neglected or looked down upon. It was undoubtedly the most important means of public communication and provided a connection between the people in different parts of the country as perhaps never before. Even in the 20th century, the writings of eminent nationalist leaders like Lokmanya Tilak in *Kesari* and Mahatma Gandhi in *Young India* and of others, was to serve as a beacon of light for Indian nationalism and culture.

Social Reforms-Heralding an Indian Renaissance

The confluence of European rationality, English education and the Indian society of the 19th century, heralded a phase of social reforms, at times considered by scholars as the Indian Renaissance. This was a phase of reform that influenced our very thoughts, permeated different aspects of our social life, and helped our art forms, literature and other elements of Indian culture to evolve. It was an age of 'introspection', whereby the questioning of the dogmatic socio-religious traditions and customs, exposed the rot and the dead wood within the Indian society. A rational enquiry of the myriad of social beliefs and practices ensued. This was followed and supported by decades of hard groundwork. Sustained campaigns to oppose the social evils, support the reforms, and create public awareness, which was aided by some strict laws, helped to stem this rot. Gradually, a positive change began in the Indian society. The century witnessed a number of socio-religious reforms which included; the Brahmo Samaj, the Young Bengal Movement, Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and the Theosophical Society, among others.

Many of these early reform movements were against evil practices like *sati*, child marriages and female infanticide. The earliest among these was the **Brahmo Samaj,** established in 1828 by **Raja Ram Mohan Roy**, a modern-thinking scholar and a great visionary. The movement and its name denoted a society of

14.9: Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a social reformer, an eminent scholar and the father of the renaissance of modern Bengal; first-day cover and stamp released in 2023 on the occasion of his 250th Birth Anniversary — Courtesy, Department of Post

the worshippers of the Brahma–the Ultimate Reality and the Supreme Consciousness. While it preached the principles of monotheism and the universality of the godhead, it also worked against child marriage, caste system and Brahmanical orthodoxy. Its relentless efforts culminated in *sati* being declared a punishable offence in 1829.

The various movements also emphasised upon education for women and supported widow remarriages. Inter castes, marriages removal of the purdah system etc. were some other social reforms they pursued. **Bharatiya Brahmo Samaj** or **Naba Bidhan Samaj**, a sect established by **Keshub Chandra Sen** (in 1866) was a champion of these issues. **Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar**, an eminent educator and reformist worked tirelessly for the education of the girl child and the emancipation of women and started many schools for them. He was opposed to child marriages and supported widow remarriages, which were legalised by the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. His efforts were also instrumental in passing of the Age of Consent Act of 1860, fixing the minimum age of consummation of marriage at 10. **Dhondo Keshav Karve** established the **Widow Remarriage Association** (in 1883) and the **Hindu Widows Home** (in 1896). He also worked against the Devadasi system and was a pioneer of women's education in Maharashtra.

Besides, the reforms were also opposed to the caste system, Brahmanical orthodoxy, and untouchability and worked for the emancipation of the downtrodden. **Veda Samaj,** established by **Kandukuri Veeresalingam** (in 1864) opposed caste discrimination. He also opposed child marriage and the dowry system. **Satya Shodhak Samaj** founded by **Jyotiba Phule** (in 1873) opposed untouchability, caste system and Brahmanical supremacy. He also worked for the education of women and the oppressed caste of the region.

Some of these movements emphasised upon the Vedantic philosophy and spiritual regeneration of the Hindu society. **Arya Samaj,** started by **Swami Dayananda Saraswati** in 1875, was one such movement. Its socio-religious reforms were based on the principles of monotheism, with its teachings centred on the Vedas. But unlike the earlier monotheistic movements such as Brahmo Samaj, it considered the Vedas to be infallible. It also exerted a wider ambit of social influence beyond the reforms by including work and issues like providing Vedic education and setup of educational institutions, working to prevent conversion of the Hindus and establishing a deeper connection with the people.

The Ramakrishna Mission, founded by **Swami Vivekananda** (in 1897) to spread the teachings of his guru **Swami Ramakrishna Paramahamsa**, started as a religious and spiritual organization. The philosophy of the movement was based on the principles of Vedanta and aimed at the spiritual rejuvenation of Indian society. It also created a monastic order of *sanyasis* (renunciates) and a *math* at Belur (Howrah), which became the focal point of the 'Mission'. While the Mission's aims were spiritual attainment and realisation of God, renunciation and humanitarian service were considered to be the ideals to be pursued for the attainment of its goals. Along with spiritual regeneration and doing invaluable work in the humanitarian field, it also actively pursued education as a goal in the coming century.

Besides these reform movements within Hinduism, this phase also witnessed the emergence of movements in other religious communities. These brought educational reforms within those communities and emphasised upon the revival of their socio-religious character. In 1851, **Dadabhai Nauroji**, **Naoroji Furdoonji** and **S.S. Bengalee** launched the **Religious Reforms Association of the Parsis** (Rehnumai Maz'dayasan Sabha). It strived to reform the Zoroastrian religion to its pristine purity as well as to bring social reforms among the Parsis. The **Aligarh Movement** started by **Sir Syed Ahmad Khan**, worked for the education and social upliftment of the Muslims. He firmly believed that Muslims should be broadminded and not be secluded from modern ideas and that this could be attained through modern and scientific education. In 1866, he started the Muhammadan Educational Conference and in 1875 he founded the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh which became the centre of the reform activities and lent the name 'Aligarh Movement' to the reforms initiated by him. The **Ahmadiya Movement** was a revivalist Islamic and messianic (based on a messiah) movement started in 1889 by **Mirza Ghulam Ahmad**. It aimed to usher in the true intent of Islam and emphasized upon the universality of religion, principles of peace, brotherhood, justice and other salient aspects of Islam. Similarly, among the Sikhs, the **Namdhari movement** (in the early 19th century) and the **Nirankari movement** (in the latter half of the 19th century) strived to revive the true Sikh religion and reform it of corrupted practices.

The social movements of the 19th century were both **reformative** and **revivalistic.** The former challenged the traditions and rejected some of the popular doctrines that had been accepted for ages. The Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, the Parsi reforms, the Aligarh Movement, the Ahmadiya Movement, the Wahabi Movement, etc. are often considered in this category. The Ramakrishna Mission, which did not completely reject idolatry and ritualism, but synthesized it with the deeper Vedantic traditions and the Theosophical movement, can be considered among the latter category. The Arya Samaj, which rejected idolatry, but aimed at reviving the Vedic traditions while considering the Vedas to be infallible, can be considered to combine the traits of both. Irrespective of the categorization and their approach, they all left a significant mark on the socio-cultural milieu.

These social movements were spread in different parts of the country. Bengal, which spearheaded the reform movement also inspired similar movements in different parts of the country, be it Maharashtra, Punjab or the Deccan region. Over a period of time, these movements imbued Indian society, particularly the religion, culture and social thought, with liberalism and modernity. They were also instrumental in invoking a sense of Indian identity which had been dormant for centuries. In the later decades of the 19th century, in the wake of the anti-colonial sentiments simmering in the land, they also aided in the emergence of nationalistic fervour and thus channelled our socio-cultural identity into Indian nationalism.

Literature and Indian Nationalism

In the latter half of the 19th century, the resurgence of Indian nationalism and the growth of literature complemented each other. This phase was marked by a reformistic and nationalistic fervour. A variety of social issues, especially those related to women, child marriage, education of women, and prohibition of widow remarriage, emerged as the main theme of many early Indian novels. *Bishabriksha* (1873), by **Bankim Chandra**, *Indulekha* (1889), the first novel in Malayalam by **Chandu Menon**, and later *Chokher Bali* (1901), *Ghaire Baire* (1915) by **Rabindranath Tagore**, were some of the novels of this genre. These engendered a larger social and cultural consciousness which also paved the way for Indian nationalism.

The rise of nationalism and the critique of British misrule were also the themes of many literary works of this period. *Neel Darpan* (play) by **Dinabandhu Mitra** (*Bagala* 1859-60) highlighted the plight of indigo farmers condemned to indigo plantations; a demand of the then flourishing British looms. *Chakar Darpan* (Mirror of Tea-Planters, 1875) by **Dakshina Charan Chattopadhyay** also highlighted the oppression of the tea planters. *Bharat Durdasha* (Hindi, 1875) written by **Bharatendu Harishchandra** succinctly brings out the reasons for India's economic plight. Amongst its major causes, besides the social and internal factors, he highlights British misrule. He identifies the destruction of the rural economy and cottage industries as an instrument of British policy to enrich its mills and economy. *Andher Nagari* (Hindi 1889), was another satirical play by Bharatendu on the perils of misrule and was metaphoric for India's condition. **Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's** *Anand Math* hails the motherland. Its song *Bande Mataram*, was an inspiration to the people during the partition of Bengal (1905) and continued to inspire several generations of nationalistic leaders. *Devi Chaudharani* (1884), another novel by Bankim Chandra made a call for patriotic struggle against the British, especially inspiring women. It was banned by the British and only post-independence of India the ban was lifted. *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901) a book by Dadabhai Naoroji, brings out the theory of the drain of wealth from India, and how India was being systematically impoverished.

Besides the above, the writings of Gokhale (in *Hitavaad*, a weekly newspaper) of Tilak (in *Kesari*) and other leaders like Tagore, Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi and others were instrumental in the evolution of a pan-India consciousness and nationalistic fervour.

British Architecture: New Influences and Confluence of Styles

Growth of British Architecture

By the last quarter of the 18th century, the British authority was firmly entrenched in India and by the beginning of the 19th century their influence had spread in a large part of the country. As with their spreading influence, British architecture also spread to different parts of the country. Indeed, their architectural style was a new influence on the Indian landscape and perhaps one of the significant and visible elements of the British tangible culture. This was an element that evolved squarely out of the needs of the colonial masters as well as their desire to stamp a mark of the ruler on the land on which they established their political authority.

British colonial architecture developed in different phases and in different cities and towns. Among the earliest to develop were the port cities. To begin with, the need for constructing various structures arose on account of practical and security considerations in the port cities from where the British carried their trade. The Company and its officials needed structures to fulfil the requirements of, trading, basic administration, security, housing and other social needs. Accordingly, in the early phase of the East India Company in the 17th–18th century, colonial architecture emerged in form of the warehouses, residential houses, churches and other monuments. These were however largely limited to the forts of Madras (Chennai), Calcutta (Kolkata) and Bombay (Mumbai) where the Company's settlements, factories and mercantile offices were fortified as protection against the other competing colonial powers and the local rulers.

14.10: Raj Bhavan, Kolkata, a mid-19th century example of British architecture in India which incorporated elements of neo-classical style; erstwhile Government House; in view, the front façade and the entrance with a majestic portico and Ionic pillars — Courtesy, Department of Tourism, West Bengal

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Company had taken over the administration of several provinces. Henceforth, the demands of administration and thus of the infrastructure requirements, became more complex. This marked the next phase of British architecture which came out of the forts and manifested in the Presidency cities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay and the adjoining regions. While the fort areas were the exclusive preserve of the British, other areas also developed around it for the settlement of the native population. This catered to the needs of the merchants, artisans, workers and others who dealt with the Company and the British merchants. In the vicinity, came up the houses of the rich Indian merchants, agents and middlemen. These were large traditional courtyard houses, particularly in the vicinity of the *bazaars.* Such native settlements were referred to as the **Black town** while the British settlement was referred to the **White town**, a segregation which remained as sharp even in the times to come. Thus, the landscape of our towns and cities changed.

Post the rebellion of 1857 and the British crown taking over the administration, the British became extremely wary and security conscious. There was a growing realization to better defend the towns. The British cleared the pastures/grasslands and agricultural fields around older towns and built areas called **'Civil Lines'** which were urban spaces exclusively/substantially for the British. **Cantonments** were also developed in many towns which were areas where the Indian troops were stationed under the command of European officers and were considered as a safe enclave. These areas were characterized by wide roads/streets, large bungalows with gardens, space for the barracks, parade grounds and churches. They were also seen as the models of urban settlements as compared to the dense and crowded Indian towns. Thus, came up new standards of urban town planning and infrastructure.

In the latter half of the 19th century and later in the 20th century, new cities and towns developed further. Rail lines were laid to connect different parts of the country. This was essential to establish administrative control of the British as well as to transfer the raw materials and finished goods from the hinterland to the ports and vice-versa. There was an increasing need for the establishment of government administrative complexes, military complexes, large residential complexes, public infrastructure, railways and transport infrastructure, besides commemorative monuments and other structures. This was reflected in the changing landscape, emerging monuments and evolving architecture which penetrated even smaller towns and cities. This was the final phase of British architecture in India which continued in the 19th and 20th centuries till India's independence.

British architectural styles

The British Colonial architecture was not a singular style but a mix of different styles of European architecture which flourished in different phases of their presence in the country. These included Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Neo–Classical, Neo-Gothic, and Victorian styles. While the **Viceregal Lodge** in Shimla (now referred to as the *Rashtrapati Niwas*) was a classic example of **British Renaissance**

14.11: Victoria Memorial, an iconic monument of the early 20th century and glowing example of Indo-Saracenic architecture — Courtesy, Department of Tourism, West Bengal

architecture, the **Government House** (1803) the **Indian Museum** (1875) in Kolkata, the **Town Hall** (1833) and the **Elphinstone Circle** in Mumbai (1869) are some glorious examples of **Neo-Classical architecture**. **Neo-Gothic or Victorian Gothic** became popular in India in the mid and late 19th century. Some of its spectacular examples are the **Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus building** (1887), the **Municipal Corporation building** and the **Maharashtra Police Headquarters building** (1872-1876) in Mumbai. The **Calcutta High Court** (established 1862), is another example of Neo-Gothic architecture.

British architecture could not remain untouched by indigenous architecture and by the demands placed on it by environmental and social-political factors. By the late 19th and beginning of 20th centuries, it incorporated elements of Mughal architecture and other indigenous Indian elements. It evolved into a fusion of British style with Indian elements and was referred to as **Indo-Saracenic architecture**. The **Victoria Memorial** in Calcutta (1921) is an exquisite example of this style. The **Senate House**, the

14.12: India Gate (1921), an iconic monument, symbolic of the 20th century British architecture of India; established as a war memorial; a sunset view from the lawns — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

National Art Gallery, (1906), and **Egmore Railway Station** (1908) in Chennai are some other prominent examples. The structures of the new capital city of New Delhi which included the **Viceroy's House** (now the *Rashtrapati Bhavan*: completed in 1927) and the Secretariat complex of **North** and **South Blocks** and other structures are some of the grandest examples of this style.

British architecture marked a transition from the erstwhile medieval architecture and manifested itself across the length and breadth of the country. Its presence was visible not only in the stately and grand structures of the new capitals the British built and in the Presidency towns, but also in numerous minor official and residential structures in smaller towns and cities. It brought in more contemporaneous construction techniques with modern materials. The concept of city planning and municipal functions was also instituted. Railways and industrial structures came up and so did roads and bridges. These changes were indeed a necessity for the British to sustain their administration in India, but then they also deeply influenced Indian architecture.

Socio-cultural Impact of Railways and the Growth of Industries in British India

Railways and industrialisation were other factors that had a considerable impact on society, people and culture. The period of the first few decades of the 19th century had been characterised by a considerable erosion of the export of cotton textiles and cotton piece goods from India. **While till the late 18th century India had the status of the world's major exporter of cotton, by the middle of the 19th century India itself became a major importer of cotton piece goods from Britain**. As per certain accounts, in 1811-12 export of cotton piece goods constituted nearly 33 per cent of India's exports, but by 1850-51 this was reduced to a paltry three per cent. While at the turn of the century, there were hardly any imports of cotton piece goods in India, by the 1850s, this figure had reached nearly 31%. The British policy of taxation of imports from India (import substitution), control of the ports and trade and pumping the machine-made cheaper products from the Manchester mills, had crippled the cotton industry and weaving in India, and thus the Indian economy.

The mills of Britain also needed access to Indian raw materials and to the markets. With the arrival of the railways in the 1850s, this link was established. The raw material from the hinterland could now move through the rails to the ports controlled by the Company and then to the mills in Britain. The finished goods could move through the same channel of ports and rails to the cities and smaller towns.

With the coming of the Industrial Revolution in Europe and machines replacing manual labour, the advent of machines and mills was not very far for India. By the 1850s, cotton mills in Bombay and jute mills in Bengal had been set up. By the 1860s, cotton mills had come up in Ahmedabad and Kanpur and by 1870s in Madras. Many of these mills were built by Indian entrepreneurs and traders.

With the collapse of the market and traditional weaving, the source of revenue that sustained the rural economy for centuries dried up. People in different communities in the villages were becoming paupers as the pressure on agriculture also piled up. The villages were impoverished. The coming up of the mills, ports, railways and other establishments and with it more opportunities made the cities richer creating an unparalleled rural-urban divide. The growth of large cities also offered economic opportunities to the rural poor and this resulted in a **migration** of people from the villages and smaller towns to the larger cities. From weavers and peasants in their ancestral lands, they now became labourers in the mills in distant cities. They were uprooted from their society and culture and became rootless in their new environment in the cities.

Society changed in villages as well as in the cities and so did their culture. Villages were no longer, the reasonably self-sufficient centres of production. They had become impoverished end consumers dependent to an extent on the cities and production centres. The economic distress and the increasing dependency had a telling impact on the people. Besides, their weakening economic status and even their self-belief started to wane. Resentment against the company and the administration was on the rise.

The migration of villagers was not limited to the ports and industrial cities in India but migration also occurred to several **British plantations** in different parts of the world. This was a part of the indentured labour system through which nearly 16 lakh migrants were taken to work in the British and European plantations in the Caribbean, South Africa, East Africa, Mauritius, Malaysia, Myanmar, Fiji, Singapore and other places. These migrants hoped to return to their native villages after earning sufficiently to tide over their economic distress, but for many this return never materialised. The migrants to distant foreign lands took with them their traditions, religion, language and culture which got implanted in their new environs. Decades later, this intermingling of cultures was to blossom in new hues.

The industries, and in particular the Railways, were an instrument of British administration brought to establish their control over the economy and the territory of command. However, both had other unintended effects. Both proved to be places where the people of different communities could not keep their social segregation or religious and caste-based aloofness intact. Such distinctions had to be eschewed perforce. Thus, they became **melting pots of people from diverse backgrounds and regions**. Railways also connected different parts of the country and brought the people closer. It was responsible for making the three ports of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras into large cosmopolitan cities, a growth which continued to propel in the next century. Thus, **Railways integrated the country by interconnecting the regions and connecting the people**. This interconnect was crucial in later decades in the rising phase of Indian nationalism.

British Influence on Dress, Food and Other Elements of Micro-Culture in India

This was also a period in which the Indian population assimilated other elements of European culture, in particular, dress, food, and lifestyle. The influence on dress was substantial and visible especially in the aristocratic and the upper class. The British believed in their cultural superiority and so did a section of Indians which looked upon the British culture. They adopted British costumes and copied their lifestyle. One of the ostensible factors for this would have been that this could give them a greater connect with those who mattered then. This adoption of the new attire was reflected in men wearing a British/ European upper garment such as a shirt or a coat. This would go with their traditional lower garment such as *dhoti/ mundu/lungi,* a practice that is still popular in parts of South India. Some men started wearing *sherwani* or an *achkan* which fused with the British Frock coat. Some adopted the complete European wear of a pantsuit and a hat. Tie and shoes were also introduced and adopted by some Indians. The dress of women also underwent assimilation of the British elements. Although the *saree* continued to remain the traditional attire, the concept of a petticoat and a blouse was adopted by Indian women from the British women's attire.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Western Culture

The European influence on Indians in particular on dress and lifestyle is best exemplified by Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873), an eminent poet and litterateur in English and Bengali, who adopted the European lifestyle, early in his life. Dutt who studied at Hindu College in Calcutta, was a part of a generation of students who were stipulated to dress in Western clothing, eat European food using cutlery, speak in English and learn British culture. This was intended to anglicise a section of Indians who could work in the colonial administration. They were representative of a section of Indians who looked upon the British/European culture and emulated it. Dutt developed a yearning for European culture, converted to Christianity and also completely adopted Western outfits. In one of his poems, he writes about this yearning as below;

Where man in all his truest glory lives,
And nature's face is exquisitely sweet;
For those fair climes, I heave impatient sigh,
There let me live and there let me die

Michael Madhusudan Dutt and like him other Indians who adopted European lifestyles in part or substantial measure were in a way harbingers of a cultural confluence. However, this adoption was hardly ever complete, and was in part or at most in a substantial measure with elements of indigenous culture residing in the individual. This was responsible for producing an admixture of cultures and lifestyles. Dutt, in the later part of life after his long stay in Europe and England, was himself apparently disillusioned with European culture. It is believed that he wrote to his friend from France as below and in his later years took up writing in Bengali in a substantial way. 'If there be anyone among us anxious to leave a name behind him, and not pass away into oblivion like a brute, let him devote himself to his mother tongue. That is his legitimate sphere, his proper element.'

14.13: Michael Madhusudan Dutt, a portrait from 1907 — Wikimedia Commons

The confluence of cultures at the people-to-people level also affected the **culinary traditions** of both cultures. New items of foods, dishes and styles of cooking were introduced. Baking and items of food referred to as 'New World' vegetables (those brought in from the Americas) were introduced by the Portuguese and later popularised by the British. These included items such as potato, sweet potato, tomato, chilli, peanuts, amaranth etc. The long British presence and administrative control in different parts of the country were especially significant in popularising these items and also in their geographical spread. The introduction of tea in India and its popularity as a ubiquitous drink also can be traced to the introduction by the British in this period. Bread, toast, boiled eggs and some other items of food that gained popularity later with the Indians were other influences on the Indian food habits. The impact of Indian food on British cuisine also occurred. The Britishers often employed Indians as cooks and therefore the English meals began incorporating Indian dishes. Items of food such as curries, and chutneys, became popular, albeit in a modified form or with lesser spiciness.

Indian lifestyle and **habits** could not remain aloof from the British influence either. Indians were exposed to European music, Proscenium theatre, a culture of clubs, games like cricket, dining tables and chairs, the use of cutlery, the supply of piped water in households etc. Many of these were adopted by the Indians and by the end of British rule had become ubiquitous in India and completely ingrained with the Indian lifestyle. The use of the British form of greetings and salutations also got introduced in Indian society and later became common. However, the British influence on social life also exposed the Indians to **British racism**. The creation of 'white towns' of the British, 'black towns' for Indians, exclusive public spaces for the British, the exalted status of the English and the denigration of Indians, were the demeaning social influences that the Indians experienced.

Thus, the rising phase of English culture touched upon almost every aspect of Indian life and profoundly influenced many.

Mahatma Gandhi: Social Influences, British Superiority and Meat Eating

In his autobiography (*My Experiments With Truth*), Mahatma Gandhi recounts candidly as to how as a teenager he took to meat eating for a while. He attributes this to the negative influences of his friend and to the belief that it would make him strong and superior as were the British, who were so as they were meat eaters. It was a perception, he also recounts, which was in vogue then. It also succinctly brings out the general yearning of the vanquished (Indians) to be stronger, the complex of inferiority that seems to have seeped into the common folks and their desire to emulate their rulers at the cost of shedding their own strong traditions. It is indeed a pointer to the British social influences. The relevant excerpts are as below.

……A wave of 'reform' was sweeping over Rajkot at the time when I first came across this friend. He informed me that many of our teachers were secretly taking meat and wine. He also named many well-known people of Rajkot as belonging to the same company. There were also, I was told, some high-school boys among them. I was surprised and pained. I asked my friend the reason and he explained it thus: 'We are a weak people because we do not eat meat. The English are able to rule over us, because they are meat-eaters. You know how hardy I am and how great a runner too. It is because I am a meat-eater……..

All these pleas on behalf of meat-eating were not advanced at a single sitting. They represent the substance of a long and elaborate argument which my friend was trying to impress upon me from time to time. My elder brother had already fallen.

He therefore supported my friend's argument. I certainly looked feeble-bodied by the side of my brother and this friend. They were both hardier, physically stronger, and more daring. This friend's exploits cast a spell over me…….

Moreover, I was a coward. I used to be haunted by the fear of thieves, ghosts, and serpents. I did not dare to stir out of doors at night. Darkness was a terror to me. It was almost impossible for me to sleep in the dark, as I would imagine ghosts coming from one direction, thieves from another and serpents from a third. I could not therefore bear to sleep without a light in the room. How could I disclose my fears to my wife, no child, but already at the threshold of youth, sleeping by my side? I knew that she had more courage than I, and I felt ashamed of myself. She knew no fear of serpents and ghosts. She could go out anywhere in the dark. My friend knew all these weaknesses of mine. He would tell me that he could hold in his hand live serpents, could defy thieves and did not believe in ghosts. And all this was, of course, the result of eating meat. A doggerel of the Gujarati poet Narmad was in vogue amongst us schoolboys, as follows:

Behold the mighty Englishman
He rules the Indian small,
Because being a meat-eater
He is five cubits tall.

All this had its due effect on me. I was beaten. It began to grow on me that meat-eating was good, that it would make me strong and daring, and that, ***if the whole country took to meat-eating, the English could be overcome****. A day was thereupon fixed for beginning the experiment. It had to be conducted in secret. The Gandhis were Vaishnavas. My parents were particularly staunch Vaishnavas. They would regularly visit the Haveli. The family had even its own temples. Jainism was strong in Gujarat, and its influence was felt everywhere and on all occasions. The opposition to and abhorrence of meat-eating that existed in Gujarat among the Jains and Vaishnavas were to be seen nowhere else in India or outside in such strength. These were the traditions in which I was born and bred. And I was extremely devoted to my parents. I knew that the moment they came to know of my having eaten meat, they would be shocked to death. Moreover, my love of truth made me extra cautious. I cannot say that I did not know then that I should have to deceive my parents if I began eating meat. But my mind was bent on the 'reform'. It was not a question of pleasing the palate. I did not know that it had a particularly good relish. I wished to be strong and daring and wanted my countrymen also to be such so that we might defeat the English and make India free. The word Swaraj I had not yet heard. But I knew what freedom meant. The frenzy of the 'reform' blinded me. And having ensured secrecy, I persuaded myself that mere hiding the deed from parents was no departure from truth….*

Excerpts from Chapter-6 of, 'The Story of My Experiments with Truth' an autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi

THE RISE OF INDIAN NATIONALISM AND CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The Rising Indian Nationalism: Tracing its Course

The period since the last few decades of the 19th century leading to India's independence in 1947, was a phase of the rise of Indian nationalism. It was a period where our cultural consciousness was also driven by our nationalistic fervour. The growth of Indian nationalism experienced different phases of resurgence and suppression and different elements of Indian culture and social life remained closely interlinked with it.

By the middle of the 18th century, economic despair and misrule had already resulted in the alienation of the masses. Combined with a variety of other socio-economic and political factors, Indian nationalism was on the rise. This culminated in the First War of Independence in 1857. However, the brutal suppression of the revolt and later the takeover of the administration directly by the British crown and other factors had a dampening effect on the growth of Indian nationalism. The debacle of different Indian powers in the previous 100 years had a demoralising effect on the Indians and then with the crushing of the revolt, Indian self-belief also seemed to have vaporised. In the subsequent decade, there also emerged a belief in a section of Indians about the inherent superiority of the political masters, their society, governance, technology and even culture. Some Indians even looked upon the British and began to emulate them. The period 1860s and 1870s were the decades in which the British had fully and firmly established their political authority and to an extent pushed back Indian nationalism.

However, in the last quarter of the 19th century, Indian nationalism and consciousness of our socio-cultural identity grew again. The social awakening also affected the evolution of the political consciousness and both complimented each other. The exposure to the ideas of democracy and a representative system of government, which arose on account of the influence of Western culture and British education, had already kindled a national consciousness among Indians. The above factors induced a sense of rational inquiry which began in the socio-religious domain but transcended well into the political realm. There gradually emerged a section of Indians, who questioned the status quo. The culture of dogmatic acceptance of things or compliance to the status quo, driven merely on account of tradition and faith, had started to wane. The socio-cultural reforms and revivalist movements were gradually awakening our

self-belief and belief in our socio-cultural identity. These continued well in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and created an environment for the growth of Indian nationalism.

Indian National Congress and Early Nationalism

The formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, provided a platform for the growth of nationalism. Over the decades since its formation, several political events and movements unfolded many of which were launched by it and its leaders, and some supported by it, which fuelled Indian nationalism. To begin with, the Congress was envisaged as a 'safety valve' against a nationalist upsurge. It was meant to be a platform to voice the public opinion. It did serve as an early platform to this effect but also aided in the formation and shaping of the socio-political views of the Indians. The early leaders of the Congress like Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendranath Banerjee, Pherozshah Mehta, Badruddin Tyabji, W.C. Bonnerjee, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and others, adopted the approach of submitting memorandums and petitions to the Government to press for their social, economic, and administrative demands. This was what the political masters envisaged them to do. This was the generation of the '**Moderates**' who believed in the '**constitutional process**' and working with the governmental institutions. They played a significant role in establishing a discourse with the government and at times criticising it for its discriminatory laws and detrimental policies. In his book *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901), **Dadabhai Naoroji** brings out the **theory of the drain of wealth from India** and how pernicious the economic policies and British rule had been to the Indian economy and its people.

By the turn of the 20th century, the futility of the approach of appealing to the government had started to become apparent to a section of Congress leaders. A new generation of leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and others had emerged who did not believe in improvements through petitioning but in '**direct action**'. Referred to as the 'Extremist' group within the Indian National Congress, the troika of Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lokmanya Tilak (popularly known as Lal Bal Pal) engendered a new political ethos. The culture of Indian nationalism transitioned from petitioning for greater rights to the demand for *swaraj* (self-rule/self-governance). The subsequent partition of Bengal, the protest against it and the movement of *Swadeshi* etc., marked a closure of the 'moderate chapter' and announced the arrival of a new period of Indian nationalism.

The Partition of Bengal: A New Chapter of Indian Nationalism

In the first decade of the 20th century, Indian nationalism took a new direction and grew by leaps and bounds. The partition of Bengal and the ensuing mass movements kindled a nationalistic fervour not only in Bengal but also in the rest of the country. The British strategy to curb the growing nationalism in Bengal and sow a divide by partitioning Bengal on communal lines completely backfired. The mass protests against the partition were unprecedented. These cut across the classes and communal lines with Hindus as well as Muslims opposing the partition vehemently. Opposition was seen even from the *nawabs* and the nobility besides the commoners. The press, and Congress, all were completely against it. Eminent personalities like Rabindranath Tagore were highly critical of it. He exhorted the people of Bengal to tie *raksha bandhan*/ *rakhi* on each other's hands as a mark of solidarity on the day when partition was to be implemented. A unanimous rejection and persistent protest against the partition followed. Thousands of public meetings and protest marches in Bengal and elsewhere were organised. *Bande Mataram* (composed by Bankim Chandra) became a virtual anthem of the protests in Bengal. The movement unified the people of Bengal and India.

The entire movement opposing the partition was also accompanied by a movement for ***Swadeshi***. This meant the promotion and purchase of Indian goods as well as the boycott of foreign goods. This was a measure of last resort adopted when the other constitutional measures of written appeals, petitions, criticism by the press (including a section of Anglo- Indian press), vocal protests and mass meetings had failed. The Manchester-made cloth was the chief target of the boycott protests along with foreign-made salt, sugar and other luxury goods. The demand for swadeshi and emphasis on the use of Indian products also provided some impetus to local production, especially of cloth, a product whose industry had been ruined by the cheaper machine-made Manchester cloth.

The movement eventually resulted in the annulment of the partition in 1911. But this was also accompanied by a shift of the capital from Calcutta to New Delhi (a new capital that was later formed). The measure was considered a rebuttal of the movement and a means to contain the growing nationalism of Bengal. However, as time was to prove, the shift in the capital was insufficient to dampen the nationalistic fervour which had been evoked sufficiently. The partition of Bengal inspired a culture of nationalism

permeating every aspect of the social life including art and culture, trade and commerce. It integrated the socio-religious and economic dimensions with political nationalism thus engendering a new phase of our nationalistic culture.

The British constitutional reforms and disillusionment

The early 20th century also witnessed some measures of constitutional and legal reforms. However, they were far too little for Indian aspirations and too late in the day. There was already great disillusionment among the leaders and people from the inimical political developments and grossly inadequate measures of British policy. Then the proposed constitutional reforms such as the **Morely-Minto Reforms,** the **Indian Councils Act of 1909**, the **Montagu Chelmsford Reforms** (1918) and the subsequent **Government of India Act of 1919** etc. came. However, these were insufficient to fulfil the nationalistic aspirations as these were perceived as little more than 'lip service' and hardly sufficient to meet the genuine interest of the people. It convinced Indians that their salvation and hopes for a better future could not materialise under the exploitative British Rule or the legal framework set up by them.

The partition of Bengal on communal lines (1905), had already inflamed the masses and fired Indian nationalism. The two reforms had failed to inspire any confidence among Indians. Following it, came the **Rowlatt Act** of 1919 which authorised the police to arrest any person for any reason, to curb the rising Indian nationalism. This was sufficient to add fuel to the fire. Protests were organised by the Indian National Congress which now under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi asked the people to oppose it by means of peaceful *Satyagraha*. In the wake of one such peaceful protest against the Rowlatt Act, the brutal **Jallianwala Bagh Massacre** (1919) took place. This completely exposed the British designs, eroding all faith in the British Government. The remnants of hope, if any, in British Constitutional reforms as a means for India's upliftment, were by now completely extinguished and gave way to the growth of Indian nationalism.

Mahatma Gandhi and the socio-political culture of ethics and principles

The arrival of Mahatma Gandhi in the Indian political scene and subsequent movements launched by him were crucial in **galvanising the masses and revitalising the Indian freedom struggle**. Till now Indian nationalism and the freedom struggle were led by educated Indians, intellectuals, professionals like lawyers and the upper-class elite. It was Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, ideology and conduct that enabled the freedom struggle to be a movement with which the peasants, the workers, the artisans and a common Indian could identify themselves and be a part. This changed our national consciousness.

14.14: Stamps depicting Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi yatra and the Salt Satyagraha released in 1980 and commemorating 50 years of the watershed moment of Indian nationalism — Courtesy, Department of Post

Post the launch of **Champaran Satyagraha** in 1917 by Mahatma Gandhi, the period of the next 25 years witnessed several mass movements. These included the **Non-cooperation movement** (1921), the **Civil Disobedience movement**, **the Salt Satyagraha** (1930) and the **Quit India movement** (1942), among others. These movements were not only crucial in further awakening the political consciousness but also awakening and evolving our socio-cultural consciousness.

Mahatma's firm belief in the tenet of *Ahimsa* infused the movement and the people with moral authority and vitality. His entire socio-political conception was built on the unshakeable bedrock of non-violence and ethical principles. Now India's freedom struggle was not merely concerned with the ouster of an unjust ruler and the termination of British imperialism, but also with the awakening of those moral principles in the Indians that could enable them to be a worthy free people. A path of freedom that treaded through the woods of violence was completely unacceptable to him, for the ends would not justify the means. ***Satya* (truth) and *Ahimsa* (non-violence) were two cardinal principles of his**

socio-political conduct which were inspired by the deep-rooted Indian cultural ethos. Thus, violence became antithetical to Indian freedom and its struggle. It had to be eschewed at all costs even if it meant to call off the movement of non-cooperation in 1922, post the Chauri-Chaura incidence of violence perpetrated by the Indians.

The principle of *Ahimsa* called for the inculcation of self-discipline and self-restraint and the Indians had to rise to a higher call to tread this path. This was reflected in these movements, where Indians who protested against the British policies without resorting to any mass violence bore the brunt of police *lathis* (batons) and suffered years of imprisonment. Thus, Mahatma Gandhi's leadership not only integrated the commoners with the freedom struggle, while imbuing the masses with nationalistic fervour, but more significantly, **infused in our social and national culture, a view of higher ideals and principles**. This vision of Mahatma gradually became integral to modern Indian national culture and continues to serve as a beacon of light for our socio-political culture transcending time and even societies.

Besides the infusion of the principles of truth and nonviolence in the political realm and integrating the common people with Indian nationalism, Mahatma Gandhi's efforts were also instrumental in **forging a greater Hindu and Muslim unity** at least in the early decades of the 20th century. His endeavour was also crucial in creating greater awareness about the **plight of Indian women**, promoting their rights, and their greater inclusion in Indian society, particularly in the national movement. Equally significant was his emphasis on the rights of the **marginalised communities** of India referred to by him as *Harijans* and bringing them into the mainstream of Indian society. Thus, this phase of Indian nationalism was also a witness to the emergence and growth of **Gandhian nationalism** of truth and non-violence and a larger **Gandhian culture** that permeated different elements of life and society, transcending the barriers of time, region and society.

Gandhi's View on Women

To call women the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to women. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, woman is less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then a woman is immeasurably a man's superior. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with women. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than a woman?

Mahatma Gandhi in *Young India*, October 4, 1930

14.15: The Quit India Movement of 1942, wherein Mahatma Gandhi gave a clarion call of 'Do or Die', a culmination of India's rising nationalism; a stamp sheet commemorating 75 years, released in 2017 — Courtesy, Department of Post

Social Harmony: The Change with the Times

The growing phase of Indian nationalism was also a phase that tested the communal character and social resilience of Indian society. Hindus and Muslims, the two large communities in the country, had lived together for nearly 700 years and evolved a shared culture. The social intercourse emanating from living together on the same land had generated at times social friction between the two communities; however, these were not socially disintegrative or destabilising. The approach and response of Hindus and Muslims had also been largely similar to the inimical British rule. Its tyrannical policies, economic exploitation and interference in the personal laws had brought the two communities together against a common enemy.

In the 19th century and early part of the 20th century, there was a definite convergence of views of the two communities on national issues and opposition to British rule. In the War of Independence in 1857, the two communities presented a united face. Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal, became an unwitting leader, of the rebellion and both the communities. The 'Partition of Bengal' in 1905 on communal lines (purportedly on grounds of administrative efficiency) saw stiff opposition to this 'divide and rule policy' from both communities. Mass movements of both communities followed, eventually leading to the annulment of partition in 1911. The arrival of Mahatma Gandhi on the political horizon and his efforts to cement the unity of the two communities were particularly successful in the 1920s. This culminated in the cooperation of the two communities in the **Khilafat movement**.

However, the later years saw a divergence of views on issues like governance of Muslim-majority provinces, abolition of *zamindari* (which was a touchy issue for the Muslim upper and middle class) and other matters. There was a fissure in the Indian National Congress on the above and other issues concerning the two communities. Hence, there emerged a communal divide, with the Indian Muslim league and right-wing Hindu parties each professing to be the champions of the causes of the respective communities. With the notion of a separate Islamic state emerging in the 1930s and the demand for a Pakistan crystalising and becoming shrill in the 1940s, our communal integrity was tested like never before. The emergence of the two-nation theory resulting in the unfortunate division of the country, revealed the deep communal fault lines.

Historians and scholars have different views as to whether the 'divide' had existed in the past and been dormant, or was it instituted by the British policy of 'divide and rule', or both. Some even opine that it was just a spate of uncontrolled factors and events that culminated in the partition of the undivided India but there was no underlying chasm between the communities. Irrespective of the root cause, the 'divide' deeply impacted the communal character of the country and proved to be a socio-cultural disaster despite the bond of growing nationalism. The horrendous communal riots that accompanied the decision of partition tore asunder the social and communal fabric. Indeed, overcoming the pangs of partition, the sorrow of lost lives and uprooted communities, was a daunting task at a critical juncture of a nation. Overcoming the social chasm and stitching together the communal fabric remained one of the most imposing socio-cultural challenges of the decade of the 40s and of the independent India.

14.16: "Mother preparing vegetables"; oil on canvas; a painting by Raja Ravi Varma depicting the indigenous subject in the European Academic Art style; late 19th century, location Government Museum, Chennai — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

The Growth of Indian Art Forms and Literature in Pre-independence India

This rise of Indian nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries permeated deeply into Indian culture as well. The Bengal Renaissance which had started in the early 19th century and engendered a wave of socio-religious reforms also witnessed a new wave of art and cultural reforms. Eminent personalities such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra, and Nandalal Bose, ushered new movements and infused new life in Indian literature, poetry painting and other art forms. The revival of Indian art and literature was not just limited to Bengal but also witnessed in other parts of the country. There was a growing search for Indian roots and identity which was reflected in this cultural revival manifested in the entire

country and cut across the social hierarchy touching Indian life very deeply. The theme of nationalism, the search for Indian identity and the gradual emergence of social realism has been a characteristic of this period and resonated in different forms of cultural expression be it literature, paintings, music and dance or theatre and cinema.

Indian paintings

The **Indian painting** of the middle of the 19th century was dominated by the European Academic art movement. It imbibed the style of European realism with its subjects being a mix of portraiture and Indian panorama. The advent of Raja Ravi Varma, in the latter half of the 19th century, ushered in a tradition of Indian painting wherein the subjects and ethos were uniquely Indian. His artworks were also significant as they brought in a confluence of Western/European painting techniques with Indian sensibility and subjects. It inspired a generation of Indian artists.

14.17: "Sri Krishna in *raas krida* with *gopikas"*, opaque watercolour on paper, a Nathdwara painting, Rajasthan, late 19th century; depicting a class of indigenous school of painting which survived in this period in the wave of European Academic art movement; location Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya Mumbai — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

In the early 20th century, Indian art progressed a step further. The **Bengal School of Art** ushered in a new era of **revivalist nationalism** in paintings. This art movement was started by **Abanindranath Tagore** (nephew of Rabindranath Tagore) along with **E.B. Havell** (Principal of Government Art School, Calcutta) and **Sister Nivedita** (an associate of Swami Vivekananda). The paintings of this school were connected to the Indian roots in terms of style as well as the subject. It aimed to regenerate Indian art heritage by recognising and bringing alive its ancient and folk traditions of painting as well as by connecting the art with the people and their lives. It drew inspiration from the murals of the ancient period and the work of folk painters and artists as well as the indigenous schools. Among the other greats associated with the Bengal school were, **Rabindranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Jamini Roy, Sunayani Devi, Ram Kinker Baij**, **M.R. Chugtai**, besides others.

14.18: "Krishna and Gopiyan"; tempera on cloth, a painting by Jamini Roy, one of the iconic artists of Bengal School of Art; in the early 20th century National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

Indian Literature

The late 19th century was also witness to resurgence in Indian literature. **Mirza Ghalib** (1797-1869) was already a celebrated name in Urdu poetry at the beginning of the decade of 1850s. He and other poets of the age made an invaluable contribution to Indian poetry. But this phase is especially significant for the growth of **Indian prose**. Several works of novels and plays were written heralding a remarkable chapter of Indian literature in the next 100 years.

The works of prose, *Neel Darpan* (play) by **Dinabandhu Mitra,** *Durgesh Nandini* and *Anand Math* by **Bankim Chandra**, and *Andher Nagari* (Hindi play) and *Bharat Durdasha* (Hindi play) by **Bharatendu Harishchandra,** were indeed milestone literary works. Many greats of regional literature and prose emerged including; **Lakshminath Bezbarua** (Assamese literature), **Fakir Mohan Senapati** (Odia literature), **Narmadashankar Lalshankar Dave** (Gujarati literature), **Samuel Vedanarayan Pillai**, (Tamil literature), **Kandukuri**

Veerasalingam Pantulu (Telugu novelist), **Oyyarathu Chandu Menon** (Malayalam novelist,), **Krishnamma Chetty** (Malayalam novelist).

The advent of **Rabindranath Tagore** on the Indian literary landscape in the late 19th century was indeed a watershed in Indian literature. In a literary career spanning nearly five decades, he wrote several momentous works of prose and poems, including novels, short stories, plays, essays, and travelogues and became the first and the only Indian to receive a **Nobel Prize for Literature**.

The 20th century was witness to another colossal of Indian literature. **Munshi Premchand**, considered a *upanyas samrat* (an emperor amongst novelists), authored 14 novels and nearly 300 short stories, besides essays and translations of literary works from other languages. Among other eminent writers of Hindi prose in this period were; **Acharya Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi** (editor of the esteemed Saraswati magazine), **Acharya Ramchandra Shukla** (critique, essayist and literary historian), **Vrindalal Verma** (dramatist and novelist), **Rahul Sankrityayan** (great travel writer), **Bhagwati Charan Verma** (novelist), **Hazari Prasad Dwivedi** (a novelist and literary historian), **Yashpal** (novelist and short story writer) besides others.

The coming decades were also a golden phase of **Hindi poetry**. *Chhayawaad,* a new genre of romanticism in Indian poetry blossomed. **Maithali Sharan Gupta**, **Jaishankar Prasad**, **Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala'** and **Mahadevi Verma** considered the four pillars of the *Chhayawaad* movement, contributed richly to Indian poetry and literature. **Ayodhya Singh Upadhyaya 'Harioudh'**, **Makhan Lal Chaturvedi**, **Subhadra Kumari Chauhan**, **Ramdhari Singh Dinkar**, **Harivansh Rai Bachchan** and **Nagarjun** were some other Hindi poets of this period who are considered doyens of Indian literature.

Regional literature bloomed. **Sharat Chandra Chatterjee** and **Kazi Nazrul Islam** were celebrated Bengali novelists and poets respectively. **Subramania Bharati,** an eminent Tamil poet, is deemed the father of modern Tamil literature. **Vishnu Sakharam Khandekar** (Marathi novelist) is reckoned as a great of Marathi literature. **Bhai Veer Singh** (Punjabi poet) heralded modern Punjabi poetry. **Puran Singh** (Punjabi poet) was considered the 'Tagore of Punjab'. **B.M. Srikanthaiah, D.R. Bendre** (poet), and **K.V. Putappa** (poet and novelist) were eminent Kannada litterateurs. In Malayalam literature, the triumvirate of **Vallathol Narayan Menon**, **Kumar Asan** and **Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer** ushered a new chapter.

Urdu literature, especially poetry, continued to flourish in this phase. Eminent poets like **Hasrat Mohani**, **Muhammad Iqbal**, **Yaganaa Changezi**, **Jigar Moradabadi**, **Firaq Gorakhpuri**, **Josh Malihabadi**, **Faiz Ahmad Faiz** and **Sadaat Hasan Manto** ushered a golden age of Urdu poetry. Many Indian litterateurs of English gained wide recognition. This included **Sarojini Naidu** (an eminent poet), and novelists like **Mulk Raj Anand**, **R.K. Narayan**, **Raja Rao** and others.

Different genres of literature evolved. The literature of reformism and revivalism of the late 19th century transitioned into nationalistic literature in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Spiritualism and philosophy found expression in the works of Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Dr. Radhakrishnan and others during these decades. The genre of poetry came up with romanticism in *Chhayawaad* and became popular in the 1920s and 1930s. Then came the wave of 'realism' in Indian literature which was best evident in the works of Premchandra and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee. The decade of the 30s also witnessed 'progressive' literature in the growth of the *Pragativaad* movement in Hindi literature. Thus, Indian literature evolved from strength to strength changing with the times. It was also symbolic of the wave of cultural revivalism sweeping the country even in the politically turbulent and challenging times.

Music and Dance

Indian music came out from the shadows of post-medieval decline and witnessed unprecedented growth in the late 19th and 20th centuries. At the turn of the century, among the greats of Indian classical music who laid the foundation of new trends in music and inspired a generation of musicians, were **Alladiya Khan**, **Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande**, **Abdul Karim Khan** and **Vishnu Digambar Paluskar**. **Allaudin Khan** was another doyen of Indian classical music of this period who nurtured the next generation of music greats. In the first half of the 20th century, some of the stalwarts of classical music came into prominence. This included vocalists such as; **Bade Ghulam Ali**, **Siddheshwari Devi**, **Mallikarjun Mansur**, **Gangubai Hangal**, **Begum Akhtar**, **M.S. Subbulakshmi**, **D.K. Pattamal**, **Bhimsen Joshi**, **Kumar Gandharava** and **M.L Vasanthakumari**. A galaxy of classical instrumentalists too came into prominence, including masters of their craft such as; **Allauddin Khan**, **Bismillah Khan**, **Pandit Ravishankar**, **Allah Rakha**, **Ali Akbar Khan**, **V.G. Jog** and **Vilayat Khan**, among others.

Indian classical dances also underwent revival and resurgence in this phase. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, many of these dance forms had withered or they were confined to the narrow domain of arts practised by the courtesans and temple *devadasis*. In the 19th century, dances such as Kathak, Odissi and

Bharatanatyam were looked down upon by the Britishers and even banned at times. In the late 19th and 20th centuries, Kathak was revived due to the efforts of **Bindadin Maharaj**, **Kalka Prasad**, **Uday Shankar**, **Shambhu Maharaj** and **Birju Maharaj** among others. Similarly, **Pankaj Charan Das** (considered *adiguru* of Odissi in the 20th century), **Kavichandra Kalicharan Pattanayak** and **Kelucharan Mahaptra**, helped to revive the traditions of Odissi dance.

The centuries-old tradition of Manipuri dance declined post the annexation of Manipur by the British. In the 20th century, a new life was infused in it due to the efforts of **Rabindranath Tagore** and other exponents and gurus of this art form, including **Naba Kumar**, **Senarik Singh Rajkumar**, **Nileshwar Mukherji** and **Atomba Singh**, amongst others. Bharatanatyam, a temple dance of ancient origin, suffered due to the prohibition of the temple *devadasi* system, wherein the art form remained reposited. However, in the 20th century, it was refashioned and resurfaced as a theatre art. Further, due to the efforts of **Meenakshisundaram Pillai**, **E. Krishna Iyer**, **Rukmini Devi Arundale**, and **T. Balasaraswati**, this art was preserved and even popularized. Kuchipudi was another classical dance to be revived in the early 20th century. Some prominent names associated with it in this phase were; **Vempati Venkatanarayan**, **Chinta Venkataramayya** and V**. Lakshminarayan Shastry**. Kathakali and Mohiniattam were two other great art forms and classical dances of Kerala that made a comeback in the 1930s and 1940s due to the efforts of **Vallathol Narayana Menon**, a Malayali poet. Thus, the 20th century not only revived the tradition of classical music and dances, but also took it to new heights and ushered in a period of cultural renaissance.

Indian theatre and cinema

The tradition of **Indian theatre** traces its roots to ancient times. The modern Indian theatre, and in particular the Proscenium theatre came to India in the late 18th century, and by the next 50 years, was popular in Bengal. By the latter half of the 19th century, commercial theatre was popular in the country, particularly in the presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and the adjoining regions. *Buro Shaliker Ghare Ro* (1860) by **Michael Madhusudan Dutt**, *Nil Darpan* written by **Dinabandhu Mitra** (1858-1859), and its production in 1872 by **Girish Chandra Ghosh**, were some early commercial theatre productions. *Bharata Durdasha (1875), Satya Harishchandra* (1876), and *Andher Nagari* (1881) by **Bharatendu Harishchandra** were some prominent plays of Hindi theatre. *Jhansichya Raniche Naatak* (1870), and *Afzal Khan Chaye Mrutyuche Naatak* (1871) by **Vishnu Das Bhave**, were some of the eminent Marathi plays that were commercially produced.

But Indian theatre also passed through a phase of trials and tribulations, experienced because of the political tumult. In 1872, **Girish Chandra Ghosh** founded the **National Theatre**, the first Bengali professional theatre company, which took the performance of *Nil Darpan* to different parts of the country. The play brought out the tyranny of the British indigo planters over the peasants and farm labour. It was banned by the British. *Chakar Darpan* (Mirror of Tea-Planters, 1875) by **Dakshina Charan Chattopadhyay** which highlighted the oppression of the tea planters was also banned by the British government. Soon the *Playwrights Dramatic Performance Act 1876* was passed, empowering the government to prohibit public dramatic performances that it found seditious, obscene or defamatory. Henceforth the playwrights adopted historical figures and mythological contexts to depict concurrent issues thus creating a genre of plays such as *Andher Nagari*, where the British misrule was conveyed in a veiled manner.

By the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Indian theatre and its narrative took the next leap. Its genre was now not restricted to the epic tales of the gods or the heroic deeds of the great kings but centred on the common man, the social lives and the national problems as well. *Bharat Durdasha* by Bharatendu Harishchandra succinctly brought out the reasons for the deprivation of India in colonial rule. *Andher Nagari*, *Nil Darpan* and *Chakar Darpan* were categoric in their nationalistic themes, thus integrating Indian theatre with the **rising nationalism**. The element of nationalism, albeit in the historical context, was also brought out in plays like *Mir Qasim* (1906), and *Sirajuddaulah* (1909) by **Girish Chandra Ghosh** which elucidated the fall of dynasties on account of betrayals. Others like *Chhatrapati* (1907) by Girish Chandra Ghosh, and *Mebar Patan* (The Fall of Mewar), *Shahjahan* (1910), and *Chandragupta* (1911) by **D. L. Roy** also explored elements of nationalism.

A genre of plays that portrayed social evils and were reformistic also came up. *Naba Natak* and *Kulina Kulasarbasva* by **Ramanarayana Tarkaratna** opposed polygamy. *Kanyasulkam* (Telugu) by **Gurajada Apparao**, succinctly portrayed the evil practice of marrying young girls to much older brides for a fee. *Raktakarabi* by **Rabindranath Tagore** was centred on the theme of the demeaning influence of our greed in human lives. *Parapare* and *Babganari* by **Dwijendralal Ray** portrayed the evils of the caste system. Thus the plays of this period introduced an element of **social realism**. By this time Indian theatre had also transitioned to a commercial avatar. They were now not just a means of entertainment exclusively for the elite but accessible to all who could afford it.

Coming to the 20th century, and particularly around and after the First World War, Indian theatre again experienced the winds of change. This was influenced by the socio-political environment, rising nationalism and parallel movements in the world of art and literature. In the 1920s and 30s, experimental and amateur theatre movement emerged. This was evident in the works of Gujarati playwrights like **Chandravardan Chimanlal Mehta** whose play *Aag Garhi* (Fire Engine) had a theme of social realism. *Sarjanhar* (in Gujarati), inspired by Gandhian ideology, dealt with the issue of untouchability and was another important play of a social genre.

With the emergence of the Bengal revivalist school, the founding of the **Progressive Writers Movement** (1936) and the growth of the communist movement, Indian theatre also became more people-centric. This was reflected in the birth of the **Indian People's Theatre Association** (IPTA). In 1944 *Nabanna*, written by **Bijon Bhattacharya**, a drama about the Bengal famine highlighted the great tragedy of the man-made famine which killed nearly three million people. The play was staged in various parts of the country by IPTA and later by the *Bohurupee Theatre* of Sombhu Mitra. This was truly the coming of age of the Indian theatre. Changing with the times, it now evolved to become a medium that was not limited to bringing a cultural awakening and infusing a sense of nationalism in the masses, but also to be a platform that could succinctly portray the society and the people at the very grassroots level and could identify with their causes. This was a long journey for Indian theatre having its origin in folk theatre, moving to professional theatre, graduating to commercial theatre and then evolving to grassroots theatre.

Indian cinema had its birth in the last decade of the century. This was within a few years of the Lumiere Brothers making their first public screening of cinema in Paris (in 1895) and later in Bombay (in 1896). **Sakharam Bhatwadekar Harishchandra**, who was one of the witnesses to the Lumiere Brothers' show in Bombay, produced in 1899, a series of six short films based on day-to-day activities. The first of these was *The Wrestlers*, which was shot during a wrestling match in Bombay (now Mumbai). Thus began the dawn of the age of movies in India, which, a century later, was to become among the biggest film industries of the world.

The first feature film of India, *Raja Harishchandra* by **Dada Saheb Phalke**, a silent movie came out in 1913. Within the next few decades, Indian movies reached great heights. By 1931, when the first talkie movie *Alam Ara* by **Ardeshar Irani** came, over 200 movies were being produced annually. Thus, Indian movie-making had become an established industry within just two decades of its fledgling start with a few movies in the silent era.

Cinema as an art shares many skills and attributes essential to the theatre, and in a way, theatre was a precursor to Indian cinema. Initially its growth and in particular the genre of movies also mimicked the theatre. But over a period of time, it emerged as a distinct art form, substantially overtaking theatre in popularity, reach and versatility of artistic expression. The films in the early phase of the silent era, as in the case of theatre, were often based on religious and mythological characters or devotional themes. These included movies such as *Raja Harischandra* (1913), *Mohini Bhasmasur* (1913), *Lanka Dahan*

14.19: A stamp sheet released in 2013 to commemorate the hundred years of Indian cinema, depicting some early stalwarts of Indian movies — Courtesy, Department of Post

(1917), *Nala Damayanti*, *Sri Krishna Janam* (1918), *Keechaka Vadham* in Tamil (1918), *Kaliya Mardan* (1919), *Buddha Dev* (1923), *Bhakta Prahalad* (Malayalam), *Sant Tukaram* etc. Some movies were also based on historical characters, such as Kalidas, Sati-Padmini, Noor Jahan, Anarkali, etc. These early movies were essentially in the nature of cinematic retelling of stories of the epics and the Puranas, or those drawn from the pages of history.

Coming to the late 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, the Indian movies diversified substantially and highlighted a range of social issues. Women-related issues were the subject of acclaimed works such as *Achhut Kanya* (1936), *Joymoti* (in Assames-1935), *Duniya Na Mane* (1937) and *Manoos* (1939). Some movies also broached on the subject of nationalism and India's freedom struggle but were banned by the British government. *Bhakt Vidur* (1921), *Wrath* (1930) and *Raithu Bidda* (1938-Telugu) were some such productions. The song in the movie *Kismet* (1942), *door hato ae duniya walon Hindustan Hamara haye* (O' people of this world, get away, Hindustan is ours) became a song of inspiration and protest during the Quit India movement.

Movies of the entertainment genre were also quite popular in this period. *Shirin Farhad*, produced as early as 1931, was structured like an opera with nearly 42 song sequences. *Inder Sabha*, produced in 1932, had a whopping 69, the most in any film ever, thus ushering in a culture of songs in Indian movies. Social dramas were also quite popular in this period. A series of movies of Wadia & Wadia productions such as *Hunterwali*, *Toofan Mail*, *Punjab Mail*, and *Flying Rani* featuring Australian-Indian actress Mary Evans, were based on a female protagonist and were of the category of an outright entertainer.

With the birth of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), the Bengal famine, and plays such as *Nabanna* (1944) gaining substantial traction with the masses, came a genre of movies like *Dharti Ke Lal* (*Children of the Earth* in 1946). Produced by **Khwaja Ahmad Abbas** and directed by him and Bijon Bhattacharya, the film received critical acclaim for its bold and realistic portrayal of the disastrous Bengal famine (1943). *Neecha Nagar* (1946) directed by **Chetan Anand** (an Indian adaptation of Maxim Gorky's *Lower Depths*) starkly portrayed the gulf between the lives of the rich and poor and won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival (1946). Thus, the genre of social realism which had already swept Indian literature and embraced the modern theatre also permeated in the Indian movies. This was a precursor to what a few decades later were to emerge as a 'parallel cinema'.

The regional film industry also flourished along with Bollywood which had taken the mantle of mainstream industry. Among the earliest regional language films was *Shree Pundalik*, (Marathi 1912). Made by **R.G. Torney and N.G. Chitre**, this movie, however, was in the nature of a recording of a play and accordingly was not accorded the status of a feature film. As such, *Keechaka Vadham* produced in 1917-1918 by **R. Nataraja Mudaliar** in Tamil is considered the first regional language cinema of India. Among other important regional films of the silent era were; *Bhishma Pratigyna* (1921: Telugu) by **Raghupati Venkaiah Naidu**, *Vigathakumaran* (1928: Malayalam) by **J.C. Daniel**. In the era of the talkies, after Alam Ara was produced in 1931, **Ardeshar Irani** also produced *Kalidas*, a bilingual Tamil-Telugu movie in 1931. Closely following it was the Marathi movie *Ayodhyecha Raja* (1932) produced by **Shantaram Rajaram Vankudre** (V. Shantaram), which was based on the story of Raja Harishchandra. Another regional talkie of this period was *Sati Savitri*, a Telugu film produced by **C. Pullayya** in 1933. *Joymoti*, produced in 1935 by **Jyotiprasad Agarwalla**, was among the earliest of Assamese movies.

Indian movies in this phase witnessed phenomenal growth. They integrated various art forms and were assimilative of the numerous movements witnessed in the fields of art, literature and theatre. Ranging from pure entertainment to social reforms from nationalism to realism, the movies of this period projected all the genres. But their crucial contribution to society was in their reach and connecting with the masses to the farthest of regions of the country and cutting across the classes. Thus, they were reflective of the changing society and in a way integrative of it in the turbulent times of a nation.

CULTURE OF POST-INDEPENDENT INDIA

Significant Elements of Influence on Indian Culture Post-Independence

Post-independence began a new chapter of Indian culture. Several factors played a significant role in shaping Indian culture in this phase. The **independence** of the country in itself was the most crucial influence on Indian culture. India now had the opportunity to reflect on its continuous cultural legacy of over 5000 years. It also had the freedom to change and evolve as per the need of time and the call of its soul, hitherto suppressed for centuries. Independence paved the way for the creation of a new **Constitution** and making India a sovereign, democratic republic. The Constitution heralded a new phase

in national polity and society which had a profound influence on culture as well. While the independence of the nation was the culmination of the growing nationalism of the past two centuries, the Indian Constitution was emblematic of the unity and integrity of the geographically vast and culturally diverse country. Hence, there also came several **institutions of governance** in the country, which harnessed our diversity into a **national unity**, thus adding another base to our national culture. The different elements of culture blossomed in the coming decades under the patronage of several **cultural organisations** set up by the governments and through social initiatives. As culture reposits in people, it was the **peace**, **progress** and endeavour of **people** which were undoubtedly the most significant factors in the evolution of Indian culture.

Emergence of the Indian Nation and the New Constitution

The independence of the country ushered in a new **cultural** epoch in India. To begin with, the freedom of the country was met with a tumultuous phase. It was a phase marked by rejoicing at the advent of a new era of Indian history and culture. It was a phase that ushered hope. It was also a phase marred by the division of the country and by the accompanying communal riots. The displacement of millions, the flow of refugees, and the cry of the hungry and homeless took the sheen off India's joy and celebrations. The initial turbulence was followed by a phase of reconstruction, regeneration and growth.

A new **Constitution** was framed which marked a departure from several centuries-old traditions of monarchy, which had later given way to colonialism. Power now rested with people rather than with monarchs and despots and this was to be exercised through the elected representatives of the people. Universal adult suffrage was enshrined in our Constitution and thus the country took a giant leap in creating a democracy and building **institutions of democracy**. This indeed was a turning point in the history and culture of the country.

Besides the daunting economic and political challenges several **cultural challenges** were witnessed by the country, in the first few years post-independence and the decades ahead. What could integrate such a large and diverse country? The harmonisation of several regions in the new Indian nation, each having a sub-national culture of its own; the challenge of integration of nearly 500 princely states that had experienced a different socio-political trajectory, the problems posed by numerous languages, each representing a people and their socio-cultural identity; the communal divide that bifurcated the nation; the ugly riots that followed; a society fragmented by caste divide; the issue of untouchability which was a slur on the society; the plurality of races and tribes; all raised questions as to the viability of the envisioned nation. The poor economic condition of India on the eve of independence, and the mammoth population to feed and find a livelihood for all of these, did not make the situation any easier for the country.

The **socio-cultural-political challenges** were aplenty. The demand for linguistic organisation of states was one of the major stumbling blocks for the pan-Indian national identity in the early years of independent India. However, the subsequent reorganisation of several states based on linguistic identity helped to quell the language-based and region-based separatist demands and kept intact the integrity of the emerging nation. Communal challenges which had already divided the country were far from over. The issue of reservations for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes highlighted another socio-cultural disquiet within the country. Despite these and other sectarian forces, **India emerged stronger**.

What kept the integrity of the country intact in post-independence India and what has been the basis of the unity of this new nation? Was it that the very forces that tended to carve out a separate identity for the groups and regions were in a way acting as a counterforce to the other factors that could be divisive? In a given region where the plurality of religion, communities and castes could be perceived as forces tending to pull in separate directions, could the commonality of language and regional culture be the integrating influence? This could perhaps be seen in the similarity of the culture of the families, in the food and the dress etc. which all had distinct regional traits.

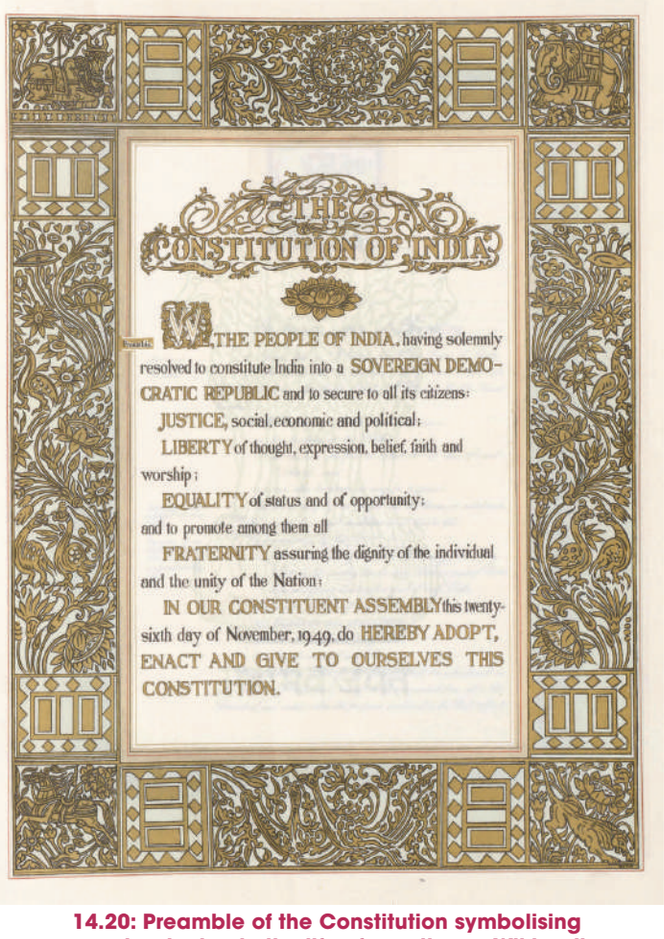
Religion could transcend inter-regional differences and could create a bond cutting across the boundaries of the new states. For the majority Hindu community spread in different parts of the country, could the belief in a common religious culture with commonality of gods, religious practices, pilgrimage sites and temples, been a factor that helped to tide the regional dissimilarities? And could similar sentiments be a factor for other religious communities to form a bond cutting across languages and regions?

On the surface, these may appear to have an element of truth. However, these factors and differences have been the characteristics of the land not only in the post-independence cultural phase, but also in its recorded history in the past 2500 years. Unity in diversity has been a cultural trait of the land, and its people since time immemorial despite it being besieged by seemingly divisive forces. In a way, this

was true for the post-independence phase also. While individuals and communities aspire for freedom to practise and preserve their own culture, in the Indian context they are largely non-interfering and to an extent respectful of the identity and culture of others, till it becomes inimical to their own identity and cultural practices. This in itself is a culture that has evolved with the common and symbiotic living together of centuries. The socio-economic need for each other, tolerance of the angularity of others and to an extent respect for others, has kept the inter-community bonds intact. The centuries of living together have blunted to a certain measure, the cultural angularities of communities and the fusion of practices have led to the creation of new and common cultures. Thus, the **confluence of cultures** has been a crucial basis of communal bonds and this has also been the basis of India's unique ethos of plurality and inclusivity. The **inheritance of this culture** which we all are justifiably proud of helped to keep the nation together in a post-independent turbulent India.

But socio-cultural conflicts do arise. The bonds are then strained. The resolution to conflicts may or may not be feasible in the cultural traditions itself. At times, even the age-old bonds may prove insufficient to keep the communities bonded. The communal disharmony of pre-independence leading to the division of the country and the demand for the linguistic organisation of states post-independence were some significant examples of the divisive forces that the country experienced in the previous century. While the former could not be successfully resolved and resulted in the disastrous division of the country, the latter was relatively amicably settled post-independence with the creation of some more linguistic states. There was a vital change in the country within the few years that separated the two occurrences and this was crucial in building a new culture of India.

India had become an independent nation with a **written constitution** of its own. As a democratic republic, the law of the land became integrated with the aspirations of its people. The resolution of the conflicts and fulfilment of people's aspirations were a part of the law of the land within the **framework of the Constitution**. Thus the creation of a nation-state, with a written Constitution enshrining the philosophy of republican democracy and vital principles of governance, accompanied by the emergence of **organs and national institutions of governance**, marked a salient departure from the past and led to the advent of a **new phase of Indian culture.** This phase inherited the cultural legacy of the past but also evolved a culture based on the firm foundation of a nation, national identity and national institutions that integrated the country and people.


THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity;

and to promote among them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the Nation;

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.

14.20: Preamble of the Constitution symbolising a new beginning in the life of a nation — Wikipedia

The **Indian Constitution**, the **national symbols**, the **common judiciary**, the **Indian parliament**, the **organs of the executive**, the **common defence forces**, and the **various other institutions of democracy**, which all transcend the regional identities helped to create an identity of an Indian nation. The concept of **federalism** enshrined in the Constitution created the federation of states with a unitary bias. Thus, our Constitution and the institutions of governance provided an environment for preserving individual, social and national identities and even harmonising them. The aspirations of the people, the expression of the diverse regional cultural identities and the unity of the nation, all were integrated into a living and dynamic whole. Thus, the new cultural phase draws upon the **national identity** apart from the **regional culture** or the sub-national culture and the centuries-old shared **cultural heritage**.

Evolution of cultural institutions as patrons of cultural elements

The independence of India ushered in the growth of several institutions that were crucial in preserving and promoting the diverse elements of Indian culture. While some cultural institutions like the **Asiatic Society** (established 1784), the **Archaeological Survey of India** (1861), the **National Archives of India** (1891), the **All India Radio** (1936) and the **Anthropological Survey of India** (1945) were established in the pre-independence period, many new institutions also came up in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly through the governmental effort and as autonomous bodies. The **Indian Council of Cultural Relations** (1950) was formed to promote Indian culture on international platforms. **Sangeet Natak Akademi** (1952), or the 'national academy of music, dance and drama' was established for the promotion of the performing arts. The **Lalit Kala Akademi** (1954) or the 'national academy of fine arts', was established to promote and propagate understanding of Indian art both within and outside the country. The **Sahitya Akademi** (1954), or India's 'national academy of letters', had the objective of promotion of the constitutionally recognized Indian languages and literature therein.

The **National Gallery of Modern Art,** established in 1954 has emerged as a premier institution of the country for the preservation and promotion of contemporary Indian art and houses more than 17000 works of nearly 2000 eminent Indian artists. **National Book Trust** (1957) was another autonomous organisation established to encourage the production of good books and literature at a low cost and for wider dissemination amongst educational institutions, libraries, students etc. The **Film and Television Institute of India** (FTII- established-1960) has come up as a leading institute of the world in the field of training personnel in the art and craft of productions in these domains. The **National School of Drama** (1959) was established by **Sangeet Natak Akademi** to promote Indian theatre and to train artists. Eventually, it became an independent school in 1975. The latter two organisations have had a significant role in the revitalization of Indian theatre, television and films.

In the subsequent decades there too came up some institutions of eminence. The **Indian Council of Historical Research** (ICHR) was established in 1972 to promote and preserve Indian history. It formulates and implements a national policy for the writing of historical research and scientific history. The **Directorate of Film Festival** was set up in 1973, as a part of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. It organised the national and international film festivals of India and presented the National Film Awards including the prestigious Dada Saheb Phalke Award. The **Centre for Cultural Resource & Training** (CCRT), an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Culture was founded in 1979 for wider dissemination of Indian art and culture. It conducts training programmes for in-service teachers to enable them to get a deeper understanding of the Indian culture, besides other activities. **Indira Gandhi National Centre for Art** (IGNCA) came up in 1985 with the objective of research, conservation, display and dissemination of various art forms. In the new millennium came the **National Mission for Manuscripts** (2003) to locate, document and preserve (physical as well as digital preservation) different manuscripts and enable access to the documents.

Some cultural institutions also emerged with the efforts of social groups and non-governmental organisations. SPIC MACAY, or the *Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music and Culture Amongst Youth* is a non-governmental organisation and voluntary movement founded in 1977. In the last five decades, it has promoted, Indian classical music, classical dances, folk music and the tradition of yoga, besides other intangible cultural elements, among the students and younger generation. The **Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage** (**INTACH**) founded in 1984 has played a significant role in the field of preservation of cultural heritage, especially in creation of awareness and preservation and management of monuments. Besides the above, the role of the large network of national and state museums and libraries, the cultural centres of different zones of the country, international organisations like **UNESCO** and **Aga Khan Trust for Culture** and others have played a crucial role in the preservation and promotion of culture.

The above and other institutions gave a fillip to different elements of Indian culture, art and heritage. Thus, Indian culture and its elements which had been reposited, preserved and promoted primarily by the private individuals and social groups, now had the backing up of eminent institutions and professional organisations. Truly, these have rendered yeoman's service in advancing the cause of Indian culture in the post-independence phase.

Evolution of Macro Elements of Culture in Post-Independence

Different elements of culture flourished in the post-independence phase. Despite this cultural period being relatively short and of just a few decades, nurtured by the people and groups and patronised

by the Government and other organisations, different elements of Indian culture have truly come of age in this period. Be it Indian literature, performing arts like Indian music and dance, visual arts like painting, sculpture and architecture, or other tangible and intangible elements of Indian culture, they all experienced a period of unprecedented growth and enrichment. They made a mark not only at the national level but even on the international stage, with many elements receiving recognition from UNESCO and other international fora. In this bouquet of cultural elements, the growth of a few is highlighted here as representative of this short but dynamic cultural phase.

Literature

Post-independence Indian literature began on a fresh note. The nationalistic and progressive literature of previous decades waned as they were no longer contextual. In the early years of independence, Indian literature was influenced by the new hope of freedom, but the pain of partition and the anguish over the communal bloodbath was also reflected in it. In the decade of the 1950s and 1960s, the works of many eminent litterateurs in different languages enriched Indian literature. These include the likes of **Amrita Pritam** (Punjabi poetry), **Khushwant Singh** (English prose), **Faiz Ahmad Faiz** (Urdu poetry), **Kartar Singh Duggal** (Punjabi, English Hindi; novels short stories), **Premendra Mitra** (Bengali poet writer), **Bhai Veer Singh** (Punjabi poet & author), **Bhisham Sahni** (Hindi novelist & playwright), **Yashpal** (Hindi novelist & playwright), **Manohar Malgonkar** (English prose) besides others. A new generation of Hindi poets came up with many inspiring works. This included several celebrated poets like **Nagarjuna**, **Ramdhari Singh Dinkar**, **Sohan Lal Dwivedi**, **Bhavani Prasad Mishra**, and **S.H. Vatsyayan Agyeya**.

New trends and new genres of literature emerged with the upcoming writers and poets, some of whom believed in the traditional Indian values while some borrowed from the Western values of rationality and modernism. This brought in an element of experimentalism in Indian literature. This was also referred to as the ***Prayogvaad*** in Hindi literature and was analogous to the worldwide modernist or avant-garde movement. S.H. Vatsyayan Agyeya was one of the pioneers of *Prayogvaad* in Hindi poetry and is said to have ushered the ***Nayi Kavita*** (new poetry) Hindi literary movement along with other poets. Another genre of poetry around this time was the ***Pragateesheel*** Hindi poetry of which the prominent patrons were **Nagarjun**, **Dinkar** and others. Both genres were prevalent in the pre-independence period and continued to flourish even in the 50s. Similarly, a ***Nayi Kahani*** movement based on *Prayogvad* was ushered with the works of **Nirmal Verma**, **Bhisham Sahni**, **Mohan Rakesh**, **Rajendra Yadav**, **Amarkant** and others.

In the period of growth of experimental literature, some litterateurs were of the view that Western materialism and ideals could not provide all the solutions to the Indian challenges. Hence, a genre of literary works emerged that questioned these principles and their relevance in the Indian context. Thus came forth a phase of Indian literature in the late 1950s and 1960s which was sharply divided between the Western ideal of materialism and Indian traditional values. This eventually led to a state of crisis of identity in Indian literature which was also referred to by some scholars as a phase of **Dark Modernism**.

Among other subgenres were works espousing the cause of marginalised and downtrodden sections. This was also referred to as the ***Dalit*** and **tribal literature**. **Mahashweta Devi** was one of the foremost Bengali authors in this genre. Yet another subgenre explored the depiction of mythology, folk legends and mythic thoughts in a modern-day context. **C. Rajagopalachari** (English prose and novels), **Vishnu S. Khandekar** (Marathi novelist) **U.R. Ananthamurthy** (Kannada novelist), **Girish Karnad** (Kannada novelist & playwright), **Badal Sircar** (Bengali playwright), **Mohan Rakesh** (Hindi novelist), **Ramakanta Rath** (Oriya novelist) and **Sitakant Mahapatra** (Oriya novelist) were some others who explored this category of literature.

Satire was another sub-genre that attained popularity amongst readers as well as literary acclaim. **Sharad Joshi** is among the most notable writers in this category. **Harishankar Parsai** (Hindi poetry, short story writer, humorist and satirist), **Kaka Haathrasi** (poet, humorist and satirist), **Ashok Chakradhar** (poet, humorist and satirist), **Shail Chaturvedi** (poet, humorist and satirist), **Pradeep Chaube** (poet, humorist and satirist) were others who attained fame in the category of satire. *Hasya Kavita* (poems of wit and humour) which was also laced with satire was another complimentary subgenre with eminent poets like Gopal Prasad Vyas, Surender Sharma, Hullar Muradabadi and others.

Post-independence **regional literature** also witnessed some stellar contributions from eminent authors and poets. These included the works of **Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya** (Assamese novelist), **Abdur Rehman** (Kashmiri poet), **Qurratulain Haider** (Urdu novelist short story writer), **Shankha Ghosh** (Bengali poet), **Satya Vrat Shastri** (Sanskrit scholar and poet), **M.T Vasudevan Nair** (Malayalam author, screenplay writer), **Ravuri Bhardwaj** (Telugu novelist), **Bhalchandra Nemade** (Marathi novelist and

poet), **Raghuveer Chaudhari** (Gujarati novelist and poet), **Pratibha Ray** (Odia novelist), **Maimoni Raisom Goswami** (Assamese writer and poet), **Damodar Mauzo** (Konkani novelist), besides others. English literature in particular had phenomenal growth in this phase, particularly in the new millennium. It includes works of some much-celebrated authors and icons of modern English literature such as **R.K Narayan**, **Nirad C. Chaudhari**, **Mulk Raj Anand**, **Khushwant Singh**, **Ruskin Bond**, **Nissim Ezekiel**, **Nayantara Sehgal**, **Vikram Seth**, **Amitabh Ghosh**, **Arundhati Roy**, **Arvind Adiga** and others.

14.21: "Mother and Child", lithograph on paper, MF Hussain; National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

The literature since the 80s and beyond reflects the new genre of **Post-modernism**. It is characterised by proximity to the life of a common man. Unlike the past phases, it may not bear the burden of being a harbinger of a social message or a philosophical ideology but reflects what it witnesses. The truth and reality that the writer perceives and which the reader can identify with usually form the substance of the work. Language may be bereft of the ornamentation of the past and be marked with pointedness and simplicity. This phase is also referred to as the ***Uttara Adhunik*** in the Hindi literature.

In the post-independence phase, Indian literature evolved and also flowed along with the world trends in literature. From the nationalism of the early 20th century, it moved to Experimentalism, Modernism and then to Post-modernism. It has explored different subgenres as well. It has changed with the times and also reflects the change in the society and Indian culture with times.

Paintings

A **'new modernism'** in **Indian paintings** emerged in the post-independence phase. The early decades post-independence assimilated the influences of the extant Indian art, the trends of the world art movements and the tastes of the changing Indian society. This ethos was typically reflected in the style and subjects in the works of the artists of the **Progressive Artists' Group of Bombay**. This group which came up post-independence in 1947, comprised many pioneering artists who were later to become celebrated names of Indian art. While it was formed with famous painters, **F.N. Souza**, **S.H. Raza**, **M.F. Hussain**, **K.H. Ara**, **H.A. Gade**, and **S.K. Bakre** (a sculptor) as its founders, later, other eminent painters and artists such as **Tyeb Mehta**, **Gaitonde**, **Manishi Dey**, and **Akbar Padamsee** joined it. Though eventually disbanded in 1956, even in this short period, it made a significant mark on Indian art.

The work of these artists had a distinctness of their own in both subject and style. Souza's paintings, particularly the nudes of women, had exaggerated proportions, as if wanting to break from the conventions of beauty of the extant artistic traditions. The works of Hussain endeavoured to explore modernism in the Indian context. It mixed the brush strokes and certain elements of cubism of the West with the

bright colours of the Indian art tradition. Raza who began with landscapes, moved towards abstraction while incorporating the use of *mandala* and *yantra* in his art. His later paintings incorporated a *bindu* (a point) representing the spiritual unity of Indian philosophy. **Gaitonde** was another artist pursuing abstraction through the representation of translucent beams of light. Many other artists of this period like **Tyeb Mehta**, **Akbar Padamsee**, **K.K. Hebbar** and others worked between abstraction and figurativeness. Thus, these painters broke away from the revivalist nationalism of the Bengal Art movement and set the path for **modern** and **abstract art** which synthesised Indian art tradition with 'European Modernism'. In the later years, many new artists have also come up with different genres such as new figurative art, new media art, digital art etc., while the older art forms of abstraction, folk art, washes, oil and easel art continued to be practiced.

14.22: Composition in red, Vasudeo Gaitonde; an abstract art; National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

Music and Dance

Music in modern India evolved and grew exceptionally in the post-independence chapter. The institutions set up to promote Indian music, means of public transmission like radio and television, the vibrant and successful film industry, the works of a generation of musical stalwarts and most importantly the demand for diverse genres of music by the Indian public, took Indian music to new heights The traditional classical musical forms of Hindustani Classical and Carnatic music attained greater acceptance and popularity within the country as well as abroad. Musical maestros like; **Bismillah Khan** (Bharat Ratna), **Ravi Shankar** (Bharat Ratna), **Allah Rakha**, **Ali Akbar Khan**, **V.G. Jog**, **Vilayat Khan**, **Lal Gudi Jayaraman**, **Hari Prasad Chaurasia**, **Shiv Kumar Sharma**, **Amjad Ali Khan**, **L. Subramaniam** and **Zakir Hussain**, redefined Indian music bringing international recognition and acclaim. Classical vocalists like **M.S. Subbalakshmi** (Bharat Ratna), **D.K. Pattamal**, **Bhimsen Joshi** (Bharat Ratna), **Kumar Gandharva**, **Pandit Jasaraj**, **M.L. Vasanthakumari**, **Balamurali Krishna**, **Dagar Brothers**, **Bhupen Hazarika** (Bharat Ratna) amidst others inspired generations of singers in modern India.

New musical forms came up in a big way. **Indian film music**, a potpourri of different musical genres was indeed the most popular and visible form of musical expression in the country. It transcended the boundaries of the various regions and cut across the barriers of language and regional culture to garner popularity not only within the country but even a considerable international following. *Thumri*, *ghazals*, *bhajans*, *qawwali*, disco, rock music, pop music, Indipop, *sufi*, folk and others found expression in Indian film music and prospered over decades. An industry of singers, musicians, song lyric writers, and others flourished in tandem with the film industry, making this musical expression, widespread, deep-rooted and also commercially institutionalised. While light music as characterised by film music has been like a pillar of Indian music, other forms like folk music, devotional music, remixes, private albums, musical bands and troupes have also flourished.

The renditions of playback singers like **Lata Mangeshkar**, **Asha Bhonsle**, **Mukesh**, **Geeta Dutt**, **Mohammed Rafi**, **Manna Dey**, and **Kishore Kumar** have transcended the regional divide and cultural diversity to bring the melody of Indian music to millions of parched souls. In the later decades, a new generation of eminent singers such as **S.P. Balasubramanyam**, **Yesudas**, **K.S. Chitra**, **Kumar Sanu**, **Alka Yagnik**, **Anuradha Paudwal**, **Udit Narayan**, **Sonu Nigam**, **Shankar Mahadevan**, **Sunidhi Chavan**, and others enthralled the audience. **Arijit Singh**, **Shaan** and **Shreya Ghoshal** represent the millennial generation of successful singers who have held aloft the banner of playback singing and Indian music.

In the last seven decades, a bevy of film music composers have imparted melody to Indian music. **Naushad Ali**, **S.D. Burman**, **Madan Mohan**, **Shankar-Jaikishan** (duo), **O.P. Nayyar**, **Salil Chowdhury**,

Hemant Kumar, **Khayyam**, **Laxmikant-Pyarelal** (duo), **Kalyanji-Anandji** (duo) and **Roshan,** were some among the renowned music directors of the 50s and 60s. The eminent music directors of later decades included **R. D. Burman**, **Rajesh Roshan**, **Bappi Lahiri**, **Anu Malik**, **Anand-Milind**, **Nadeem Shravan**, **Jatin Lalit**, **Shankar-Ehsan- Loy**, **Illayaraja**, **A.R. Rahman**, amongst others.

The film music has also changed with the times. The decades of the 1950s and 1960s to the early 70s have been referred to by critics as the **golden phase** of film music. The classical base had a strong influence on it, with the melody being the soul of music. Bollywood in the late 70s and 80s saw a transition in the music genre. Melody of earlier years gave way to the fast-paced music and the disco beats of the 80s in the film world. The economic liberalisation of the 90s and global interconnect again brought a transition. Pop and other forms of Western music gained increasing popularity. In the new millennium, the genre of soulful *Sufi* music and *ghazals* made a comeback. The trend of Indian rock and pop was also on the rise. Thus, film music and its genres have been quite dynamic. It has mirrored the changes in society, the trends in the world and consequential changes in the tastes of the people.

Classical dances too have grown in this phase. They came out of the temples and houses of the courtesans where many of these remained centred for centuries, to the public arena and even national stages. The institutional support, particularly of the Sangeet Natak Akademi in this phase, helped not only revive the dances but also helped it acquire international acclaim. Traditional dances associated with festivals and folk dances also prospered. Some of these such as **Chhau**, **Kalbelia**, **Muddiyettu** and **Garba** dance forms acquired the status of intangible cultural heritage of the world under the aegis of UNESCO. Several dance and music festivals have come up in different parts of the country that showcase the depth and diversity of this art form to national as well as international audiences.

Cinema

Indian cinema which had its genesis in the early 20th century, emerged in the next 50 years as a succinct reflection of Indian society and its changing culture. By post-independence, it had also become a platform that integrated different tangible and intangible cultural elements including, theatrical performance, acting, music, dance, script and songwriting, besides other arts and crafts. It emerged not only as a medium of entertainment and a seller of dreams that provided succour to a population struggling with the challenges of their daily lives but also as a powerful means of social communication and portrayer of social realism and idealism. Cinema transcended regional boundaries and thus became a medium to showcase, reposit and integrate the diverse Indian culture. Gradually, cinema in itself became a significant cultural element of society.

In post-independence, Indian cinema evolved to include diverse genres ranging from popular entertainment to parallel cinema and from regional movies to award-winning international movies. While some early movies like *Awaara* (1951), *Shree 420* (1955); *Pyaasa* (1957), *Chaudavi Ka Chaand* (1960), *Parineeta* (1953), *Devdas* (1955) got commercial success, movies like *Do Aankhen Barah Haath* (1957), *Naya Daur* (1957) and *Mother India* (1957), besides being popular, also won critical acclaim. In the first few decades after independence, the growth of '**parallel cinema**' ushered some greatest works ever of Indian cinema by maestro movie makers like; **V. Shantaram**, **Satyajit Ray**, **Ritwik Ghatak**, **Tapan Sinha**, **Mrinal Sen**, **Shyam Benegal** and **Adoor Gopalakrishnan**. In the coming decades, the works of **M.S. Sathyu**, **P. Lankesh**, **Grish Karnard**, **Govind Nihlani**, **Aparna Sen**, **Shyam Benegal** and **Saeed Akhtar Mirza** carried forward the tradition. This category of cinema, inspired by cinematographic realism and naturalism, pushed the boundaries of art in an otherwise commercial domain and brought international fame and recognition to Indian movies.

The mainstream Indian movies have also changed over the decades. The romantic musical genre of the 60s gave way to the dark and violent crime thrillers of the 70s. While Dilip Kumar came to personify tragedy in the 50s and 60s, stars like Dev Anand, Rajesh Khanna and others became the quintessential face of romance in the 60s and early 70s. Exemplified by Amitabh Bachchan, an angry young man, a generation of movies came up in the 70s and 80s. While romance, comedy, drama and thrillers continued to find cinematographic space, *masala* movies which combined these diverse flavours, were perhaps an invention of the 70s and continued to rule the roost even in the later decades.

The decade of the 80s witnessed the emergence of India as the largest film production centre and earning its major centre, Bombay (now Mumbai) the epithet of 'Bollywood'. The production of art movies continued in this decade also, although the genres of action, romance and *masala* continued to dominate the industry. In the sweeping wave of disco gripping the country in the 80s, a poignant but short-lived sub-genre of movies was those with disco-based themes and songs. Some of these were not only

commercially successful within the country but also enjoyed international popularity. But the decade is also remembered for its stereotyped movies which were indeed a dampener to the growing culture of movies. Adding to the woes of the industry in this period, was the rise in home video viewership, video piracy and a relentless decline in theatre footfall; a trend which continued in the early 90s, even affecting the quality of movies produced.

With the economic liberalisation in the 90s and the arrival of satellite TV, there was a greater interconnect of the Indians with the world and with movies from around the world. New genres of movies were in demand by the new generation, but this was rather conspicuous by its absence in production. Even the art cinema of the early decades had dried up by this time. However, romantic musicals and action movies which were the staple productions, continued to churn commercial successes. A noticeable change in the movies of this decade was the transition of the backdrop of the movies to urban settings, urban characters and at times even to international locales. The rural landscape was rarely seen any more, nor was portrayed the themes of economic struggles and social challenges of the 50s, 60s and 70s. The villains who personified the antagonist, a poignant aspect of the Indian movies, were no more the wily *sahukars* of the villages (village money lenders), the marauding dacoits of Chambal ravines, or even the dangerous smugglers operating in the dark alleys of the cities. They had transitioned from the specific classes and categories to generic characters and even to anti-heroes. This was also a reflection of the changing character of the society, the demographic profile of the country and the culture of the people.

In the new millennium, Indian movies moved from strength to strength, be it in terms of the volume of production, the quality of movies, or the genre of themes. A salient feature of Indian cinema in this period was its burgeoning international appeal. With their commercial distribution reaching as many as 90 countries, and the popularity of Indian films and stars soaring in the foreign markets, Indian movies had their best international presence. The large Indian diaspora abroad also fuelled the international demand.

The most significant feature of the new millennium is indeed the rise of the regional film industry. This is best exemplified by the movies of South India which have recorded phenomenal success. Another noticeable feature is the merger of genres of social realism and commercial cinema which no longer stand as separate productions. New-age cinema tends to integrate both art and commerce rather than produce exclusive art movies. With the changing technology and coming of the digital age, Indian movies have not been left untouched. Modern technology and the change it has ushered in society, are redefining the movie culture of the country and its various dimensions.

Folk Culture in Post-independence

Folk culture is another salient element that has come into prominence in the post-independence period. Art and crafts of the common folks, their rituals, fairs and festivals, folk theatre, folk music and dance are among the numerous elements that the large canvas of folk culture encapsulates. These draw from and reflect the aspects of the daily lives of the common people, communities and tribes. Thus, they are true manifestations of culture at the very grassroots of a society.

Folk music and dance are ancient traditions of this grassroots culture of India. These arts have flourished in the hinterland, in the villages, in the tribes and in diverse communities. As traditional music and dance forms, it is infused into the very micro-culture of the population and is also integrated with the daily lives of people. Besides being a form of entertainment, a means to overcome the routine and drudgery of daily work, it is also an expression of joys and sorrows of people which are practised on the occasions of childbirth, betrothal, marriage or other events of life. Fairs, festivals religious ceremonies, agricultural activities, harvests etc. are some other occasions of their expression. While communities and their cultural practices have been the traditional repository of these art forms, in the post-independence period, government institutions, non-governmental organisations and other private initiatives have helped to provide a platform, for these art forms and also aided in their propagation and preservation for future generations.

Emblematic of the regional and local culture, each state and region of India has a bewildering variety of such folk music and dance traditions. Among the **folk music** forms that enjoy wide popularity include; *Chakri* of Jammu and Kashmir, *Tappa* of Punjab, *Laman* of Himachal Pradesh, *Alah* of Haryana, *Barahmansa* of Kumaon, *Basanti* of Garhwal, *Pankhida* of Rajasthan, *Rasiyageet* of Uttar Pradesh. Amongst the states of Eastern India, some popular folk music forms include, *Sohar* of Bihar, *Jhumair* of Jharkhand, *Baul* of West Bengal, *Bihu* of Assam, *Lai Haroba* in Manipur, *Saikut Zai* in Mizoram, *Tamang Selo* of Sikkim, *Daskathia* of Odisha. In central and western India, some popular forms of folk music include; *Pandavani*

14.23: The folk art of Pung Dhol Cholam and Sangeet, the soul of Manipur Sankirtana, a UNESCO 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity' — Courtesy, Sangeet Natak Akademi

of Chattisgarh, *Alha* of Madhya Pradesh, *Powada* of Maharashtra, *Sugam Sangeet* of Gujarat and *Mando* of Goa. In the South the popular folk music forms are; *Burrakatha* in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, *Janpad Geethe* in Karnataka, *Villu Pattu* in Tamil Nadu and the *Sopana Sangeetham* in Kerala, among some others. ***Sankirtana***, the ritualistic singing, drumming and dancing of the Vaishnava people of Manipur is also recognized by UNESCO as an 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity', thus exemplifying the richness of this folk art.

Folk and tribal dances too have an amazing diversity and spread. Each is associated with different occasions, has a different purpose and even expresses different moods. *Rouf* of Jammu and Kashmir, *Nati* of Himachal, and *Choliya* dance of Uttarakhand are symbolic of the diverse dances and unique culture of the hills. *Bhangra* and *Gidda* of Punjab, and *Ghoomar* of Rajasthan are dances of energy and liveliness. *Raas Leela* popular in Haryana and Rajasthan is inspired by the legends of Lord Krishna and the love of the *gopikas* for him. *Garba* and *Dandiya* of Gujarat are associated with the religious festival of *Navaratra* and the worship of Goddess Durga. *Jawara* of Budelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh is associated with agricultural harvest. *Raut Nacha* and *Gaur Maria* of Chattisgarh are some of the popular tribal dances and so are *Chaau* and *Paika* of Jharkhand. *Purulia Chhau* of West Bengal is known for its vivid masks depicting various deities. *Kajari* of Bihar is a dance celebrating the arrival of the rains.

The colourful *Bihu* dance of Assam is associated with the Bihu festival and agricultural harvest. *Thang-Ta* of Manipur is a traditional martial arts form of dance, while *Hozagiri* of Reang tribes of Tripura is a dance of great skill and balance performed while standing on earthen pitchers and balancing a bottle on their head with a lit earthen lamp on it. *Goti Pua* is a unique dance tradition of Odisha that is performed by young boys who dress up as girls. *Lavani* of Maharastra, performed by women, is a dance of beauty and sensuousness. *Dekhani* of Goa is another folk dance performed by women and is associated with beauty. *Burrakatha* of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana region is a form of ballad dance and singing. *Kunitha* folk dances of Karnataka which include the popular *Dollu Kunitha* is a class of ritualistic folk dances. *Mayilattam*, popular in Tamil Nadu, is a dance of women who are dressed as a peacock. *Theyyam* is a popular ritual form of dance and worship in Kerala.

Thus, folk dances, very much like folk music, are associated with different occasions which are connected with the life, of the people, social events, festivals and other occasions. Both forms of art and the culture associated with it were nurtured for ages by the communities and their social practices. With migration displacing the people from their sociocultural roots, and the modern lifestyle leaving less time for these performing arts, both have experienced a weakening of their cultural roots. Institutional support from Lalit Kala Akademi and other organisations has helped these art forms to get a platform as well as due recognition. However, their practice and preservation will eventually depend on the survival of the communities in their traditional environment and eco-system and the interconnection of the migrated communities with their traditional culture.

14.24: Madhubani painting on silk fabric, 'Krishna and Gopika Raas', unknown artist, private collection — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

Folk paintings, a part of the diverse folk culture of India, have seen increasing popularity in the post-independence period. **Madhubani paintings** (Bihar), **Pattachitra** (West Bengal & Odisha), **Kalighat paintings** (Kolkata-West Bengal), **Pichwai paintings** (Rajasthan), **Phad paintings** (Rajasthan), and **Kalam Kari** (Andhra Pradesh) are some examples of the many folk paintings practised today. Tribal art is another wide domain of folk art that has grown and now enjoys increasing social visibility. **Warli paintings** (Maharashtra), **Gond paintings** (Madhya Pradesh), the **Santhal paintings** (West Bengal; Jharkhand) the **Bhil paintings** and the **Paitkar paintings** are some prominent examples of tribal art.

These paintings are based on the local culture and tradition and include diverse subjects. These may include; scenes from community life as in Warli paintings, or scenes of Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Indian mythology as in the Madhubani, Pattachitra, and Pichwai paintings. While day-to-day happenings of rural life are captured in the Kalighat paintings, Paitkar paintings often depict the rituals and ceremonies of the community. The canvas of these paintings is the walls, the floor of the house, paper, scrolls, and even fabric. Events like birth, marriage ceremonies, festivals, rituals, etc. are often the

14.25: A Pichwai painting of Nathdwara representing Vraja Yatra, painting on cloth, late 20th century; location Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

occasions for such art. A unique aspect of these paintings is the use of natural and earthy colours that are available locally. This integrates them with the local environment and also reflects the indigenous ethos and culture. Like other folk arts, they remain reposited in the folk knowledge and often have a tradition of several centuries. They too face the headwinds of change in societies experiencing the transition to modern lifestyle.

Folk theatre is another salient element of our grassroots culture and a centuries-old enduring and living tradition. It is a fusion of different elements of performing arts including dances, singing and music, besides literary arts like poetry/writing of verses. Arts of pantomime and ballad recitation are some of its other elements. Numerous traditional crafts like puppetry, costume making and others are also integrated with folk theatre. The uniqueness of folk theatre lies in its expression of the creativity and spontaneity of the common people who are not bound by the rules of classical theatre. Some prominent forms of folk theatre which have survived to modern times include **Ramlila**, **Krishna Lila**, **Nautanki**, **Jatra**, **Tamasha**, **Bhavai**, **Yakshagana**, **Bhand Pather** and **Swang**. These theatre arts are practised in different regions of the country. In the post-independence period, besides performing traditional epic tales, local legends and ballads, the folk theatre also diversified into communicating social messages and became a means of popular entertainment. However, in recent times and the 21st century in particular, folk theatres are on the decline. The arrival of modern theatre, the dominance of Indian cinema later as a means of entertainment, and the recent spurt in the electronic and digital means of entertainment have limited the presence of this once-popular form of grassroots theatre. However, with some institutional and governmental support, there is hope for the preservation of these art forms.

14.26: Festivals are an ancient, ubiquitous and salient cultural tradition of India. A large idol of Sri Krishna and the crowd of revellers, celebration of Rangpanchami at Indore — Courtesy, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board

Besides the above, several other elements of Indian culture have witnessed considerable change and evolution. **Indian theatre** has moved from strength to strength. Although cinema became stronger and other digital means of entertainment appeared from time to time, theatre has held on its own and carved a social niche. **Indian architecture** has endeavoured to come out of the colonial hangover and find an Indian identity rooted in its culture and ethos. The changing tastes, technology, modern demands and environmental considerations have played an important role in shaping modern Indian architecture. **Arts and crafts** of India have made their presence felt at the global scale, especially Indian fabric. GI-tagged crafts of today represent a confluence of the local culture, social practices and the associated commerce. **Fairs and festivals**, be it religious, social, agricultural or of any other genre, have always been a crucial element of Indian culture and occupy a position of pride in modern-day Indian culture. **Food** and **dress** are among other elements of micro-culture which have uniqueness of their own and also witnessed considerable change. Each region and state has a vibrant diversity of food and dress in a way symbolic of the pluralism of Indian culture itself.

14.27: A Yakshagana performance with elaborate makeup headgear and costumes; a folk theatre of Karnataka — Courtesy, Sangeet Natak Akademi

DRIVERS OF CHANGE IN INDIAN CULTURE IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

With the various macro and micro elements changing over time, the broad contours of the culture itself change. This is evident in the Indian context, especially in the last 25 years of the new millennium. The change in the economic policy of the 90s and the global interconnect, ushered in a period of economic growth, bringing a change in consumption and material aspirations of the Indians. The economic and other opportunities generated by the metropolitan cities attracted an increasing population to them and other urban centres. They spawned a new social culture that was more cosmopolitan breaking the social and caste rigidities of the erstwhile traditional rural society. But at the same time, it also uprooted a population from its cultural ecosystem.

New cultural trends emerged. Elements of material culture prospered. Greater emphasis on material gains also changed cultural tastes and perceptions as to the appropriate elements of culture. Tangible elements of culture grew. Changes in elements like food and clothing took place, which was as much influenced by the growing urbanisation, and also inspired by the global culture and materialism. Many other macro elements like art and literature followed similar trends. Platforms like entertainment which integrate the diverse elements of culture reflected this change and at times ushered new trends. The cultural elements of India were also significantly influenced by the changing population profile and social demography. With a younger population (median age of 28.7 in 2022) emerging in the new millennium, cultural tastes have changed and so has the demand, particularly for popular culture. Fast-paced music, action genre of cinema, fast food, emerging fashion, digital entertainment, culture of sports and other lifestyle trends are reflective of this influence.

Perhaps the most significant driver of cultural change in this phase has been technology which has also profoundly influenced other aspects of modern society and human civilisation. Like the industrial age, the digital age in the new millennium has caused socio-cultural upheavals and changed the very face of

14.28: A view of the erstwhile and the new parliament from the Vijay Chowk, coexisting side by side, the past and the present and the promise of a new future — photograph by Madhukar K Bhagat

society. India and its society have been abreast of this change and have embraced the numerous facets of digital technology in full measure. E-commerce, e-education, online entertainment, 'work from home', digital social media, crypto currencies, net meetings, 'over the top entertainment', and 'home delivery industry', among others, are some recent products of digital technology. These are changing the society and social discourse. These are also influencing certain subtle aspects of human society and influencing culture itself. In the coming decades, with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and others ruling the roost, how much they influence creative arts, literature, entertainment, and other aspects of human society and culture is yet to be seen. However, change they certainly will bring.

The changing environment is yet another factor of the socio-cultural change. India with its vast and diverse geography and sensitive ecology is particularly vulnerable to it. As global and local weather patterns change, it is eventually affecting the human habitat and society. Agriculture, commerce, industry and other aspects of human civilisation are beginning to be impacted and culture will not be able to remain aloof. Large cities have become vulnerable to urban flooding while unstable hills are now unable to cope with human pressure and changing environment. Rising sea levels are a threat to the coastal habitations. To adapt to and mitigate the adverse effects of the changing environment, traditional settlements and lifestyles are also beginning to change. These are likely to see disruptive changes in future, particularly in India. Will some of these cities meet the same fate as those of the ancient cities like Dholaveera of the Indus Valley civilisation? Those cities flourished for hundreds of years but perished due to the changing environment leading to the loss of their civilisation and culture. Or whether we have learnt from our history and past culture? Time will only tell.

Energy technology and fossil fuels have brought human civilisation into a sharp clash with the biotic and abiotic world, to the peril of all. However, technology also has the wherewithal to pull the world out of this quagmire. Whether and how much of the salvaging would eventually be done, would depend, as much on the culture we adopt as on the technology we develop and adopt. Whether materialism would remain the mainstay of human civilisation; whether universalism would prevail over utilitarianism; and whether the political systems can harmonise the elements of democracy (read people), ecology and technology; all would cast crucial influence on the world of tomorrow. India and India's culture would surely be affected by it as well. In a way, it is India's culture with its abiding emphasis on universalism and inclusiveness (*sarve bhavantu sukhinah* – may all be happy) and ancient heritage of living in harmony with nature as reflected in the wider philosophy of *ahimsa*, which offers hope and shows the way forward to this world in peril.