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# **INDIAN SOCIETY : IMAGES AND REALITIES**

**B.S.O.G.- 171**

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*Based on*

**C.B.C.S. (Choice Based Credit System) Syllabus of**

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*By: Taruna Jain*



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Mob.: 8510009872, 8510009878 E-mail: [info@neerajbooks.com](mailto:info@neerajbooks.com)

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Content

**INDIAN SOCIETY :  
IMAGES AND REALITIES**

Question Paper–June-2024 (Solved) .....	1
Question Paper–December-2023 (Solved) .....	1
Question Paper–June-2023 (Solved) .....	1
Question Paper–December-2022 (Solved) .....	1
Question Paper–Exam Held in March-2022 (Solved) .....	1
Question Paper–Exam Held in February-2021 (Solved) .....	1
Sample Question Paper–1 (Solved) .....	1

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<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
1.	Civilization and Culture .....	1
2.	India As Colony .....	13
3.	Nation, State and Society .....	26
4.	Village India .....	39
5.	Urban India .....	51
6.	Language and Religion .....	66

---

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
7.	Caste and Class .....	80
8.	Tribes and Ethnicity .....	94
9.	Family and Marriage .....	106
10.	Kinship .....	118
11.	Class, Power and Inequality .....	127
12.	Resistance and Protest .....	139



**Sample Preview  
of the  
Solved  
Sample Question  
Papers**

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# QUESTION PAPER

June – 2024

(Solved)

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B.S.O.G.-171

Time: 3 Hours ]

[ Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Attempt all the questions. All questions carry equal marks.

**Q. 1. 'India is a land of composite culture, reflective of unity in diversity.' Explain.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-1, Page No. 10, Q. No. 5.

**Q. 2. Discuss the impact of colonialism on Indian society.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-2, Page No. 13, 'Indian Society in the Colonial Period'.

**Q. 3. Elucidate the emergence of Nation-State in India.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-3, Page No. 34, Q. No. 3.

**Q. 4. Discuss village as a social unit in India.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-4, Page No. 40, 'Village as a Social Unit'.

**Q. 5. Describe the urban problems in India.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-5, Page No. 64, Q. No. 6.

**Q. 6. Discuss how the dimensions of plurality are addressed in Indian Constitution.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-6, Page No. 68, 'The Constitution and India's Plurality'.

**Q. 7. Explain the features of caste system.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-7, Page No. 81, 'Features of the Caste System'.

**Q. 8. Elucidate the relationship between tribe and ethnicity.**

**Ans.** In India, tribes and ethnic groups share common elements of identity, but their distinctions and relationships are shaped by geographic, social, and cultural factors. The concept of a tribe in India often refers to groups with specific geographic locations, distinct social and cultural practices, and relative isolation from mainstream society. Ethnicity, on the other hand, is broader, referring to groups of people with shared linguistic, religious, cultural, or national identities, but they may not be confined to specific regions or exhibit the same degree of cultural cohesion as tribes. Tribes in India, such as the Gond, Bhil, and Santhal, are primarily defined by their geographic distribution and collective lifestyle within particular territories, often in remote and rural areas. Their ethnic identity is closely tied to their social structure, economic activities (such as agriculture or hunting), and cultural

practices that set them apart from other groups. They may share racial or linguistic affinities, and their isolation or interaction with the larger society varies, influencing their level of integration with other social groups. Ethnicity, on the other hand, includes broader social groups defined by shared characteristics like language, religion, or cultural heritage. While ethnic groups in India may share these markers, they are not always geographically concentrated. For example, the Bengali or Tamil ethnic groups span across different regions and countries, without the geographical concentration characteristic of tribes. The relationship between tribe and ethnicity in India lies in the overlap of these identities.

Tribes can be understood as ethnic groups with distinct socio-cultural markers that set them apart from both mainstream society and other ethnic groups. However, unlike broader ethnic groups, tribes tend to be geographically concentrated and have more cohesive social structures that are often shaped by their economic pursuits, such as agriculture, handicrafts, or forest-based livelihoods. Their isolation from or interaction with other groups, either voluntarily or due to external pressures, further influences their social and cultural development. In contrast, ethnic groups in India are more integrated into the larger national and global context. For example, the Tamil or Bengali ethnic groups are spread across several regions but maintain linguistic and cultural unity despite geographic dispersion. Ethnic groups may not have the same degree of economic or social isolation as tribes, and their identity is less tied to a specific territory. In order to understand the social formation among the tribes, it is important to understand the issue of isolation and interaction. The reasons for the isolation of the tribes include the migrations of the tribes in India due to political, economic and ecological reasons. There are many tribes that have formed the large kingdoms and even the most isolated groups were part of a wider network of economic relations. ■■

# QUESTION PAPER

December – 2023

(Solved)

## INDIAN SOCIETY : IMAGES AND REALITIES

B.S.O.G.-171

Time: 3 Hours ]

[ Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Answer any five questions. All questions carry equal marks.

**Q. 1. Discuss the various approaches to study Indian civilization.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-1, Page No. 1, 'Approaches to the Study of Indian Civilization'.

**Q. 2. Discuss the idea of India as imagined by the nationalists.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-2, Page No. 17, 'Nationalist View of India'.

**Q. 3. Explain the dimensions of stateless society in India.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-3, Page No. 26, 'Stateless Society in India'.

**Q. 4. Critically evaluate the self-sufficient characters of Indian society. Was it a myth?**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-4, Page No. 39, 'Indian Village : Myth and Reality'.

**Q. 5. Explain the various dimensions of urbanisation in India.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-5, Page No. 59, Q. No. 1.

**Q. 6. Explain the relationship between caste and class in Indian society.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-7, Page No. 84, 'Relationship between Caste and Class', Page No. 91, Q. No. 5.

**Q. 7. Elaborate the important features of tribes in India.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-8, Page No. 96, 'Features of Tribes in India'.

**Q. 8. Discuss the factors contributing to the change in the family system in India.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-9, Page No. 113, Q. No. 1.

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# Sample Preview of The Chapter

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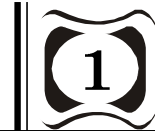
# INDIAN SOCIETY : IMAGES AND REALITIES

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## Civilization and Culture

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### **INTRODUCTION**

India is considered as one of the oldest civilizations in the world. The country is a home to half a billion people and is famous for its cultural diversity and plurality. The country is rich in every dimension of life, in the population, in the geography, environment, modes of livelihood and above all in its cultures and therefore it is difficult to capture all the diversity of the country. The Indian civilization can be studied in four broad approaches. The first section of the chapter deals in these approaches. The Indian population depicts a variety of historical migrations that has resulted in racial, ethnic and religious diversity. The Indian population is diverse in nature and speak diverse languages and have a distinct way of life that sets them apart from each other. The ecological and physiographic variations of different regions of India explain the richness and diversity of the country. The chapter also deals with the cultural and historical geography of India and the social structure and cultural diversity of Indian civilization. The religious and socio-political historical past are significant to understand the evolution of Indian society. It stresses on the fact that no society can be properly understood without reference to its history. The chapter also reflects the significant elements that contribute to the unity of Indian civilization and deals with the fact that regionalism was never a significant threat to the civilization of India unified identity in spite of internal conflicts and almost continuous warfare.

### **CHAPTER AT A GLANCE**

#### **APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF INDIAN CIVILIZATION**

The term civilization comes from the Latin word *civis*, meaning “citizen” or “townsman.” Therefore, the

term depicts the complexity of the civilization. The term also shows some agricultural practices, trade, some evidence of planned dwellings, multiple cultures, art, religion and some administrative and political structures. Civilization can be defined as the complex of human grouping/society with cultural-material and non-material/ideational traits and a defined polity. The Indus Valley Civilization whose society is explained to us through its artefacts and monuments is considered a civilisation. India is taken as one of oldest continuing civilizations because its origin is traced back to the Harappan civilization.

There are many scholars who have focused on the Indian civilization devoted to understanding of the nature of Indian society and culture and have explained the diversity and richness of India as a civilization and provide multiple conceptual tools/methodology used to study it.

According to Cohn (1971), the four broad approaches/directions to understand Indian civilization can be derived from the accounts as follows:

- Catalogue Approach
- Cultural Essence Approach
- Cultural Communication Approach
- Approaching India as a Type

#### **The Cataloguing of Traits**

The main objective of the approach is the recording of the traits, the institutions and the qualities that are considered to be essentially Indian. The population of India shows diversity can be depicted in terms of geographical, ecological, regional, class or religious differences. The focus is on the list out traits or qualities that are distinctly Indian or contribute to Indianness which are based on assuming the notion of what it means to be Indian and these may vary from scholar to scholar.



2 / NEERAJ : INDIAN SOCIETY: IMAGES AND REALITIES

**The Reading of Cultural Essence**

In this approach, the focus is on the discovery of essential style and process – the cultural essences which represents the Indian civilization since its inception but not the trait or content. The true spirit of India is depicted in its cultural essence which it has imbibed over the years in the wake of historical and various other exigencies. It shows that India is not statistically measurable and its essence may be understood in terms of concepts like ‘Unity in Diversity’, tolerance and brotherhood, respect for the spiritual and divine. The idea of ethos is abstract and deductive in nature and is highly subjective as a concept.

**The Study of Cultural Communication**

In this approach, the focus is on the ways and processes through which the content of the civilizational system are transmitted and communicated through different levels of society. The stress is on the structural integration of the Indian civilization. The works of the social anthropologists, McKim Marriott (1955) and Robert Redfield (1956) gives us a significant basis to understand the unity and interdependence of various parts of a civilizational entity. Marriott focused on the cultural synthesis and interaction between ‘Great Tradition’ and ‘Little Tradition’ and stressed on festivals celebrated in a small north Indian village, Kishangarhi in Uttar Pradesh. On the other hand, the study of Redfield depicts the constant interaction and communication between great tradition and little tradition in the form of folk-urban continuum, which stands for symbiotic and interdependent relationship between the two.

**Box 1: Parochialization and Universalization**

The work of **McKim Marriott’s** named *Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization* (1955), explains the twin concepts of Universalization and Parochialization for explaining the cultural exchange between great tradition and little tradition in India. The process of carrying further the great tradition by encompassing the elements of little tradition is Universalization or in other words it explains the systematisation and standardisation of local rites, values and cultural ideals by universal sanskritic belief system. He explained this by taking the example of the *diwali* – the Festival of Lights celebrated locally, in Kishangarhi village to propitiate Goddess of wealth and prosperity *Saurti*. He added that Goddess Lakshmi may be a universalised form of *Saurti* of the little tradition as the former is also symbolic of wealth and prosperity.

This is opposite to the universalization process is parochialization and stands for the downward spread of rites, beliefs and cultural ideals of universal appeal to suit the local environs. It depicts the creativity of little communities within India’s indigenous civilization. According to Marriott, the process is explained by citing the example *Naurtha* festival in Kishangarhi, pointing it as a parochialized version of *Navarathri* in which nine different consecrates of the Sanskritic Goddess Durga is propitiated for nine successive days.

**Box 2: Little and Great Traditions**

*Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (1956) is the work of **Robert Redfield** and is based on his experiences with Latin American peasants. He also discovered that the peasant-based societies were not isolated and bounded. The life of the peasants is influenced by tribes, towns and cities people. According to **Robert Redfield**, the peasant society is a system of social relations, with relationships extending outside it to wider communities. He stressed on the interdependence of peasant community as bearers of little tradition on townsfolk and populace who represented great tradition.

**Analysing Indian Civilization as a Type**

The comparative sociologists liked the approach and stressed on the aspect that the Indian civilization is seen as a distinct type in juxtaposition with other societies and culture. The focus is to view Indian society as a traditional society, which is experiencing processes, such as modernisation that illustrate cultural, social and historical principles. The objective is not to read distinct values or aspects that are unique to the structure of India but typify it on the basis of what it has in common with other societies and culture and then to examine variations. In order to view India as a caste society, the futile exercise will be to understand as the concept/ phenomenon of caste is unique to India. This eliminates the possibility for making cross-cultural/societal comparisons of India. The distinct part is thus ‘Scientifically Incomprehensible’ in view of this approach (Cohn 1971:4).

## UNDERSTANDING THE GEOGRAPHY OF INDIA

The historical traditions of the Indian civilization are complex and deeply rooted in nature with a wide variation in custom and behaviour regionally and with the social structure of a particular region (Cohn 1971:7). The geographical distribution of the country explains its diversity and regional variations. The basic physiography of India also explains the broad framework for a persistent historical, cultural and political pattern. It is, therefore, important to take an account of its (historical) geography.

According to Cohn, the three zones into which India may be divided in a broad geographical way are:

- The Perennial or Nuclear Zones
- The Route Zones
- The Zones of Relative Isolation

A description of these zones is as follows:

### The Perennial/Nuclear Zones

The perennial zones consist of the fertile river basins, plains and delta and have been centres/nucleus of human settlement, high population density, political activity and a stable state system. The agriculture practices are settled and are famous for being trade centres of agricultural and craft commodities. There are many pre-modern and modern cities that have emerged in nuclear zones and India is marked by such zones both in north and south India.

The river basins and plains around Peshawar led to the emergence of first nuclear zone in northern India which is Gandhara, a town that is now in Pakistan. An important role was played by this region in spreading the influences from western and central Asia to India. The Sutlej-Jamuna doab and the Gangese-Jamuna doab together make the major nuclear zones of north. These consist of the cities like: Kurukshetra-Panchala, Kanauj, Panipat, Delhi, Agra, which have had a vibrant politico-historical past. The examples of the nuclear zones of north are Kosala, the present day Central Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and Saurashtra, the contemporary Gujarat. These zones have distinct linguistic traditions and owing to topographical and climatic variations have evolved a distinctive cropping pattern.

The nuclear zones in south India are – Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra and Mysore. Andhra consists of Telugu speaking people and has rich agricultural delta areas of Godavari and Krishna river. Tamil Nadu consists of Tamil speaking people and is the site of the Chola and Pandyan kingdom and consists

of fertile plains of Pennar river and Kaveri delta and is densely populated. Maharashtra consists of Marathi speaking people and is similar to Mysore, the home of Kannada speaking population in agricultural practices. Both the zones are known for dry agriculture with millet, maize and gram being prominent crops. The south western part of India is Kerala/Malabar and is distinct from other zones in the south owing to its height due to the Niligiri ranges and the rain it receives. The Western Ghats isolate it from other zones in south and render it a distinct culture and social structure, visible in the practice of matriliney by the Nayar community. Kerala also displays agriculture based on wet rice cultivation.

### The Route Zones

One famous example of route zone is Malwa which connects north India with the western coast and Deccan. The place acts as a passage for invaders and traders to reach nuclear zones of attraction and has a distinct cultural region, lying towards south of Aravali ranges. The region is semi-arid in nature. There is no unified and persistent political tradition in the route zone and are mosaics rather than having distinctive culture and social structure (Cohn 1971: 26). They are areas of settlement of migrant population.

### The Zones of Relative Isolation

These zones are relatively inaccessible and geographically lesser conducive areas for human settlement. One such example is Ladakh which is not only icy cold but relatively cut off due to high mountains ranges and has less settlement.

The northern part of the country is hilly and mountainous and depicts several zones of relative isolation which is as follows:

(a) The area in the northern arc. This consists of the regions adjoining the borders of Baluchistan and Afghanistan and has loosely organized tribes who have been Islamised.

(b) The areas around Gilgit and Jammu and Kashmir comprises of distinct cultural tradition, assimilating Hindus from the plains.

(c) The areas along the Himalayas in the plains extending through Nepal border, Bhutan and Sikkim and place where the Brahmaputra River enters Assam plains. All these areas represent dual cultural influence that of Tibetan-Buddhism and Hindu beliefs transmitted from the plains.

(d) In the hilly and forested tracts of north east, the area between Burma and India which is home to various tribes reflecting south-eastern influence.

4 / NEERAJ : INDIAN SOCIETY: IMAGES AND REALITIES

(e) The Rajputana/Marwar is a region of relative isolation in the north west India and is inhabited by the Rajputs and other refugees from Muslim invaders who established their culture over the scattered tribes of the region.

There are two significant zones of isolation in central India which are as follows:

(a) The area runs through Vindhya mountains, eastern Gujarat, Narmada River, eastern Banaras from where Kaimur hills are visible.

(b) The second zone is the mountainous terrain south of Vindhya range, northern Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, north western Orissa and south eastern Bihar.

**VIEWING INDIA FROM A STRUCTURAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

The social and the cultural aspect of the Indian civilization is influenced by its past. The religion, economy and politics of the country played an important role in shaping its social structure and culture. The mythicreligious past and direct political past of the country has helped in understanding the mutual alliances and tensions between the various regional political entities that existed in pre-colonial India. The mythic and religious are interconnected with the political and myths such as those of sacred kingship which are often invoked to justify present political hierarchies and relationships.

There are many invasions, migrations and a porous and accepting religion which has added diversity to the Indian population. These aspects have given it an essentially pluralistic content.

This does not mean that India is not seen as a singular entity/unit, a nation. The civilization of India is structurally and culturally highly segmented and stratified. Hinduism is not a doctrinal religion and more of a way of life of the country. The religions such as Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are flourished in the country and accepted outside religions like Islam and Christianity. Therefore, we can say that the religious past of India manifests a high level of differentiation and absorption of diverse elements. The great tradition of India in terms of the hierarchy of *varna*-order and the prolific *jati* system is an all encompassing system of social order that has so permeated the Indian sub-continent that incoming religions such as Islam and Christianity have also accepted this social order in practice if not in ideology. The social and political order from the past has helped in letting the caste system of *varna* and local *jatis* play an important role in the arena of power dynamics and formation of social networks

and groups. The identity of a person even in the contemporary India is connected to his/her *jati* and *varna* identity and legitimized by reference to some imagined and mythical past.

The link with religious past also helps in knowing the means for identification with a distinct kinship group and particular ancestry. There are many Hindus who visit Gaya and Haridwar to perform rituals for their dead, where priests maintain books tracing the genealogical history of their clients. The *varna* and *jati* systems rule the social world by its superimposition on the kinship system by the rule of *jati* endogamy. The concept of generational or blood feuding also exist that is a derivative of kinship and is followed in the societies where kinship plays a vital role even at present. Thus, we could come across households and clans whose members may not enter into marital alliances or inter-dine with each other as their ancestors in the previous generations had arguments or quarrels. The impact of kinship and the *jati* system as an extended kin group limits the social mobility and encloses people to groups identified by the past more than the present.

The perception of the past has changed over the years, particularly since the end of 19th century when our nationalist leaders started to portray India as a nation and its population as a unit. India is no longer seen only as a segment or fragment which is divided into several regions/states with its population representing different religious/social identities. India was declared as a secular state in the year 1947. The Hindu symbols were avoided and a mix of religions was represented in the formation of the national symbols and to reiterate its secular character. In India, secularism refers to a respect for all religions and not its western counterpart of no religion. The flag of the country has a Buddhist wheel of law and the national emblem is made of lions, taken from the seal of the Buddhist king, Ashoka. Also, the national anthem of the country, *jana, gana, mana* spells out peoples and regions of India and focus on its unified identity, despite the underlying diversities. To sum up, we conclude that the focus of the nationalist leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru had been to show India as essentially representative of the principle of 'Unity in Diversity'. The principle of unity and diversity reflects India's ability 'to absorb and reshape what is foreign' (Cohn 1971:57). The civilization of India depicts the assimilation and absorption of elements from long period of several waves of immigrant rule. This helped in the socio-cultural richness and pluralism of the