

Indian Culture and Heritage - A Holistic Approach

Dear Aspirants,

The study of Indian culture should be of great interest, but the method of its study should be appropriate. A very common question asked by the candidates is, "Which book should be considered the foundation for the study of culture"? If we suggest one such book for the study of culture, then candidates have to face two types of problems. First, no such book is available that accommodates the scope of culture which is suitable for the main examination as well as preliminary examination. Secondly, with the help of related books, candidates start collecting facts from an abundance of literature, architecture, sculpture, paintings etc. and will not be able to establish coherence between those facts. Therefore, the sooner those facts are remembered, more quickly they will be forgotten. This intellectual struggle will continue for two weeks, then the book will adorn the part of the book-shelf.

To understand the seriousness of the preparation, we suggested candidates that they should analyze the question papers of both prelims and mains examination from 2013 to 2023. So in light of this, the scope of the questions asked in examination will be known. The range of questions in the mains examination is much diverse. Scope of mains questions extended from 'Tandav dance' and 'Chola art' to 'Sangam literature' and up to 'Harappa urban architecture', 'Mesolithic Art' and 'Cultural Diversity of India'. The format of some questions is so complex and diverse where bookish knowledge remains insufficient, for example -

1. Describe any four cultural elements of diversity in India and rate their relative significance in building a national identity.

2. Despite the specific geographical location, Taxila could not get university status while Nalanda was a university. Examine.
3. Mesolithic rock cut architecture of India not only reflects the cultural life of the times but also a fine aesthetic sense comparable to modern painting. Critically evaluate this comment.
4. Initial Buddhist Stupa-art, while depicting folk themes and stories, magnificently illustrated Buddhist ideals. Explain.
5. What are the challenges to our cultural practices in the name of secularism?
6. Do we have cultural pockets of small India all over the nation? Elaborate with examples.

To attempt the above questions, one should have a holistic approach. In the first question, explain the four factors of cultural diversity in ancient times and medieval times and elaborate that how it can inculcate the sense of unity in diversity. Similarly, answer writing for all subsequent questions expects a holistic approach.

In the preliminary examination, the scope of questions is even significantly more specific. This fact can be understood through some following examples -

1. With reference to the religious history of India, consider the following statements:
 - (1) The concept of Bodhisattva is central to Hinayana sect of Buddhism.
 - (2) Bodhisattva is a compassionate one on his way to enlightenment.
 - (3) Bodhisattva delays achieving his own salvation to help all sentient beings on their path to it.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 and 3
(c) 2 only (d) 1, 2 and 3
2. With reference to the cultural history of medieval India, consider the following statements
- (1) Siddhas (Sittars) to Tamil region were monotheistic and condemned idolatry.
- (2) Lingayats of Kannada region questioned the theory of rebirth and rejected the caste hierarchy.
- Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) 1 and 2 (d) neither 1 nor 2
3. Kalamkari painting refers to -
- (a) A hand-painted cotton textile in South India
(b) A handmade drawing on bamboo handicrafts in North-East India
(c) A block-printed woolen cloth in Western Himalayan region of India
(d) A hand-painted decorative silk cloth in North-Western India
4. The National Motto of India, 'Satyamev Jayate' inscribed below the Emblem of India is taken from
- (a) Katha Upanishad
(b) Chhandogya Upanishad
(c) Aitreya Upanishad
(d) Mundaka Upanishad

In addition to the above questions there are also questions related to the literature, ethnicity and tribal groups etc. Considering the diversity of the questions and comprehensiveness of the topic, mere knowledge is not enough, but 'culture' should be considered as a catalyst of intellectuality. It's not much difficult, but it required to apply a logical or pragmatic approach. In fact, this logical approach will also applicable to other

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subjects in General Studies. In four papers of General Studies, the candidates have to study about 13 sub topics (including contemporary issues). Aspirants has to bear such a huge intellectual overload alone - that too in a situation when they did not get any intellectual training from the university education system. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt practical method of study. It is required to emphasize two things under this strategy. Firstly, each topic is interconnected with each other, so the study of each topic makes the study of the second topic easier, and this provides knowledge of the entire subject area. Secondly, during studies, try to establish the interlinking of topics from one subject to another. This will increase interest in the subject matter and it will also be easier to remember the facts. We will begin this method of study with the study of 'culture and heritage'. Candidates can also use this approach in the study of other subjects. To develop a holistic approach on culture and heritage, knowledge of the following aspects is necessary-

- 1. To explore the meaning of culture and heritage** - For this, it is necessary to understand the relationship between culture and civilization and culture and religion. Apart from this, also required to know which elements will be included in culture.
- 2. Methodology of study to develop a comprehensive understanding of culture and heritage** – Underline the changes in religion, literature and art from ancient period to modern period. So that we can understand how Indian culture set an example of unity in diversity.
- 3. Study of culture; knowing the importance of study of literature and art** - It is important to know, only then it will develop a real understanding of culture.

4. To understand the importance of interdisciplinary approach in the study of culture – Under this there is need to assess the impact of culture on foreign policy, economy, Constitution and on nation building.

■ **Meaning of Culture and Heritage:-**

To study the topic of 'Culture and Heritage', one should start with fundamental understanding of the topic. In general, the word culture is used in two senses. Firstly, in traditional sense, it means artistic creation and intellectual achievements. Under this, culture expressed in the form of the community's literature, architecture, classical music, classical dance and painting. In this way, both culture and heritage are closely assimilated to each other. Secondly, anthropologists use the word culture in another sense. Anthropological culture deals with the study of rituals and customs, perspective of the common people, their mentality and their tradition.

In fact, the focus of anthropologists does not on culture superiority, but they give emphasis on the study of the mentality of those people, who are marginal in the society. But, presently Anthropologists played a major role in popularizing the term culture. A study under the influence of anthropologists a separate branch 'Cultural Studies' has developed. The cultural study is the study of the mentality of the people who is on the margins of the society. Cultural Studies has impacted every branch of social science, such as History, Geography, Political Science, International Relations etc.

As far as the Civil Services Examination concerned, its curriculum covers both the periphery of the culture i.e., elite culture and culture related to the common people.'Tandav dance', 'Nalanda and Taxila University', 'literary achievements of

Krishnadev Rai's period' - all these point belongs to the elite culture, on the other hand 'Mesolithic painting' is associated with the general culture. It should be known to the candidate that in the era of growing democracy, like other humanities subjects, culture was also democratized. Naturally, the importance of 'folk' instead of 'classical' is encouraged, such as folk music, folk dance, terracotta figures, etc.

■ **What is the relation between culture and civilization?**

Determine the relationship between civilization and culture is in itself a complex question because both of these has been defined in many ways. Firstly, in the context of an ancient society, culture refers to a certain way of living, but, when this way of life expanded across a large region and came to be accepted as the norm, it was referred to as "civilization." For example, several regional cultures existed prior to the Harappa civilization. When the persistence of one of them goes beyond its territory and an advanced lifestyle was created in a large area, this was known as civilization. In other words, civilization is considered to be the highest status of culture. Additionally, some scholars also tried to link the development of ancient civilization to the urbanization and the knowledge of art of writing. In this sense, civilization became the symbol of highest order of materialistic life, but Abid Hussain believes that the elements of culture reached in higher level of material life only when that material life is accompanied by material pleasures with the means to achieve high moral values. But, when such a life sacrifices some of the moral principles, then it turns against the culture.

Then in another sense, an attempt has been made to link civilization and culture with external shell and the intrinsic quality

respectively. In other words, if civilization is the outer shell, then culture is internal quality. We can understand this with the example of a flower. The petals of flower is considered as civilization and the fragrance of flower contemplate as culture. In comparison, intrinsic quality is more significant than extrinsic traits. Due to more emphasis on external quality, the internal quality is diverted from its virtue. Therefore, many scholars considered the development of both as contradictory to each other. In fact, a German scholar, Spengler, says that with the development of civilization follows a recognizable decline of culture.

■ **At present, there is relatively less discussion about civilization, while culture is being discussed excessively. What is the reason behind this?**

As we know that when civilization spread, so in this process many other cultures get suppressed. In fact, when a culture reached its zenith, it takes the form of civilization, and within itself it assimilates many other cultures. Thus a type of elitism entered in civilization. Therefore, it connected with the dominant section of the society. While the Dalit and backward sections of the society can't reach to this level.

But as democratization progressed, the upliftment of Dalit and backward classes started. In this order, the scholars and intellectuals drew attention to those forgotten cultures, and then began to rediscover it. This is the reason that's why at present, emphasis on culture is more than civilization.

■ **What is meant by classical art? In which scenario art gains classical standards?**

The art and literature reached at that stage of development when it starts to influence the art and literature in the upcoming ages. This means that they have

been established as a standard and this standard is called as classical. In Indian history, there were some period when art adopted classical standards. For example, the art evolved from Maurya period to the Gupta period. Therefore, in Gupta period art assumed the classical standard. Similarly, Pallava art till the Chola period accepted the classical advancement. Lastly, architecture of Sultanate period acquired the classical standard by the Mughal period.

■ **What is the relation between culture and religion?**

There are many aspects of culture such as literature, art, life, perspective, food habits, lifestyle and religion. As we know, the religion is also one of the aspect of culture, but religion have two segments i.e., philosophy and rituals. However, the philosophy of all the religious sect is concerned with human welfare. In this way, through fundamental thinking, all religious sects enjoys proximity with each other, but with time, religious cults have developed such a system of rituals that conflict with basic human values and in this scenario, it increases the possibility of clashes between one religious sect to another religious sect. Then, in this situation, religion becomes an opponent of culture. In such a situation, religion drew the boundaries of India and Pakistan, working in opposition to the syncretic culture of India.

■ **Can culture also have a regressive element which is need to transform?**

Over a period of time, two types of flaws start coming to the surface within the culture. Firstly, culture word is already complex in itself and gradually some such customs and traditions begin to incorporate in it, for example, some people acknowledged the social evils like child marriage and sati system in the name of religion and considered

religion as part of the culture. Later, in India, in the 19th century, various intellectuals and reformers, from Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Swami Vivekananda, stood against social evils and successfully removed these evils from culture and religion.

Secondly, value is relative to society. When human society develops, some human behavior and practices considered to be part of culture become irrelevant and then there is a need to bring changes in them.

■ Can culture also be misused?

Like history, misuse of culture is also possible. In the name of protecting the vested interests of society, religion and culture promoted socio-religious evils, for example, when Raja Ram Mohan Roy opposed the evil practice of Sati, then conservatives like Radhakant Dev considered it as an attack on religion and culture. In the same way, at present when the demand raise to end the practices like 'Triple Talaq' and 'Nikah-Halala', then, the Muslim orthodox elements tried to preserve these practices in the name of religion and Islamic culture. That's why there is a need to make proper cultural policy in India. For the development of the country the proper formulation of policies is required in the field of science, defence, foreign etc., similarly effective cultural policy is also necessary.

■ Why do we study art and literature?

While studying the art and literature of any community, it explicitly expressed the life-perspective, thoughts and aesthetics sense. For the past hundreds, thousands of years our ancestors thinking and aesthetic sense have been expressed. If we study this, then naturally we will get the opportunity to understand the gradual development of thinking and aesthetic sense of our forefathers. Then we can evaluate ourselves, where we are standing from the point of view of intellectual and moral development. While going through

history we will try to understand the gradual development of political, economic and social structure. In the same way, while studying the art and literature we will try to understand the development of life interest and aesthetic sense.

■ Why Indian culture is considered an example of Polyphonic Culture?

Indian culture developed in such a way that it became pluralistic. During ancient times we can observe the harmony between Aryan culture and non-Aryan culture. Similarly, a synthesis can be evident between the cultures of the North and South. In Aryan culture, there was primacy of *Yajana* while bhakti, incarnation and idol worship prevailed in non-Aryan culture. Later, Hindu religion or Hindu culture developed with the assimilation of elements of Aryan and non-Aryan cultures. Similarly, any religious cult Brahmins, Buddhists and Jains develop in North India, it must have moved towards the south. Advaita philosophy of Upanishads developed in the north was refined and developed by Shankaracharya in south. Under Ashoka, cave architecture developed and it attained perfection with the construction of Pallava cave temple.

Bhakti and Sufi movement of medieval period expressed as Gangi-Yamuni culture. Similarly, a synthesis of Islamic and Indian features can be seen in the realm of architecture throughout the Sultanate and Mughal periods, which gave rise to a new style. This harmony is also seen in the fields of painting and music etc. Due to these reasons, the form of Indian culture is polyphonic or pluralistic.

■ How can the understanding of culture and heritage be useful in the studies of other subjects?

While studying the culture the candidates should adopt an interdisciplinary approach. With this approach, comprehension

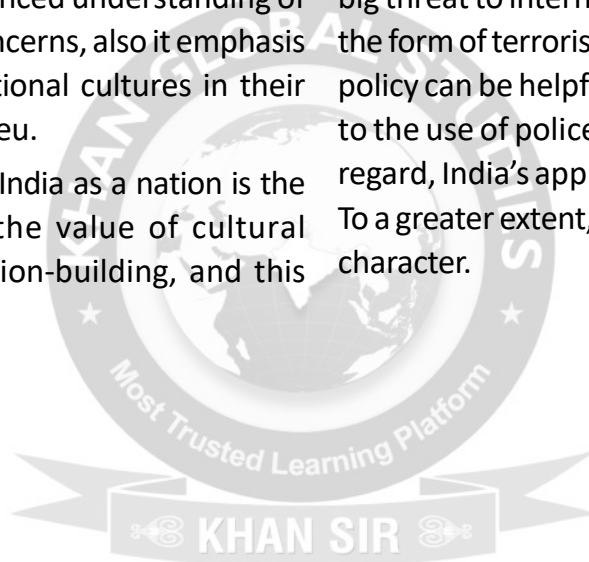
of other topics will also advance in addition to cultural understanding. Its interconnectivity with various social sciences can be understood through following ways -

Culture emerged as an important component in the conduct of foreign policy. Culture plays a vital role for the growth of soft power of any nation. At present "Cultural Diplomacy" became an important component of foreign policy. On this basis, India by expanding the neighboring region and eager to reach to the countries of South-East Asia. Similarly, Project 'Mausam' aims to re-connect and re-establish communications between countries of the Indian Ocean world, which would lead to an enhanced understanding of cultural values and concerns, also it emphasis on understanding national cultures in their regional maritime milieu.

The success of India as a nation is the best illustration of the value of cultural understanding in nation-building, and this

success can be attributed to our constitution makers that they understand India's diversity and on that basis they provide protection to linguistic and religious minorities. The difference becomes clear if we compare India with the failure of neighboring countries in South Asia, such as Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

In terms of economic success, even effective cultural policy can also play an important role. Raghuram Rajan long ago made it clear that religious conservatism and economic development cannot go hand in hand. Lastly, culture also proves to be an important factor for the internal security of the country. At present, Religious Bigotry is a big threat to internal security and it has taken the form of terrorism. An appropriate cultural policy can be helpful to regulate it in addition to the use of police and military force. In this regard, India's approach has been pragmatic. To a greater extent, India respected its diverse character.



Previous Year Questions from Art & Culture Section

1. The ancient civilization in Indian sub-continent differed from those of Egypt , Mesopotamia and Greece in that its culture and traditions have been preserved without a breakdown to the present day. Comment.
(200 Word, 12.5 Marks) (2015)
2. Mesolithic rock cut architecture of India not only reflects the cultural life of the times, but also a fine aesthetic sense comparable to modern painting. Critically evaluate this comment.
(200 Word, 12.5 Marks) (2015)
3. Do we have cultural pockets of small India all over the nation? Elaborate with examples.
(150 word, 10 marks) (2019)
4. The rock-cut architecture represents one of the most important sources of our knowledge of early Indian art and history. Discuss.
(150 word, 10 marks) (2020)
5. Pala period is the most significant phase in the history of Buddhism in India. Enumerate.
(150 word, 10 marks) (2020)
6. Indian Philosophy and tradition played a significant role in conceiving and shaping the monuments and their art in India. Discuss.
(150 word, 10 marks) (2020)
7. Persian literary sources of medieval India reflect the spirit of the age. Comment.
(150 word, 10 marks) (2020)
8. Do you agree that regionalism in India appears to be a consequence of rising cultural assertiveness? Argue.
(150 words, 10 Marks) (2020)
9. Evaluate the nature of the Bhakti Literature and its contribution to Indian culture.
(150 word, 10 marks) (2021)
10. How will you explain that Medieval Indian temple sculptures represent the social life of those days?
(150 word, 10 marks) (2022)
11. Discuss the main contributions of Gupta period and Chola period to Indian heritage and culture.
(150 word, 10 marks) (2022)
12. Discuss the significance of the lion and bull figures in Indian mythology, art and architecture.
(150 word, 10 marks) (2022)
