

INDIAN SOCIETY

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICES EXAM

EXAM-ORIENTED CONCEPT -CENTRIC STRUCTURED & SIMPLIFIED

Indian society is a mirror of its civilization – diverse yet united, ancient yet evolving, rooted yet rising.

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1. SALIENT FEATURES OF INDIAN SOCIETY

1.1 What is a Society?

A society refers to a structured group of individuals who share a common geographical area and are bound together by shared norms, values, culture, and institutions. It governs social interactions and provides the framework for coexistence.

Indian society is one of the oldest and most complex civilisations in the world, shaped by thousands of years of cultural evolution, religious philosophies, regional interactions, and historical processes. It is marked by a high degree of heterogeneity and coexistence.

1.2. General Traits of Indian Society

- **Cultural Diversity**

India is a culturally pluralistic nation where multiple languages, religions, customs, and traditions coexist across various regions.

- **Social Hierarchy**

Indian society has historically been stratified along caste, class, and gender lines, with the caste system being a particularly significant organising principle.

- **Family-Centric Orientation**

The family plays a central role in Indian life. Joint and extended families remain common, especially in rural areas, providing emotional and economic security.

- **Religious Influence:**

Religion permeates daily life in India. Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism are widely practised, influencing food, dress, rituals, festivals, and even laws.

- **Respect for Elders**

Elders are treated with deference and reverence. Their guidance is sought in family and social decisions, reflecting patriarchal and gerontocratic values.

- **Hospitality**

The Indian ethos follows ***Atithi Devo Bhava*** (The guest is like God). Guests are welcomed warmly, and hosts strive to ensure their comfort.

- **Cultural Syncretism**

Over centuries, India has witnessed the blending of diverse cultural and religious elements, resulting in unique hybrid traditions, such as Indo-Islamic art or Sufi-Bhakti movements.

- **Secular Outlook**

Though deeply religious, India as a state is secular. The Constitution upholds the right of individuals to freely practice their religion.

1.3 Salient Features of Indian Society

1. Multi-Ethnic Composition

India is a multi-ethnic society, with people from different racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds.

Ethnic Group	Major Regions Found
Indo-Aryans	Predominantly in North and West India

Dravidians	Southern states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh
Mongoloids	Northeastern states like Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, and Assam
Tribals	Central and Northeastern states
Europeans/Other	Primarily in urban, cosmopolitan areas

2. Multilingualism

India is a multilingual society where linguistic identity often overlaps with regional identity.

- As per the 2011 Census, 19,569 mother tongues were reported, which were rationalized into 121 languages.
- 22 languages are recognized in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.
- Scheduled languages are spoken by 96.71% of the population.

Language	Number of Speakers (in crores)
Hindi	52.83
Bengali	9.72
Marathi	8.30
Telugu	8.11
Tamil	6.90
Gujarati	5.54

3. Multi-Religious Society

Religion is a key identity marker in India, influencing both personal and public life.

Religion	Population Share (%)
Hindu	79.80
Muslim	14.23
Christian	2.30
Sikh	1.72
Buddhist	0.70
Jain	0.37
Others/Not stated	0.88

4. Caste System

- The caste system has been one of the most defining features of Indian society.
- Originating in the Vedic period, it divides society into hierarchical groups based on birth and occupation.
- Although legally abolished, its socio-cultural influence continues in marriage, politics, and access to opportunities.

5. Family, Marriage, and Kinship

- Indian families are typically patriarchal and hierarchical.
- Marriage is regarded as a sacred institution and often arranged within the same caste or community.
- Rituals such as *Saptapadi* and *Kanyadaan* are widely practiced.
- Though urbanization is leading to nuclear families, joint families still prevail in many regions.

6. Tribalism

India's tribal population is diverse, with each group having distinct customs, languages, and ecological contexts. **Examples:** Gonds, Bhils, Santhals, Mundas.

Key characteristics of tribal societies:

- Common topography and territory
- Endogamy and shared dialects
- Distinct political and religious practices
- Strong community solidarity

7. Coexistence of Tradition and Modernity

- Indian society showcases a continuous interaction between traditional values and modern institutions.
- The colonial period, post-independence development, and globalisation have influenced social transformation.
- Traditions such as yoga and Ayurveda coexist with scientific temper and technological advancement.

8. Balance Between Individualism and Collectivism

Indian society reflects both collective and individualistic values, often depending on urban-rural or generational contexts.

Individualism	Collectivism
Personal freedom and self-expression	Emphasis on family and community duties
Focus on rights and independence	Focus on harmony and obedience
Rising in urban, educated classes	Still dominant in rural and traditional areas

9. Balance Between Spiritualism and Materialism

Spiritual and material goals are not considered mutually exclusive in India.

Spiritualism	Materialism
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Practices like yoga, meditation, bhakti	Economic growth, consumerism, and entrepreneurship
Focus on inner peace and moral values	Pursuit of wealth and success through hard work
Coexistence of gurus and business leaders	Rise of Ayurveda industry, spiritual tourism

10. Unity in Diversity

- India exemplifies *Unity in Diversity*, where varied identities coexist within a democratic framework.
- National festivals, sports, freedom movement, and constitutional values bind citizens together.

1.4 Role of the Indian Constitution in Shaping Society

- Abolishes untouchability and prohibits discrimination (Article 17, 15).
- Guarantees freedom of religion, language, and culture (Articles 25–30).
- Provides for affirmative action for SCs, STs, and OBCs.
- Promotes equality, fraternity, and justice through Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles.

1.5 Impact of Globalisation on Indian Society

- Urbanization and technology have brought about changes in lifestyle, consumption patterns, and aspirations.
- Rise in inter-caste and inter-faith marriages, nuclear families, and gender equality awareness.
- However, globalisation has also led to cultural erosion and identity crises in some segments.

1.6 Role of Social Reform Movements

- Historical reformers like **Raja Ram Mohan Roy**, **Jyotiba Phule**, and **B.R. Ambedkar** challenged caste, patriarchy, and social injustices.
- Contemporary movements advocate for **LGBTQ+ rights**, **gender justice**, and **environmental sustainability**.

1.7 Role of Civil Society and NGOs

- NGOs play a vital role in bridging the gap between the government and marginalized communities.
- They work in areas like education, health, environment, gender equality, and tribal welfare.

1.8 Factors Threatening Peace and Harmony in Indian Society

1. Poverty:

Widespread poverty generates stress, exclusion, and conflicts at the local level.

2. Economic Inequality:

Disparities in income and wealth create a divide between social classes, leading to discontent.

3. Religious Conflicts:

The politicisation of religion often results in communal violence, affecting national unity.