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INDIAN CULTURE

CIVILISATION

Meaning

'Civilisation', in the words of Will Durant, 'is social order promoting cultural creation'. Among its four constituents – economic provisions, political organisations, moral traditions and pursuit of knowledge and fine arts – the first one is the most important.

Constituents

One of the most important conditions for civilisation is **economic**. Agriculture is the key to civilisation: without it, a society would base its economy on hunting and gathering. This would only allow temporary settlements. Agriculture not only forces a group of people to settle (plots of land cannot be moved), but also provides a food supply much larger and reliable than the hunting gathering economy. A reliable supply of water and food teaches mankind to work with order and regularity and to plan in the long term. It also requires less people directly involved in the food supply activities, thus allowing a portion of society to be relatively free from labour and to engage in other activities. Previously, among nomads, one roving band met another and there was a display of force in order to gain the right to exploit a specific area. These encounters were usually not deadly if other areas were still unexplored. The weaker band, foreseeing a defeat, would retreat and search for another area. There was no area worth the loss of life. Farmers, on the other hand, did not really have a choice, they had to defend their immovable farms. To stand and fight was their only alternative. By defending their farms they had a chance to survive, their only other option was to die of starvation. This was the beginning of organized warfare.

Another condition for civilisation is **intellectual**: many aspects could be included here, such as language unity, and the pursuit of knowledge (philosophy, science, art). There has to be some language unity to allow the exchanging of ideas. This could be either a homogeneous fully consistent language or a variety of dialects close enough to prevent language barriers. Mental exchange feeds into the developing of philosophy, science and arts, enriching the cultural development and facilitates the transmission of morals and education. This might sound like an extremely basic point but it is often taken for granted. However, a language complex which is homogeneous enough to allow these consequences seems to be a relatively later achievement in human history.

An intellectually complex civilisation will appreciate and encourage art and crafts in its many manifestations: paintings, pottery, music, sculpture, architecture. It is not that these elements do not exist prior to the time of cities, but it is in the cities that they flourish, multiply and get richer as the sense of beauty increases.

It seems that originally objects are neither pleasant nor unpleasant. The beholder is not pleased because an object is beautiful but rather the object is named beautiful because it pleases him. The spirit of art is not in the objects but within ourselves. And there is a strong link between the complexity of human thought and language and the flourish of art. In the words of Oscar Wilde:

The artist is the creator of beautiful things.

To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim. [...]

Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated one.

For these there is hope.[...]

Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art.

Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art.

It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.

(Wilde, Preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray)

A **moral code** is also essential for civilisation. Without it, social order and cohesion would not be possible. Several means can serve for the transition of a moral code: family, school, religious institutions. Clear rules reduce the conflict among citizens. Those who violate the rules are punished and those who live by them are rewarded: this basic dynamic offers some direction and stimulus to human conduct. A moral code is a message that encourages or prevents specific behaviours.

There must also be **education**. This includes any technique, however primitive, for the transmission of culture. Here we can also see a number of institutions involved in handing down to the young what has to be learned: relatives, lore, teachers, priests, etc. Language, knowledge, moral code, arts, these are some of the things that should be transmitted through education.

There is another condition for civilisation: **political order**. Citizens must feel a relative social stability. However, it seems that in the simplest societies there is hardly any government, at least in the form we recognise. Association and cooperation are for special situations like hunting or fishing. However, these associations are not permanent

4. BIHAR

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS:

Some of the important religious institutions in Bihar are:

Mahabodhi Temple Complex at Bodh Gaya:

Mahabodhi Temple Complex is the **UNESCO World Heritage Site** in Bihar. It is the place where Lord Buddha attained the spiritual enlightenment in 531 BC while He was seated under the **Bodhi Tree**. This place is one of the four holiest sites related to the life of Lord Buddha, others being **Lumbini** in Nepal-place of His Birth, **Sarnath** in Uttar Pradesh -place where He delivered His first sermon and **Kusinara/Kushinagar** in Uttar Pradesh -where He took His last breath. The first temple at the present location was built by Emperor Asoka of the Maurya empire in the 3rd century B.C., and the present temple dates from the 5th or 6th centuries during the late Gupta Empire. The most important of the sacred places is the giant Bodhi Tree (Botanical name-*Ficus Religiosa*).



This tree is supposed to be a direct descendant of the original Bodhi Tree.

Architectural Significance: The Mahabodhi temple is one of the earliest temple constructions existing in the Indian sub-continent & one of the few surviving examples of early brick structures in India. The temple has a huge shikhara (tower) surmounted by amalaka and kalasha which went on to become significant architectural of Indian temples. The sculpted stone balustrades are an outstanding early example of sculptural reliefs in stone.

Kesaria Stupa: The excavation in 1998 by the ASI unearthed this massive stupa that is claimed to be the world's tallest excavated. It is presumed to be built between 200-750 A.D. by the **Licchavis**. It is in **East Champaran district**.

Barabar Caves: The Barabar Caves are the oldest surviving rock-cut caves in India, mostly dating from the Mauryan period. They are located in the **Jehanabad district**. These caves were used by ascetics from the **Ajivika sect** which founded by **Makkhali Gosala**-a contemporary of Gautama Buddha. Barabar Hill contains four caves-**Karan Chaupar, Lomas Rishi, Sudama** and **Visva Zopri**.



Sun Temple: Deo Sun temple in **Aurangabad district** is one of the few existing ancient sun temples, Deo, was built in 8th century CE by Chandravanshi King

Bhairavendra Singh. This temple faces west which is a unique feature for any sun temple as the usual tradition of sun temples is to face east, towards the rising sun.

Mundeshwari Temple: This temple in **Kaimur district** dates back to 635 AD. It is considered to be the **oldest functional temple of India**. Most of the structure has been destroyed and currently gathered around the temple in huge heaps. The temple has a four-faced Shivlinga at the centre of the sanctum sanctorum but the presiding goddess deity Mundeshwari is placed at one of the niche of this octagonal temple.



Vishnupad Temple: This temple in **Gaya** is marked by a footprint of **Lord Vishnu** incensed into a basalt rock. Buddhist tradition regards the footprint in the Vishnupad Temple as a footprint of Buddha. The present-day temple was rebuilt by Devi Ahilya Bai Holkar, the ruler of Indore, in the 18th century.

Pawapuri/Jal mandir: This temple in **Nalanda district** is located where during around 500 BC **Lord Mahavira**-the last of the 24 Tirthankaras in **Jainism**-achieved salvation. He was cremated at Pawapuri, also known as *Apapuri-the sinless town*. There was a great rush to collect his ashes due to which so much soil was removed from the place of his cremation that a pond was created. Today, a temple made up of white marble stands in the middle of this pond.



ARTS AND CRAFT: Registered **Geographical Indications (G.I.)** belonging to Bihar are:

Madhubani Paintings (Registered G.I. as a Handicraft): **Madhubani painting** is also known as **Mithila painting** as it is practiced in the **Mithila** region of Bihar. Painting is done with fingers, twigs, brushes, nib-pens, and matchsticks, using natural dyes and mineral pigments. There are paintings for each occasion and festival such as birth, marriage, holi, Durga puja and other occasions. The painting was traditionally done on freshly plastered mud walls and floors of huts but now they are also done on cloth, handmade paper and canvas.



Madhubani paintings mostly depict the people & their association with nature, natural objects like the sun, moon & plants and the scenes & deities from the ancient epics like Mahabharat & Ramayan. Generally no space is left empty on the canvas and the gaps are filled by paintings of flowers, animals and geometric designs. In order to create a source of non-agricultural income, the All India Handicrafts Board and the Government



of India have been encouraging the women artists to produce their traditional paintings on handmade paper for commercial sale.

Applique-Khatwa Patch Work of Bihar (Registered G.I. as a Handicraft): Khatwa patch work is an appliqué work ,i.e., it is an ornamental needlework in which pieces of fabric are sewn or stuck on to a larger piece to form a picture or pattern. Khatwa is mainly used to

create designer curtains, cushions, table covers, tents, canopies and other products. The designs in Khatwa work include trees, flowers, animals, birds and others. In Khatwa work, the patches are first stitched to the base fabric and then the designs are cut to shape.

Sujini Embroidery Work of Bihar (Registered G.I. as a Handicraft): Sujini embroidery started as the distinctive embroideries done by women in Bihar from worn and used clothes. It is a very popular & expressive art form now. Sujini is quilt having embroidery made in Bihar by recycling a number of worn out saris and dhotis in a simple running stitch that gives the old cloth a new structure while ornamenting it. Sujini embroidery has eventually taken the form of representing unique narrative elements of storytelling and sharing experiences through embroidery. Women often stitch their sorrows and realities on the Sujini, transforming mundane cloth into testimonies of their lives and challenges.



Sikki Grass Work of Bihar (Registered G.I. as a Handicraft): The Sikki grass articles are made by the women of North Bihar. Sikki is obtained from the dried stems of a succulent plant. The plant is abundantly available in Bihar. The upper portion of the stem, which contains flowers, is discarded and the remaining portion cut into small pieces and preserved for making attractive Sikki ware.



Sikki Grass Work of Bihar

It is out only once after the rains and the cut pieces are stored for use throughout the year. Sikki grass dyed in red, blue, black and gold is imaginatively wrought into a variety