

CHAPTER 3

Representing Culture: Indian Weddings, Family, and Festivals

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Though outwardly there was diversity and infinite variety among our people, everywhere there was that tremendous impress of oneness, which had held all of us together for ages past, whatever political fate and misfortune had befallen us. (Nehru, 1946, p. 47).

In the present day world of rapid globalization, it is becoming increasingly imperative for more countries to have understanding of other cultures. The Chinese and Indian cultures have become all the more important because together they represent more than two billion people. While it is true that India is a land of extremes and contrasts, thereby making it very difficult to generalize, there are areas in which disagreements are few. To enable understanding of Indian behavior patterns, this essay concentrates on the commonalities in Indian traditions and celebrations rather than their differences in regard to weddings, family, and festivals.

Geography

A democratic republic in the southern part of Asia, India borders Pakistan in the northwest, China and Nepal in the north, and Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar (once called Burma) in the northeast. The southern part of India is a peninsula, or land surrounded by water on three sides. The Arabian Sea lies to the west, the Bay of Bengal to the east, and the Indian Ocean to the south.

India consists of three main regions which are as follows: the mountainous north, the plains, and the peninsula. Each region has a different geography and climate. Part of the Himalayan Mountains in northern India have the highest peaks in the world. Winters in the

mountains are very cold, while summers are warm and dry. South of the foothills of the Himalayas, the land levels off to form the northern plains. The hot and dry Thar Desert lies in the northwestern part of the plains, but to the east the land is well watered. It is from this area that three major rivers flow: the Brahmaputra, the Indus, and the Ganges. The waters of the Ganges are sacred to the Indian people. Because of the abundance of water and rich soil, the northern plains region of India is the most densely populated area of the nation (Cifarelli, 1996). India is the seventh largest country in the world; by area it encompasses 1,269,419 square miles or 3,287,782 square kilometers. By population, it ranks the second largest country in the world, crossing the one billion mark at the turn of the new millennium.

The Indus Valley Civilization

The name “India” derived originally, through the Persians and the Greeks, from the region of the great river Indus (or Sindhu). Europeans called the peninsula the Indies and the Spice Islands. By retaining the name India upon independence in 1947, the Indian people claimed and inherited an ancient and rich history and culture (Watson 1975:11).

A BRIEF ANCIENT HISTORY OF INDIA

India’s civilization began around 2,500 B.C., in the valley of the Indus River. Archaeologists discovered ruins of marvelous ancient cities at places now called Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. According to the buildings, streets, and tools found at the cities, the Indus Valley civilization was very advanced. The people even had a system of writing, although experts have not been able to translate it (Cifarelli 1996:14).

In 1750 B.C. the Indus Valley civilization came to an end. For reasons that are not known, the great cities were abandoned, and people began to live in simple villages. A people from the northwest called the Aryans started to move into northern India. Many of the traditions that the Aryans brought are still part of Indian life. Today, descendants of the Aryans can be found in the northern half of India, and the indigenous Dravidian, in the south (Watson, 1975).

After the arrival of the Aryans, India was divided into many small

kingdoms, which were often at war. However, a few brilliant rulers were successful in uniting large regions. These kings founded powerful dynasties and ruled great empires with some dynasties lasting for centuries. According to Cifarelli (1996), the first great dynasty in India was the Maurya, which rose to power around 320 B.C. By 273 B.C. the Maurya dynasty controlled vast reaches of lands. The empire stretched from Central India to the area that is now Afghanistan in the northwest.

Five hundred years later, another great dynasty called the Guptas arose. The Guptas ruled from A.D. 320 to 550, conquered much of northern India, and had power over nearly the entire subcontinent.

Following the downfall of the Mauryas and the rise of the great Gupta dynasty, the intervening period was of great significance. In the Gangetic valley, the orthodox Hindu tradition re-established itself under the local dynasties and Sanskrit literature witnessed a revival which was to have far-reaching consequences. In the area between the plains of Hindustan and the Deccan plateau a new dynasty known as Satavahanas established itself as a great power. Placed as they were between the Dravidian of the south, and the Aryanized Hindustan, they were able to create a basic cultural unity for the entire country of India (Panikkar, 1965).

The British in India

On December 3, 1600, the “Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies” was chartered by Queen Elizabeth. Over 200 Englishmen had contributed close to £70,000 as the initial capital behind this venture. The royal charter granted Governor Thomas Smythe and his 24 “committees” of London merchants a monopoly on all trade between the Cape of Good Hope and the Straits of Magellan for 15 years. Four ships were outfitted the following year, a beginning for what became the administrative agency of Britain’s empire in India (Wolpert, 1965).

The first half-century of British contact with India was an era of meager mercantile expansion in which British expectations of grandiose profits were frustrated by Dutch and Portuguese competition as well as Mughal indifference. According to McNair (1990), the founder of the Mughal Empire was a Muslim king named Babar who invaded India

in 1526. He was part Mongol and originated from Afghanistan. Following Babar, seven generations of Mughal emperors extended their territories until they included northern India, Afghanistan, present-day Pakistan and Bangladesh, and much of southern India.

Denied equality of trade, the British merchants were content to linger in India by the grace of Mughal, and eagerly took advantage of serving the Mughals whenever the opportunity presented itself. Surat became the first center of British interest in India until 1687 when it was superseded by Bombay (Ibid., p. 69).

According to Cifarelli (1996), in 1857 the British conquered the entire country of India and made it part of the British Empire. The Indians, however, felt discriminated against in their own land and consequently struggled for independence.

Independence

After World War II, it became obvious that the British could not justify their presence in India. Consequently, in 1948, the British government appointed Lord Mountbatten as the viceroy who would preside over India's independence. On August 15, 1947, India became an independent country with Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi's greatest follower, as its first prime minister.

GLOBALIZATION OF IDEAS

Philosophical thoughts have traveled back and forth between India and English-speaking lands with each influencing the other. Trading ships made regular voyages between American colonies and India for many years before the American Revolution. Diplomatic relations were established by President George Washington who sent an American consul to Calcutta in 1782 (McNair, 1990). On the other hand, Great Britain played a long and significant role in the history of India. In turn, India's modern leaders were influenced by British and American thoughts. Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian hero who deserves most of the credit for leading his country to independence, used nonviolent resistance to tyranny and oppression. His ideas were influenced by both the Hindu religion and the writings of the American essayist, Henry David Thoreau.

In the 1960s, the American Civil Rights Movement derived much

of its inspiration from India's experience. The movement's leader, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., visited India, met with Prime Minister Nehru, and studied Gandhi's methods intensively. Dr. King's birthday is noted each year in India with newspaper editorials that point out what the two countries learned from one another in their struggles for freedom.

THE DEFINITION OF CULTURE

In 1699 B.C., the Aryans came from Central Asia and dominated the Indian subcontinent both militarily and culturally. The term "Aryan" meant "pure," and signified the invaders' conscious efforts to show their superiority to the Dravidians, the earlier inhabitants of the subcontinent. The Aryans brought with them a new language, Sanskrit, a new pantheon of gods, and a patriarchal family system. It is noteworthy that the Indian word for culture is "sanskriti," which means refined and cultivated, as opposed to "prakrti," which means inherent or instinctual. Whereas nature is immutable, culture is learned or acquired by virtue of membership in a society or community. According to Tylor (1958), culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society." The Indian culture known today, emerged from the fusion of Aryan and Dravidian traditions, beliefs and value systems. It is the practice of the core values, standards of conduct, customs and traditions that have been instrumental in unifying the Indian people despite their great diversity.

PHILOSOPHY

Religion, The Four Castes, Stages, and Ends of Life

According to Ganeri (2001), three-quarters of all Indians are Hindus. They believe in a supreme being called Brahman, whose various characters are represented by three main gods which are as follows: 1) Brahman (the Creator); 2) Vishnu (the preserver); and 3) Shiva (the destroyer). Existing within the Indian culture are thousands of other gods and goddesses (Ibid., p. 5). Additionally, some people worship in temples, while others in small shrines in their homes. Since Hinduism is an

extremely flexible religion, some Hindus do not perform any formal worship. Imbedded within Hinduism is the belief in reincarnation and for Hindus the ultimate goal is “moksha,” or salvation from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Other major religions include Islam, Buddhism, and Sikhism (Ibid).

Indian society divided its people into four “varnas” or castes, and life is divided into four “ashrams” or stages, with specific duties assigned to each. The Sanskrit phrase “varnaashramadharma” is indicative of this concept that each varna and ashram has its distinct set of duties.

Originally, the caste system was the way of division of labor among the Indian people. It was a person’s occupation or profession that determined his or her caste. According to Risabhchand (1964), the caste system was based on the following Indian idea:

[M]an falls by his nature into four types. There are, first and highest, the man of learning and thought and knowledge; next, the man of power and action, ruler, warrior, leader, administrator; third in the scale, the economic man, producer and wealth getter, the merchant, artisan, cultivator.” And the last type, he adds, belongs to the Sudras, who are “fit only for unskilled labor and menial service. (Rishabhchand, 1964, pp. 39–40).

As the Indian sociologist Motwani (1947) puts it, caste division “insured efficiency and economic strength and promoted social integration ... The functional castes, like the mediaeval guilds of Europe, fostered esprit de corps, encouraged due recognition of mutual bonds of interdependence.”

One of the main sources of information about Aryan religion are a collection of 1,028 hymns called the Rig Veda. These were recited by priests at sacrifices and ceremonies. Some hymns were addressed to specific gods; there are also battle hymns, observations, and dialogues. Hymns from the Rig Veda are still sung at weddings and funerals (Ganeri, 2001).

The caste is mentioned in the tenth book, Hymn XC of the Rig Veda. It conceives of the society as a giant body, with the Brahmins (priests,

thinkers and scholars) as the head, the Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers) as the arms, the Vaishayas (businessmen and farmers) the thighs, and Sudras (menial and unskilled workers) as the feet. Each caste had its function in sustaining and nurturing the health of the social body. At first, one could change one's profession and caste, but over time, the caste system became a bane of the Indian society as it became rigid and hereditary.

According to Nehru (1960), the Kshatriya caste “depended more on status and occupation rather than on descent, and so it was much easier for foreigners to be incorporated into it.” While many great people of India have warned against the rigidity of the caste system, Mahatma Gandhi recognized the need for its elimination. According to Gandhi, “Caste must go if we want to root out untouchability.” Today, caste discrimination is illegal, though it has yet to be eliminated from social practice. Under the influence of modern ideas of enlightenment, people in India are free to choose their professions in spite of the caste into which they are born. Inter-caste marriages are on the rise in India and are the order of the day among the people of the Indian Diaspora.

Manu, the Indian lawgiver, divides life into four *ashrams* (stages), each with its own set of duties and observances. According to Manu Smiriti (Law Code of Manu), the four stages are as follows:

- I. Life as a “Vidyarthi” or student;
- II. Life as a “Grihasthi” or householder;
- III. Life as a “Vanprasthi” or spiritual aspirant; and
- IV. Life as a “Sanyasi” or preacher.

Each stage is accompanied by its own *dharma*, or duty. Manu asserts that after “having spent the first fourth of his life in the house of his guru, the second fourth in his own house with his wife, the third part in forests, that one should take sanyasa in the fourth part casting away every worldly tie.”

Indian traditional culture is based on four main ends of life, namely: “dharma” or cosmically-ordained duty; “artha” or gainful employment or worldly success; “kama” or enjoyment of physical or sensual pleasures; and “moksha” or salvation or liberation from the cycle of births and deaths.

The term “dharma” is derived from the Sanskrit root “dhr,” which means to bear or to hold. The Hindu Scripture states that “this world is upheld by Dharma.” According to Monier-Williams (2005), Dharma is that which is established or firm, steadfast decree, statute, ordinance or law; usage, practice, customary observance or prescribed conduct or duty; right, justice (often as a synonym for punishment); virtue, morality, religion, religious merit or good works.

According to Zaehner (1966), “verily, that which is Dharma is truth.” In other words, dharma is not just law, but it is the only “Sat” or Truth. Dharma thus represents not only the established law and order, but it also encompasses the duties of humans in general as well as the duties of individuals in all matters, both sacred and secular. Dharma guides a person to righteous conduct at all times and at all stages of life. The problem of finding one’s dharma in difficult situations is one of the primary themes of the Bhagvad Gita, which is considered to be as sacred to the Hindus as the New Testament is to Christians. The Bhagvad Gita or The Lord’s Song, is included in an epic where Lord Krishna expounds his duty to Arjuna when the latter lays down his arms and faces a moral dilemma as to whether he should fight his evil cousins (Roy, 1927–32). Arjuna learns that he must fight the evildoers, no matter who they are. Lord Krishna proclaims that he incarnates himself whenever dharma is in danger and runs the risk of being destabilized.

WEDDINGS, FAMILY AND FESTIVALS

Weddings, family, and festivals perhaps best represent Indian culture. After a person completes his or her life as a student, he or she is ready to enter the most important stage of the householder. The Code of Manu considers this stage to be the prop of the social structure: “Just as all creatures exist depending on air, so do all the Ashrams depend upon the householder. Because the householder supports the three orders by means of knowledge and food, so his order is the highest.” A wedding is the greatest event in an Indian family, and it is one that involves much expenditure and social obligations for the families of the bride and the groom. While most marriages are still arranged through parents who introduce the couple, marriages in which the partners choose each

other are increasingly becoming common. However, marriage in India is not between just two individuals, but also between their families.

At one time, it was common for the bride's parents to give a dowry upon marriage. Unfortunately, some parents demanded exorbitant amounts from the bride's parents for the education of their son. There have even been cases of a particularly horrifying type of domestic violence, such as bride burning, when a bride's parents could not satisfy the dowry demand. Today, demanding a dowry is illegal under Indian law.

Ceremony

Whereas wedding rituals vary from region to region, a practice that is common to an Indian wedding ceremony, or "Vivaha samaskara," is the circumambulating of the sacred fire four times. In walking around the fire, the bride and the groom proclaim their desire to achieve the aforementioned goals of dharma, artha, kama, and moksha in their married life. The couple alternates by leading each other around the fire, symbolizing that each can take the responsibility for directing the course of their life together. At each round, they stop to touch a stone in their path symbolizing the obstacles that they will encounter and overcome together. Another important ritual is that of "saptapadi" or seven steps and vows. These steps represent seven promises that are made to one another. They are as follows:

- To cherish each other in sickness and health, happiness and sorrow;
- To respect each other's families as his or her own;
- To remain faithful to each other forever;
- To stand by each other in sadness and rejoice in happiness;
- To complement and complete each other;
- To share everything God has blessed each with; and
- To acknowledge that God is a witness to the wedding.

Family

Family is the single most important institution in India for the purposes of transmitting cultural values. For many years the joint family was the order of the day in India, when sons brought their brides to live jointly in their father's home, and shared work and income, pleasures and comforts, as well as troubles and tribulations with other members of the extended family. Today, nuclear urban families are quite common, especially among young professionals. The Indian family celebrates joyous occasions, events, and festivals as a unit. Living in a joint family gives the members a sense of protection and security. Parents teach children their duties toward their siblings, to help one another in times of distress and crisis. Indian epics are replete with examples of wifely devotion, a son's sacrifice to honor his father's words, and sibling devotion. The role of a mother in the family is central as she is the one who teaches her children cultural values and traditions.

Rama and Sita, the hero and the heroine of the Hindu epic Ramayana, are considered role models of a man and a woman. Rama unhesitatingly agrees to go into exile for fourteen years to honor his father's word, but his wife Sita, refuses to remain at home at her husband's bidding, declaring, "[A] wife enjoys the fortune of her husband since she is a part of himself... Assuredly, I shall accompany thee to the forest uninhabited by men, filled with savage beasts, such as bears and bulls." By calling herself "a part" of her husband, Sita is here emphasizing the Indian belief that a husband and a wife complement each other and must share each other's joys and sorrows (Shastri, 1952). According to Zaehner (1966), "oneself is like half of a split pea," thus underscoring the mutual dependence of men and women in married life.

A typical Indian family shares their joys and sorrows as a unit. Births, deaths, and marriages are family events. Also, family honor is a matter of paramount importance. The word given must be honored even at the cost of one's life. At times, a son may sacrifice his own comforts and happiness for the sake of his younger siblings. When a family member falls on hard times, others join hands to help him or her in any way possible. Prayers for the peace of ancestral souls are, however, recited by the oldest son. The ceremony of "Shraddha" or annual rites for the

departed souls is performed by all male descendants to honor three generations of deceased ancestors. Special gift items and clothing are also donated to the officiating priest.

The Status of Women

The position of a wife in ancient India seems to have been high, as is evident from the Indian term for a married couple, “dampati,” which means “co-rulers.” However, over time, the position of the Indian woman progressively deteriorated, and it was at its lowest when the British arrived in India. Polygamy and child marriage were permitted. The custom of Sutte (wife’s burning herself on her husband’s funeral pyre) was practiced in northern India, especially among members of the warrior class of Rajputs; widow remarriage was also not allowed among members of the upper castes.

In 1927, the All-India Women’s Conference was founded, and this organization sought to improve women’s social and economic status. Women were an integral part of the independence struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi. They participated in Gandhi’s Salt March in 1930, and as many as 17,000 women courted arrest. Indian women gained more equal rights with men only after India’s independence. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 prohibits polygamy and child marriage and provides for both separation and divorce. The Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956 gives women the right to adopt children. Perhaps the most revolutionary of these new laws concerning women’s rights is the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, which accords women the right to inherit property, and daughters, mothers, and widows the right to share equally with sons the self-earned property of the man who dies without a will (Lamb, 1966).

Among the few emancipated Westernized minority are many outstanding and forceful women prominent in public life. The most notable example is India’s third Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi (not related to the Mahatma), the first woman in modern times to become the chief executive of a major power. Before becoming prime minister, Mrs. Gandhi had an active career in social welfare and in Congress Party politics, serving as president of the party in 1959–60 (Lamb, 1968). According to Blackwell

(2004), this positive move may indicate that class and family in India are more important than gender (p. 150). Certainly, Mrs. Gandhi had to have personal strength to win her battles. Today, women in India can be found in various levels of the society. Many have taken up the fight for women's causes, and they include lawyers, physicians, educators, journalists and professionals in other fields.

Festivals

Festivals keep Indian people connected to their cultural roots, give them an opportunity for emotional and spiritual renewal, and help them follow dharma or the path of duty. The approach of a festival prompts Indian people to clean their homes. Women decorate the doorsteps of their homes with creative designs called "rangoli," using sand, grains, or paints. Women also decorate their hands with "mehandi," or henna designs, to show to relatives and friends. Because different festivals are celebrated across the country, the focus is on a few representative festivals like Vasant Panchmi and Holi, which bring out the community spirit and cultural unity of Indian people; festivals like Raksha Bandhan and Karwa Chauth, which strengthen sibling affection, and spousal love, respectively; and above all, the festival of Diwali, when Indians light their homes with clay lamps and candles, and take stock of their works during the year and make new resolutions for the year to come.

Vasant Panchami is the festival that heralds the advent of spring, and marks the end of winter. "Vasanta" means the spring season. According to the Indian almanac, this festival falls in the month of Magh (January–February). Just as the Irish wear green clothes on St. Patrick's Day, Indians welcome the onset of spring by wearing yellow, and coloring food yellow with saffron. The festival commemorates the burning of the god of love, Kamadeva, by Lord Siva. When Kamadeva awoke Lord Siva from deep meditation with arrows, Lord Siva opened his third eye and reduced the god of love to ashes. This is the reason Kamadev is called Ananga, the one who is without a body. Apart from its religious meaning, this story points to the invigorating power of the spring season. The day is celebrated outdoors with wrestling matches, kite flying competitions, and poetry recitals.

While the northerners of India refer to the festival as Vasanta Panchmi, the Bengalis refer to it as Saraswati Puja Day. On this day, they worship Saraswati, the goddess of learning, and hold literary competitions. Also on this day, Bengali children start their education in order to receive the blessings of the goddess of learning. In olden days, dramas of great writers like Kalidasa were enacted on this festival. In the evening, devotees take images of Saraswati in procession and immerse them in the river.

The month of March brings Holi, the festival of colors and mirth. One of the most popular of the Indian festivals, Holi is celebrated throughout India with tremendous gusto and fervor. On the Holi eve, people make bonfires in public squares. People from all sections of the Indian society, the young and old, rich and poor celebrate this festival by throwing colored powder or colored water on friends and relatives.

The festival of Raksha Bandhan, which falls on the full moon day of the Indian month of Shrawana (August), reaffirms the bond between brothers and sisters. The phrase “Raksha Bandhan” means “Promise to Protect.” On this occasion brothers renew their pledge to come to their sisters’ help in times of need, and sisters pray for their brothers’ good health and prosperity as they tie “Rakhis” or decorative threads around the right-hand wrist of their brothers. According to Hinduism, when Indra, the king of gods, began to lose in the war against demons, his wife Indrani tied the sacred thread to Indra’s right-hand wrist, and consequently, turned the tide in Indra’s favor. The rakhi serves as a two-fold blessing. It is meant to protect the brother against evil, and the brother in turn is obligated to defend his sister whenever the need arises. This festival thus reinforces the affection between brothers and sisters as well as their duties toward each other. It is customary for the brothers to give their sisters money or gifts such as clothing or jewelry as tokens of their love. Sisters living abroad likewise send “Rakhis” by mail to their brothers, who in turn send gifts to their sisters.

Karwa Chauth festival falls in the month of Kartik (October–November), and comes nine days before Diwali, the most popular of the Indian festivals. It is observed in the northern and western parts of India. The term “karwa” means an earthen pot with a spout, symbolic

of peace and prosperity, and “chauth” means the fourth day of the new moon. On this day, married women pray for the longevity and well being of their husbands. They arise very early, generally before the dawn of day, perform their ablutions, wear new clothing, and partake of a meal of select grains and fruits. For the remainder of the day, they abstain from food and drinks, and break the fast only after seeing the moon. Women wear their best clothes and ornaments for the occasion, and adorn their hands with intricate mehandi (henna) designs. Of course, all wives expect lavish gifts from their husbands. It is noteworthy that in the event the wife should become ill, her husband may keep the fast for the well-being and longevity of the couple. From personal experience, my father-in-law kept the fast when my mother-in-law became ill. This festival aims at promoting spousal love and sets the tone of festivity and feasting for Diwali.

“Deepavali” or “Diwali,” which literally means a row of lamps, is the most important of Indian festivals. Diwali night is a sight to see with all homes and buildings glittering with lights. Diwali is celebrated throughout India and wherever the Indian Diaspora can be found. Like Christmas, Diwali is a national holiday, and all Indian people, irrespective of rank and status, are imbued with a festive spirit.

Every year, Diwali falls on a different date in October or November because Indians follow the lunar calendar in matters of festival dates. Diwali celebrates the victory of forces of good over those of evil. It celebrates the slaying of the demon Narkasura, as well as the victory of Lord Rama over the demon Ravana, with Rama’s triumphant return to his capital of Ayodhya with his consort Sita and brother Lakshmana after fourteen years in exile. Traditionally, people would light clay lamps filled with mustard oil, but candles and electric lights are increasingly popular, illuminating windows, balconies, and roofs of houses. Dressed in their best clothing, celebrants visit friends, relatives, with sweets in their hands. On Diwali people worship Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. They clean and decorate their homes with Rangoli designs to make them suitable for a visit from Lakshmi.

Also, Diwali marks the beginning of the New Year, at which time merchants close old ledgers in order to start new ones. In short, Diwali

is the day of national rejoicing and festivity, annual stocktaking, as well as prayers for prosperity and happiness for the New Year.

In addition to the salient features of common culture, Indians believe in the philosophy of Karma, according to which an individual's actions performed in this life and in the earlier incarnations, determine the individual's status and fortune. According to the most popular sacred book, the Bhagavad Gita, an individual's duty lies in action only, and not in the fruits of the action. Doing duty for duty's sake should be the primary concern of an individual in action. "Mukti" or salvation is available to all souls, and no soul will suffer in hell forever, although a soul may experience numerous births and deaths to attain salvation.

CONCLUSIONS

The history of India since independence has many achievements. Though a republic, India elected from the beginning of independence to remain within the Commonwealth, thus maintaining relations with the United Kingdom. India maintained a culture which has given significance to its history.

The primary focus of Indian culture is the promotion of dharma as it relates to the individual's life, family, society and the world at large. All cultural activities, observances, ceremonies and celebrations are performed to uphold dharma.

Whether one performs a series of rites and celebrations, from baby shower to "shraddha," or participates in family traditions and festival celebrations throughout life, one is expected to support and sustain dharma. In the final analysis, Indian cultural acts are geared toward strengthening family relationships, as well as promoting unity among the Indian people.

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8 Most Popular Festivals in India. Festivals for Experiencing Indian Culture at its Best. Written by. Sharell Cook.Â The festival is centered around the burning and destruction of the demoness Holika, which was made possible through unwavering devotion to Lord Vishnu. However, the really fun part involves people throwing colored powder on each other and squirting each other with water guns. This is associated with Lord Krishna, a reincarnation of Lord Vishnu, who liked to play pranks on the village girls by drenching them in water and colors. Bhang (a paste made from cannabis plants) is also traditionally consumed during the celebrations. Holi is a very carefree festival that's great fun to participate