



A STUDY ON INDIAN SOCIETY AND WAYS OF LIVING IN RURAL AREAS

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Abstract : India offers astounding variety in virtually every aspect of social life. Diversities of ethnic, linguistic, regional, economic, religious, class, and caste groups crosscut Indian society, which is also permeated with immense urban-rural differences and gender distinctions. Differences between north India and south India are particularly significant, especially in systems of kinship and marriage. Indian society is multifaceted to an extent perhaps unknown in any other of the world's great civilizations—it is more like an area as varied as Europe than any other single nation-state. Adding further variety to contemporary Indian culture are rapidly occurring changes affecting various regions and socioeconomic groups in disparate ways. Yet, amid the complexities of Indian life, widely accepted cultural themes enhance social harmony and order.

Keywords: Civilization, Socioeconomic culture, Social harmony, Gender distinctions

Introduction

India is a hierarchical society. Whether in north India or south India, Hindu or Muslim, urban or village, virtually all things, people, and social groups are ranked according to various essential qualities. Although India is a political democracy, notions of complete equality are seldom evident in daily life. Societal hierarchy is evident in caste groups, amongst individuals, and in family and kinship groups. Castes are primarily associated with Hinduism, but caste-like groups also exist among Muslims, Indian, Christians, and other religious communities. Within most villages or towns, everyone knows the relative rankings of each locally represented caste, and behavior is constantly shaped by this knowledge. Individuals are also ranked according to their wealth and power. For example, some powerful people, or "big men," sit confidently on chairs, while "little men" come before them to make requests, either standing or squatting not presuming to sit beside a man of high status as an equal.

Hierarchy plays an important role within families and kinship groupings also, where men outrank women of similar age, and senior relatives outrank junior relatives. Formal respect is accorded family members—for example, in northern India, a daughter-in-law shows deference to her husband, to all senior in-laws, and to all daughters of the household. Siblings, too, recognize age differences, with younger siblings addressing older siblings by respectful terms rather than by name.

Purity and Pollution

Many status differences in Indian society are expressed in terms of ritual purity and pollution, complex notions that vary greatly among different castes, religious groups, and regions. Generally, high status is associated with purity and low status with pollution. Some kinds of purity are inherent; for example, a member of a high-ranking Brahmin, or priestly, caste is born with more inherent purity than someone born into a low-ranking sweeper, or scavenger, caste. Other kinds of purity are more transitory—for example, a Brahmin who has just taken a bath is more ritually pure than a Brahmin who has not bathed for a day.

Purity is associated with ritual cleanliness—daily bathing in flowing water, dressing in freshly laundered clothes, eating only the foods appropriate for one's caste, and avoiding physical contact with people of significantly lower rank or with impure substances, such as the bodily wastes of another adult. Involvement with the products of death or violence is usually ritually polluting.

Social Interdependence

One of the great themes pervading Indian life is social interdependence. People are born into groups—families, clans, subcastes, castes, and religious communities—and feel a