

## **WHAT IS INDIAN CULTURE**

Indian civilization is the oldest living civilization of the world. Whereas other contemporary civilizations waned away with time, the Indian civilization is still thriving. It cannot be said with certainty as to when it started. According to some Indian scholars it may be more than 20,000 years old. Some European scholars assess it to be 5,000 years old. Since we do not know as to when it started we call this civilization 'Sanatan' which means 'continuing from times immemorial'. The basic scriptures which describe and elaborate the principles of this civilization are four Vedas, six Upvedas, 220 Upanishads, six Darshan Shashtras, 18 Puranas, Manu Smriti, Ramayan, Mahabharat and Shrimad Bhagvad Gita. These scriptures are not the creations of one person but thousands of scholars who devoted their whole lives in study and research contributed in creation of these scriptures. The name 'Hindu' does not find place in any scripture. This name was given to this civilization when Alexander's forces attacking India reached river Sindhu and as they could not pronounce 'S', they started calling it 'Hindu' and thereafter the whole of this area from Himalaya to Kanyakumari became known as 'Hindu' – Hindustan. Over a period of time we started calling persons living here as 'Hindus' and the religion they follow became known as 'Hinduism'.

Every civilization of the world has got some systems which have been enunciated by the elders and wise men of that period with the objective of smooth running of the society. Such systems are classified as 'Systems of Thought' and 'Systems of Living'. The 'Systems of Thought' govern, control and guide the 'Systems of Living'.

In Indian civilization we have several 'Systems of Thought' and 'Systems of Living', some of them are common with other civilizations but some of them are unique. The major systems of thought and living of this civilization are described in brief hereunder –

### **SYSTEMS OF THOUGHT**

- **There is one God and nothing but God**

Concept of one God is there in all popular religions of the world. But in Indian thought this concept is a bit different. It says that there is one God only and every

other thing is part of the God. The God remains present in each molecule of every thing which exists in the whole universe. God is present in each atom in all living or non-living, moving or non-moving beings or objects. In a way modern science also admits this fact when it propounds the theory that all objects are made of atoms.

- **Atma or Soul**

The concept of Atma as propagated in Indian thought is unique and is not available in any other religion throughout the world. According to this thought Atma is that substance due to which body of a living being remains alive. As soon as Atma departs from the body the life becomes extinct and the living body becomes dead. This Atma is part of God. It comes from God and goes back to God.

- **Atma takes rebirth**

This concept of rebirth is again a unique feature of 'Hinduism'. It says that the Atma comes to a body at the time of birth and after leaving the body at the time of death the Atma travels to another body and takes rebirth as a completely new being. This cycle of rebirth goes on for 84,00,000 lives. Thereafter the Atma unifies with God. In some of the religions of the world there is a concept of life after death but that is for once only. After you die you will get up again on the Day of Judgment to be sent to Hell or Heaven according to your deeds. This concept is quite different from the concept of rebirth available in Indian thought.

- **Moksha – Freedom from the cycle of re-birth**

The cycle of re-birth goes on till 84,00,000 lives after which there is no re-birth. This state is called Moksha. But for emancipated souls this cycle of re-birth may stop earlier also depending upon the knowledge gained, actions undertaken and the grace of God received. After Moksha the Atma unifies with God.

- **“Prarabdha” (or Destiny) - the accumulated effect of deeds done during previous birth/s**

This concept says that the effect of deeds done during life time will accumulate and travel with Atma to the next birth and may continue for several subsequent lives and everybody has to face the consequences of his actions. If you have done

good or bad things in life you will reap the harvest in this or the next lives. It further says that you will be allotted subsequent lives according to your deeds. In a way we can call it “Destiny”.

- **God is achievable**

In some civilizations God is considered to be the super most power different from human beings or other living beings or other inanimate objects. According to them God is not achievable. According to Indian thought God is achievable. There are various methods through which we can achieve or experience God. Some of the better known methods are Raj Yog, Gyan Yog, Karma Yog, Bhakti Yog, Mantra Yog, Tantra Yog, Kundalini Yog etc. The underlying principle in all of them is Dhyana – Meditation. Through Dhyana we can cleanse our mind from all thoughts, emotions and desires pervading human mind constantly every minute. When this train of thoughts, emotions and desires stops we are able to experience God within ourselves. God-hood is a stage of supreme bliss – supreme happiness - which can not be achieved through worldly possessions.

- **Incarnation of God**

According to this concept God takes birth as ordinary human being, or otherwise, in order to alleviate the suffering humanity. This incarnation can be in various forms – man, animal or natural forces.

- **Whole world is one family**

According to Indian System of Thought all human beings as well as all non-human beings are members of one big family. Human beings irrespective of their faith or religion are part of the same family and they all are lovable and their existence is acceptable.

- **Non-expansionist**

The Indian thought does not believe in expansion of religion through sword or money or by conversion. It only propagates the wisdom enshrined in our scriptures throughout the world and anybody may pick it up.

- **Freedom of action**

Everybody is free to act according to his wisdom and conscience but he will have to reap the harvest of his actions.

- **Four objectives of life**

Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha are the four main objectives in everybody's life. Everybody is required to act in order to achieve these objectives. He must adhere to the path of his faith, earn money by rightful means, satisfy the needs of body and desires within reasonable limits, and achieve Moksha as the ultimate goal. One who does not act to achieve these objectives has just wasted his precious life.

- **Open to change**

These Systems of Thought are not rigid and are not of a closed circuit nature. They are open to change. Discussions, refinement as well as disagreement and hostile points of view are entertained. Whenever a reasonable point of view comes to fore it is accepted.

## **SYSTEMS OF LIVING**

Since birth till death everybody has to live. He may live a fruitful and happy life or he may live a life saddled with troubles and unhappiness. It may be due to certain circumstances but circumstances alone are not the only factor. We can make changes in our way of living. The 'Systems of Living' enshrined in Indian Scriptures help a person live a better life – a peaceful and meaningful life. In our day-to-day life we are advised to follow the below mentioned practices -

1. **Truthfulness** – We have to be honest and truthful in all our actions, intentions and speech.
2. **Non-violence** – We should not kill or cause harm to any other human being or any living being unnecessarily. In exceptional situations, in order to save life of one's own self or of others, one may resort to violence but within justifiable limits.
3. **Tolerance** – We have to tolerate actions, speech and feelings of others as they are also human beings like us. They may be having their own perceptions, feelings, desires and aspirations. We have to understand their perspective. We

have to appreciate their actions etc. by keeping ourselves in their place under the given circumstances.

4. **Austerity** – We should follow the maxim – simple living and high thinking. We should not live a wasteful life. The resources available in the world are to be shared by all the living beings.
5. **Humbleness** - Be humble to all fellow human beings in all actions and speech.
6. **Gratitude** – Be grateful for all that you have received and are enjoying.
7. **Control on Desires** – Our mind remains filled with desires and these desires remain unquenchable. No sooner one desire is satisfied two more crop up. The ever increasing desires do not let our mind be at peace. We have to control our desires by using our intellect and better judgment.
8. **Control on Senses** – We have 5 sense organs – eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin and 5 action organs – hands, feet, speech, sex organ and anus. Whatsoever we perceive and feel is through these sense organs. The sense organs prompt our mind towards desire. They through the mind move our action organs. These 10 organs taken together alongwith mind are responsible for all happiness or sadness that we experience. We have to keep a control on our sense organs so that they remain in balance.
9. **Duty** – Every person has some duties assigned to him by elders, by society or by law. We have to pursue our duties vigorously and without slackness.
10. **Act with full ability** – Whatever activities we indulge in either chosen by us to follow or being assigned to us, we must execute with our full ability without complacency.
11. **Earn honestly** – Everybody has to upgrade his economic condition so that he and his family members may live with comfort. Therefore one must take up such activities which make him economically strong but such activities must be undertaken honestly. We must not indulge in dishonest practices.
12. **Family Life** – After acquiring proper education we have to lead a married life, have children and take full care of their upbringing so that the system of progeny continues properly.
13. **Joint family** – Living in a joint family where several generations are living under one roof provides security and respect to elders and affection and care to youngers. In this system the eldest member of the family is considered to be the Head and all others follow him. Every member takes care of and is concerned for each other.

14. **Respect of elders** – We must respect our elders. We should treat our mother, father and other elders in the family as well as in the society with all respect and care. They should be treated like deities.
15. **Follow the elders** – We have to follow the right actions and advices of our elders, but if, in our considered and unbiased opinion, the elders are not giving proper advice or are not taking correct and justifiable actions we may not follow them.
16. **Importance of giving** – Give so that you may live. Give with humbleness, give with grace, give according to your capacity, give to develop friendship.
17. **Religion** – We have to follow the tenants of our faith, whatever it may be, regularly and without any slackness.
18. **Freedom of system of worship** – There is no dogmatic system of worship. There are several methods through which one can worship God. The individuals are free to adopt any method of their choice. Worship is meant for self development and to invite blessing of God. Even if somebody chooses not to worship he is acceptable and is not considered an outcaste.

Your views, suggestions, and comments are needed for betterment.

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