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Q8

What makes the Indian society unique in sustaining its culture? Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · GS I · 10 marks · Indian Heritage and Culture

Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

Core demand of the question

- What makes the Indian society unique in sustaining its culture? Discuss
- Explain the features that have allowed cultural continuity, and discuss them
- Keep the answer within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Indian culture is reproduced in family, jati, and local worship, not only by the state.

Many languages and faiths run together, which prevents one centre from erasing the rest.

Pilgrimage and crafts keep a living geography and skill.

New rulers were often absorbed into food, building, and custom.

Constitutional cultural rights now protect that plurality, while caste continuity remains the dark side of the same story.

Introduction

Indian society has kept languages, rituals, crafts, and family forms alive across conquest, reform, and the market. The uniqueness is not that culture never changed, but that it absorbed new layers without a single centre wiping out the rest.

Body

Continuity through plurality

- Many religions, jatis, and regions lived side by side, so culture was reproduced in the home, the caste panchayat, and the temple, mosque, gurdwara, or monastery, not only by a state church.
- Sanskrit, Persian, and later English added layers, while Tamil, Bengali, and other tongues kept older literatures in daily use.
- Bhakti and Sufi currents, and festivals such as Kumbh, Pongal, Eid, and local jatras, renewed faith without deleting village custom.

Family, craft, and sacred geography

- Joint and extended family, marriage rules, and oral epics taught children food, dress, and story even when schools were few.
- Crafts of Banaras silk, Kanchipuram, Bidri, and Madhubani passed through workshops and jati skill, which is a living museum rather than a frozen relic.

- Pilgrimage circuits from Badrinath to Rameshwaram, and river and hill shrines, mapped a shared sacred geography that outlasted dynasties.

Absorption rather than replacement

- Greeks, Kushans, **Delhi Sultanate**, Mughals, and the British left food, words, and buildings; Indian society often folded them into existing practice, as in Indo-Islamic architecture or railway pilgrimage.
- The Constitution's cultural rights in **Articles 29 and 30**, and freedom of religion in **Articles 25 to 28**, now give legal space for that older habit of many ways of life.
- **Uniqueness has a cost:** caste and gender custom can also be sustained. The same mechanisms that preserve culture can delay reform.

Why this looks unique

- Other old civilisations broke more sharply with their past. India's uniqueness is layered continuity, local reproduction, and a high capacity to add without total erasure.

Flow diagram

Family jati oral craft -> Lived culture
Plural faiths pilgrimage -> Lived culture
Absorb new layers -> Lived culture
Articles 25 to 30 -> Lived culture

Conclusion

Indian society sustains culture through family, jati skill, pilgrimage, and a habit of adding new layers instead of replacing the old. That uniqueness remains a strength only if continuity does not become an excuse to freeze caste and gender inequality.

Facts & figures

Articles 25-28

Constitutional freedom of religion that lets many faith practices continue in public and private.

Articles 29-30

Cultural and educational rights of minorities to conserve language and run institutions.

Kumbh pilgrimage

Mass gathering that renews a shared Hindu sacred calendar across regions.

Banaras and Kanchipuram weaves

Living craft towns where skill is still passed inside family and workshop.

Bhakti and Sufi strands

Devotional movements that carried culture in the vernacular and mixed social spaces.

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