International Journal of Multidisciplinary Education and Research
www.multieducationjournal.com
E-ISSN: 2455-4588
Received: 14-01-2026, Accepted: 13-02-2026, Published: 28-02-2026
Volume 11, Issue 1, 2026, Page No. 79-82

The role and importance of Sanskar and culture in modern Indian society

Dr. Md Ata Uddin
Assistant Professor, Islamia Teacher's Training (B.Ed.) College, Patna, Bihar, India
DOI: https://doi.org/10.66856/ijmer.2026.11.1.11060

Abstract
Indian society is distinguished by its cultural diversity, historical continuity, spiritual traditions, and deeply rooted social values. Among the most significant concepts shaping Indian social life are *Sanskar* and culture. *Sanskar* refers broadly to the values, ethical principles, behavioural patterns, and traditions through which an individual develops a sense of responsibility, morality, discipline, and social belonging. Culture, meanwhile, encompasses the collective way of life of a community, including its language, customs, traditions, beliefs, art, literature, festivals, social practices, and shared heritage. In contemporary India, rapid urbanisation, globalisation, technological development, migration, changing family structures, and increasing individualism have transformed social relationships and lifestyles. These changes have created both opportunities and challenges for the preservation of traditional values. This paper examines the role and importance of *Sanskar* and culture in modern Indian society. It argues that traditional values need not be understood as obstacles to modernisation; rather, they can provide an ethical and cultural foundation for responsible modern citizenship. At the same time, traditions must evolve with changing social realities and should be interpreted through the principles of equality, human dignity, constitutional values, and social justice. The paper concludes that a balanced integration of cultural heritage with modern knowledge and democratic values can contribute significantly to a harmonious, ethical, and sustainable Indian society.

Keywords: Sanskar, Indian culture, society, values, tradition, modernisation, globalisation, social change, Indian heritage

Introduction

India is one of the world's oldest and most culturally diverse civilisations. Its social and cultural traditions have developed over thousands of years through the interaction of different religions, languages, communities, philosophies, geographical regions, and historical experiences. Despite enormous diversity, Indian society has traditionally placed considerable importance on values such as respect for elders, compassion, hospitality, family responsibility, cooperation, self-discipline, spirituality, and social harmony. These values are often expressed through the concept of *Sanskar*.

The term *Sanskar* has a broad meaning. It may refer to the impressions, values, habits, and moral principles cultivated in an individual's personality through family, education, community, religion, and social experience. In everyday Indian life, a person is often considered well-cultured not simply because of academic qualifications or economic success, but also because of their behaviour toward parents, teachers, elders, children, neighbours, and society. Thus, *Sanskar* is closely connected with character formation.

Culture is an equally important component of social life. It provides individuals with a sense of identity and belonging. Language, food, dress, festivals, music, dance, literature, architecture, rituals, customs, and community traditions collectively contribute to India's cultural identity. Culture is not static; it changes as society changes. Indian culture itself demonstrates this process of adaptation, having absorbed and interacted with numerous influences throughout history.

The twenty-first century has brought significant changes to Indian society. Digital communication, social media, global markets, modern education, urban lifestyles, changing employment patterns, and international cultural influences have altered the way people communicate and interact. Young people in particular are increasingly exposed to cultures and ideas from around the world. These developments have enriched Indian society, but they have also raised concerns about declining interpersonal relationships, weakening community bonds, consumerism, cultural homogenisation, and the erosion of certain traditional values.

The central question, therefore, is not whether India should choose tradition or modernity. Instead, the more meaningful question is how valuable aspects of cultural heritage can be preserved while society continues to progress. *Sanskar* and culture can play an important role in this process if they are understood dynamically and critically.

Understanding the Concept of Sanskar

Sanskar is deeply embedded in the Indian understanding of human development. It traditionally refers to processes through which individuals acquire moral, social, and cultural qualities. From childhood, individuals learn appropriate behaviour through observation, instruction, participation, and experience.

The family is generally the first institution through which *Sanskar* is transmitted. Children learn basic values such as speaking respectfully, sharing with others, helping family members, showing kindness, accepting responsibility, and distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Parents and grandparents traditionally play an important role in this process.

However, *Sanskar* should not be restricted to rituals or religious ceremonies. While traditional Hindu thought describes various *Samskaras* associated with stages of life, the broader contemporary social meaning of the word includes ethical conduct and character. Honesty, empathy, tolerance, respect, responsibility, humility, and concern for

others can all be considered important dimensions of *Sanskar*.

Education also has a major role in developing these qualities. A good education does not merely provide professional skills; it also develops critical thinking, social responsibility, emotional maturity, and ethical awareness. In this sense, values and education complement one another.

The concept of *Sanskar* can therefore be understood as an ongoing process of personality formation. It influences how individuals respond to social responsibilities and how they participate in collective life.

The Importance of Culture in Indian Society

Culture provides continuity between generations. It enables individuals to understand where they come from and how their communities have developed. In India, cultural traditions are particularly significant because of the country's extraordinary diversity.

Cultural Identity

Culture provides people with a sense of identity. Language, regional traditions, festivals, folk arts, literature, music, and food traditions connect individuals with their communities and historical roots. A person's cultural identity can create a feeling of belonging and social security.

In an increasingly globalised world, cultural identity becomes especially important. Globalisation allows people to interact with different cultures, but it can also encourage cultural uniformity. Maintaining cultural diversity helps preserve India's distinctive social heritage.

Family and Social Relationships

Indian culture has traditionally given importance to family relationships. Concepts such as respect for parents, responsibility toward family members, hospitality toward guests, and cooperation among relatives have contributed to strong social networks.

Although family structures are changing, these values remain relevant. Modern nuclear families may have different lifestyles from traditional joint families, but mutual respect, emotional support, and responsibility remain essential for healthy relationships.

Festivals and Community Life

Indian festivals are important cultural institutions. Festivals bring people together, strengthen community relationships, and transmit cultural knowledge from one generation to another. They also provide opportunities for social interaction and collective celebration.

Festivals such as Diwali, Holi, Eid, Christmas, Guru Nanak Jayanti, Onam, Pongal, Bihu, Durga Puja, and numerous regional celebrations demonstrate India's cultural pluralism. Their social significance extends beyond religious observance because they can promote community participation and mutual understanding.

Language and Literature

India's many languages and literary traditions represent an invaluable cultural resource. Literature preserves historical memories, philosophical ideas, social experiences, and artistic expression. Regional languages are particularly important for maintaining cultural diversity.

The preservation and promotion of Indian languages can strengthen cultural confidence while also encouraging multilingualism. Modern technology can assist this process by making regional literature and cultural materials accessible to younger generations.

Role of Sanskar in Modern Indian Society

Modern society is characterised by rapid change. Economic development and technological advancement have improved many aspects of life, but they have also generated new ethical and social challenges. *Sanskar* can provide a framework for addressing these challenges.

Development of Character

Academic achievement and professional success are important, but they cannot alone determine the quality of an individual's contribution to society. Character remains essential.

Values such as honesty, integrity, compassion, patience, and responsibility help individuals make ethical decisions. In professional life, these values can contribute to trust, accountability, and responsible leadership.

Respect and Intergenerational Relationships

Modern lifestyles sometimes create distance between generations. Younger people may have different attitudes toward work, relationships, technology, and personal freedom than older generations.

Respect does not require unquestioning acceptance of every traditional practice. Rather, it can mean recognising the dignity and experience of others while maintaining open communication. *Sanskar* can therefore support healthier intergenerational relationships when understood as mutual respect rather than rigid hierarchy.

Social Responsibility

Indian traditions contain strong ideas of social responsibility and service. The principle of helping others can be translated into modern forms of civic participation, volunteering, community service, environmental responsibility, and support for vulnerable groups.

In a democratic society, responsible citizenship requires individuals to think beyond personal interests. Values of cooperation and social responsibility can therefore complement constitutional ideals.

Promotion of Tolerance

India's history demonstrates extensive cultural and religious diversity. In modern society, tolerance is increasingly important because people from different backgrounds interact through workplaces, educational institutions, migration, travel, and digital platforms.

Cultural values should encourage respect for diversity rather than discrimination. The positive dimensions of Indian traditions—such as hospitality, dialogue, compassion, and coexistence—can contribute to social harmony.

Sanskar, Culture and the Challenges of Modernisation

Modernisation has transformed Indian society in significant ways. These changes should not automatically be viewed as negative. Modern education, scientific development, women's participation in the workforce, improved communication, technological progress, and democratic institutions have created many positive opportunities.

Nevertheless, rapid change can create tensions between traditional values and contemporary lifestyles.

Globalisation

Globalisation has expanded access to international ideas, products, education, entertainment, and employment opportunities. Young Indians increasingly participate in a global cultural environment.

The challenge is not globalisation itself but the possibility of losing cultural confidence through uncritical imitation. Indian society can benefit from global knowledge while preserving its own cultural heritage.

Consumerism

Economic growth has increased consumption and material aspirations. Advertising and social media can encourage people to associate happiness and success with possessions, appearance, or status.

Traditional values can offer an alternative perspective by emphasising moderation, responsibility, gratitude, and relationships. However, cultural values should not be used to reject legitimate economic aspirations. The goal should be balance rather than opposition to material development.

Changing Family Structures

Urbanisation and migration have contributed to the growth of nuclear families. Young adults may move away from their hometowns for education and employment. Consequently, traditional forms of family interaction may become less frequent.

Digital communication can partly bridge geographical distance, but technology cannot completely replace emotional presence. Maintaining meaningful relationships requires conscious effort from family members.

Social Media and Digital Culture

Social media has created new forms of communication and cultural expression. It allows people to share festivals, languages, music, traditions, and local histories with a global audience.

At the same time, misinformation, online hostility, excessive comparison, and superficial communication can create social problems. Values such as self-control, empathy, responsibility, and respect are therefore relevant in digital spaces as well as in face-to-face interactions.

The Role of Family and Educational Institutions

The preservation of *Sanskar* and culture cannot be the responsibility of families alone. It requires cooperation among families, schools, universities, communities, media organisations, and government institutions.

Family

The family remains an important environment for early value formation. Children learn more from observed behaviour than from verbal instructions. Parents who demonstrate honesty, respect, empathy, and responsibility provide powerful examples for their children.

At the same time, families should encourage children to ask questions and develop independent thinking. Value education should not become a process of fear or forced conformity.

Educational Institutions

Schools and universities can integrate cultural and ethical education into the broader curriculum. Students can learn about India's diverse traditions through literature, history, music, art, local heritage, and community engagement.

Value education should encourage critical thinking. Students should understand both the strengths and limitations of historical practices. This approach allows cultural heritage to remain meaningful in a democratic and modern society.

Media and Digital Platforms

Media plays a powerful role in shaping public attitudes. Films, television, digital content, and social media can influence how young people understand culture.

Responsible media can highlight India's cultural diversity and promote constructive values. Digital platforms can also be used to document endangered languages, folk traditions, traditional crafts, oral histories, and regional literature.

Culture and Gender Equality

A discussion of *Sanskar* and culture in contemporary India must also consider gender equality. Some traditional practices have historically contributed to unequal opportunities for women and marginalised groups. Therefore, preserving culture should not mean preserving every historical practice without examination.

The valuable principles of Indian cultural traditions should be separated from practices that conflict with equality, dignity, freedom, and justice.

Modern interpretations of *Sanskar* should therefore include respect for women, equal educational opportunities, freedom from discrimination, dignity of labour, and respect for individual choice. A culturally rooted society can simultaneously be a society committed to equality.

In this context, modernity and cultural heritage need not be contradictory. Cultural values can evolve as society develops a deeper understanding of human rights and social justice.

Sanskar and Environmental Responsibility

Indian cultural traditions contain numerous ideas related to respect for nature and the interconnectedness of human life with the natural world. Rivers, forests, mountains, animals, and agricultural landscapes have historically occupied an important place in many Indian traditions.

These ideas can be relevant to contemporary environmental challenges. Climate change, pollution, water scarcity, deforestation, and waste generation require responsible individual and collective behaviour.

Modern environmental education can therefore connect scientific knowledge with cultural values of conservation and respect for nature. For example, traditional ideas about avoiding waste and respecting natural resources can complement modern concepts of sustainability.

Preserving Culture in a Changing Society

Preservation does not mean freezing culture in its historical form. Culture survives precisely because communities reinterpret it according to changing circumstances.

Several approaches can help preserve Indian cultural heritage:

- **Documentation:** Oral traditions, folk songs, regional histories, crafts, and local knowledge should be systematically documented.

- **Education:** Cultural studies should be connected with contemporary education rather than treated as irrelevant to modern life.

- **Digital preservation:** Technology can make manuscripts, literature, music, art, and historical materials accessible to younger generations.

- **Community participation:** Local communities should have an active role in protecting their cultural heritage.

- **Youth engagement:** Young people should be encouraged to participate in cultural activities rather than merely being told to respect tradition.

- **Critical interpretation:** Traditions should be evaluated according to contemporary principles of equality, dignity, justice, and human rights.

- **Cultural pluralism:** Indian culture should be understood as a diverse collection of traditions rather than a single uniform way of life.

The Need for a Balance Between Tradition and Modernity

One of the major challenges facing contemporary Indian society is finding an appropriate balance between traditional values and modern aspirations. Blind rejection of tradition can result in cultural disconnection, while blind acceptance of every traditional practice can restrict social progress.

A balanced approach involves preserving values that contribute positively to human development while reforming practices that cause discrimination or injustice.

For example, respect for elders can be preserved without denying young people's independence. Family responsibility can coexist with individual freedom. Cultural traditions can coexist with scientific thinking. Spirituality can coexist with modern education. Economic development can coexist with environmental responsibility.

Thus, *Sanskar* should be viewed as a living ethical tradition rather than merely a collection of rituals. Its relevance in modern India depends on its ability to respond to contemporary social realities.

Conclusion

Sanskar and culture remain highly significant in modern Indian society because they contribute to identity, character, social responsibility, family relationships, and community cohesion. In an era of globalisation, technological transformation, and rapid social change, cultural heritage can provide individuals with a sense of continuity and belonging.

However, cultural preservation should not mean rejecting modernity. Indian society must continue to embrace scientific progress, democratic values, gender equality, education, technological development, and social justice. At the same time, it should preserve positive cultural values such as compassion, honesty, respect, cooperation, hospitality, responsibility, and concern for the community.

The future of Indian culture will depend largely on how effectively the younger generation engages with its heritage. Young people should neither be forced to accept tradition unquestioningly nor encouraged to abandon it completely. Instead, they should be given the opportunity to understand, examine, reinterpret, and creatively carry cultural values into the future.

Ultimat0ely, the strength of Indian society lies not merely in preserving its past but in transforming its heritage into a meaningful resource for the present and the future. *Sanskar* can provide an ethical foundation for modern citizenship, while culture can preserve diversity and social identity. When combined with constitutional principles, scientific thinking, equality, and human dignity, they can contribute to the development of a modern Indian society that is progressive without losing its cultural roots.

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