

## Culture and Civilisation

### Why in news?

Subject experts opine that there is a need for a new definition of a culture and civilisation.

### What is the meaning of culture and civilisation?

- **Culture** - The term 'culture' is a Latin origin of the word '**cultus**', which refers to *cultivating or refining something*, in such a way that it provides admiration and respect.
- It is the way people live, reflected in the language they spoke, food they eat, clothes they wear and the Deity they follow or worship.
- It expresses the *manner in which one thinks and do things*.
- **Man-made** - *Plants and animals do not have culture*, while humans do as they are made by man.
- When we became humans from apes, we started using tools, painting on cave walls, etc. invoking the birth of a culture.
- There is *no human who does not have a culture*.
- **Relation with mythology** - Culture is intertwined with mythology.

As humans, we need to generate food, clothing and shelter hence, we need **resources** - In Hindu mythology, resources are symbolised by **Goddess Lakshmi**.

To fulfil our basic needs, we need **power** in the form of tools and technology. We also need rules to regulate how resources are distributed and inherited - This is represented by **Goddess Durga**.

When we have resources and security, we **express** our imagination through song and dance, art and architecture. We share our knowledge with the next generation - This represented by **Goddess Saraswati**.

- **Civilisation** - The term 'civilization' is derived from a **Latin term 'civis'** which indicates '*someone who resides in a town*'.
- **Concept** - It is a complex culture with hierarchy, complex organisations, and most importantly ruins of public buildings and monuments created from surplus resources.
- **haracteristics** - There are seven characteristics of a civilisation.
- It includes the presence of a government, written language, language, religion, arts, food supply, technology and social structure

## What is the relationship between a culture and civilisation?

|                        | Culture  | Civilisation  |
|------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Meaning</b>         | A term used to denote the manifestation of the manner in which we think, behave and act. | It refers to the process through which a region or society, outstretches an advanced stage of human development and organization. |
| <b>Basis</b>           | It is more psychological and about values  | It is more material and about goods, technology, art and architecture.  |
| <b>Components</b>      | It is a people's belief systems, rituals and customs                                     | It is a complex culture with hierarchy, complex organisations, and ruins of public buildings and monuments.                       |
| <b>Representation</b>  | Culture is what we are   | Civilisation is what we have  |
| <b>Reflected in</b>    | Religion, art, dance, literature, customs, morals, music, philosophy, etc.               | Law, administration, infrastructure, architecture, social arrangement, etc.   |
| <b>Expression</b>      | Higher level of inner refinement   | Higher level of general development   |
| <b>Interdependency</b> | Culture can grow and exist without civilization  | Civilization cannot grow and exist without culture  |

## What can be the new definitions of culture and civilization?

- **Issues with existing definitions** - A century ago, the Europeans used the word civilisation to distinguish themselves as a culture which had a complex structure with a hierarchy, cities and monuments.
- But they saw themselves as *civilised and the "other" as uncivilised*.
- It assumed that only those *who colonised and created class divisions have civilisation*.
- It implies that *tribal folks have a culture but not civilisation* which seems rather insulting.
- Therefore, these old definitions need to be questioned.
- **New definition** - *Every human has a culture* that takes care of its own people, while a *civilisation engages with other cultures* through trade.
- **Transition from culture to civilisation** - Stone Age cultures turned into Bronze Age civilisations as they began trading.
- Metal and stones from mountains were exchanged with agricultural settlements in river valleys.
- Civilisation is thus measurably larger than culture, looking at the needs of not only the in-group but also of the out-group.

### Trade system of Harappan civilisation

- They *traded with modern-day Iraq and Iran* 4,500 years ago.
- Harappans exported via sea routes cotton textiles, sesame oil, ivory, beads made of carnelian, agate and other semi-precious stones, live chickens, water buffaloes, dogs.
- In exchange, they received bitumen, incense, silver, copper, and woollen textiles.

### Trade system of Andaman Tribe

- The Jarawa tribe in Andaman *does not trade* and continues to remain isolated, it is *not yet a civilisation*.
- But since they are humans, who use tools and have rites and rituals, they *have a culture*.

- Having goods exemplifies the saying that civilisation is what we have, while the exchange mindset stands for who we are, our culture.
- However, *not all cultures have an exchange mindset*, but the ones that have it become civilisation.
- In other words, ***all civilisations are cultures, but not all cultures are civilisations.***

### Diversity in Indian Culture

- **Northwest India** - Around 2500 BC, in the Northwest of India, the Harappan civilisation was thriving with its *red and black pottery*.
- **Ganges Plains** - Around 1500 BC, the *painted grey ware* of Vedic culture thrived in the Gangetic Plain.
- **Deccan region** - There were communities *building megaliths and ashmounds*, and hoarding copper artefacts.
  - This is culture because they are man-made.
  - But since we *do not see a trading pattern*, we cannot call them a civilisation.
- **Western coast** - On the Ratnagiri coast of Maharashtra, 10,000 years old rock art was found.
  - These were made by cultured people.
  - But in the absence of knowledge about their trading pattern, we *cannot say whether they had a civilisation*.

## Reference

[Indian Express| Culture and Civilisation](#)