UNIT 1: ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL INDIA

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you would get an idea about

- the nature of India’s cultural heritage,
- elements of tolerance and harmony in Ancient India,
- the contributions made during the medieval period of India’s history towards a human rights perspective,
- the role of movements like Bhakti and Sufi in shaping a human right perspective,
- a concern for environment in Indian tradition, and
- the relevance of India’s tradition and heritage for a human right perspective.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The question of establishing the relationship between human rights education and Indian historical tradition is a complex one. The concept of human rights is of a recent, post-Second World War origin. It specifically laid down a concern and emancipation of the individual as a cornerstone of any human right activity. The idea of equality of all individuals has fed directly into a human rights perspective. Individualism as a doctrine itself is a purely modern idea. Therefore, if you want to look at India’s traditional heritage as a possible source of inspiration for a human rights perspective today, a superficial investigation may not yield much. Such a search is neither easy nor possible. It would be imperative to dissect and dismantle the concept of human rights and to take out the constitutive elements that make the whole. It should then be possible to go back to the Indian tradition and identify those elements that essentially constitute human rights today. In other words you may not easily find any intellectual currents of individualism, universalism or egalitarianism in the remote past. But certain features of a human rights perspective like humanism, concern for the lower social groups, respect for their emancipation, an acceptance of their right to protest, compassion, non-violence etc. register an abundant presence.
Such an exercise, it is important to point out, can be risky. Scholars can be easily tempted into glorifying the entire Indian tradition and portraying a human rights perspective to be flowing directly from there. Or, alternatively, they may look upon Indian tradition in purely negative terms - full of fissures, caste tyranny and inequality - and deny any connection between the two. In order to avoid the risk involved in the two approaches it is crucial not to look upon Indian history and tradition as a uniform, homogenous unilinear progression of a broadly similar trend - whether glorious or tyrannical. Instead Indian tradition has to be seen and understood as a huge ocean of elements, beliefs, attitudes and structures of various kind. Complex and contradictory beliefs and practices have existed and interacted with each other at multiple levels.

This complexity of India’s cultural heritage has made it possible for both positive and negative traditions to co-exist. And, it is this co-existence which has imparted a kaleidoscopic character to India’s traditional heritage. The Indian tradition has shown a tendency towards both change and resilience. So to say, certain features of Indian tradition have continued whereas some others have undergone a change. It is precisely in this sense that some of our centuries old traditions are still with us. Our cultural heritage has both positive and negative or undesirable features. Whereas it is important to remember and take pride in the possible ones, it would not be fair to block out the negative aspects from our memory. Some of the features of our tradition pertaining to tolerance, respect for plurality, and uplift of the lower sections of the society etc., can be considered the forerunners of the modern day human rights perspective. This Unit is going to delve into some of these aspects.

1.2 OUR HERITAGE IN ANCIENT TIMES

While talking and writing about human rights violations, some Indian scholars and human rights intellectuals refer to India’s glorious and golden past of 5000 years and impress that it must be revived to usher in a new India where the values of tolerance, non-violence, friendship for all, equality, respect for the human person, human dignity and rights and freedom will be observed and cherished. They, however, leave us in the dark as to which ‘glorious’ past is to be revived and which one needs to be buried. Obviously, we want to revive that past which will help India claim the inheritance of the blessings of modern civilization. Our Ancient past, as indeed any past of any society, is of an ambivalent nature. This has been aptly pointed out by the noted historian, Romila Thapar, in her book The Past and Prejudice:

The supposed perfection of the past has hampered our understanding not only of the social processes but also of our own cultural identity. An analysis of the totality of Indian society today has to account for a variety of transitions taking place and involving tribal groups, peasant groups, and, at the most articulate level, the change to industrialisation. The nature of these changes will often involve a basic change of social values. The confrontation can no longer be evaded, as it once was, by recourse to the theory that our concern has always been only with things spiritual, or by an escape into the past. But the process can be facilitated by an awareness of the past, deriving from a realistic assessment....It is only the awareness that history is made by an entire people into its total activity, which can bring us nearer to explaining the past in its concrete actuality. And, this, after all, is the ultimate purpose of historical investigation.

Let us therefore look upon some aspects of our past which have something to offer to a human rights activist today. It is just as well to begin with the Rig Ved, the oldest available text in the world.
1.2.1 Vedic References

Two statements in the Rig Ved contain vital clues to any enquiry into the nature of truth and justice to be pursued by anyone: "Truth is one. Wise men interpret it differently" and "Let noble thoughts come from everywhere". These two might well represent the oldest philosophical acknowledgement of the plurality of ways in which the universal truth can be interpreted and understood. The second statement in addition attempts to create a pool of wisdom to which everybody should contribute and which is in the end beneficial to all. Any human rights activist would do well to begin his enquiry from these twin concerns laid down in the Rig Ved.

But there is one problem with the Vedic texts. Being Brahmanical in nature, they do not represent and speak for everybody, mainly the lower castes and groups. For their contribution to a human rights perspective, we would have to turn to Buddhist and Jain texts and sources.

1.2.2 Buddhism

Buddhism forms an important part of non-Brahmin or non-Sanskritic traditions that stood up for the downtrodden in society. Buddha himself debunked the Brahmanical claims to any spiritual superiority on the basis of birth. During the Buddhist period, interest in man, in his image, and man’s affairs on this earth, unlike interest in gods and goddesses and good life in heaven after death, this earth being a vale of tears, became the primary concern of thoughtful men and women. Buddha rejected the caste system for it was based upon inequality and treated some individuals as morally superior purely on grounds of birth.

Buddha’s story is known to everybody. Human sufferings made Prince Gautam Siddhartha restless and he left all luxuries and comforts of the King’s palace in search of remedies for all human miseries and sufferings on this earth. The basic tenets of Buddhism are non-violence, non-hatred, and friendliness to all. Emperor Ashokaa who became a devoted follower of Buddha took to the non-violent and humanist philosophy of Buddhism. Also, he became a great champion of freedom and tolerance. He pleaded for universal tolerance. One of the most significant contributions of Buddhism was the introduction and spread of secular education—education for all. Organised universities came to be established under the direct influence of Buddhism.

Buddha (564 BC-480 BC) rejected the infallibility of the Vedas as well as Brahman, without which no opposition to Brahmin-upanishadic domination was possible. His Nirvana (liberation from the cycle of life and death) was to be attained in this very world, and it could be attained by anyone, should he or she follow the right conduct. He came out strongly against elaborate Brahmanical rituals and rites involving animal sacrifices on the grounds of non-violence and compassion to all beings. The important philosophical contribution made by Buddhism that should inspire any human right activist is beautifully contained in the famous story about Buddha’s life that he narrated to his disciples in the following words.
The Buddha and the Swan

I was born in Kapilvastu. My father, King Sudhodana brought me up in comfort and luxury. One day I was walking in the garden. Suddenly a white swan fell from the sky at my feet. An arrow had pierced its wing. It was gasping for breath. Its eyes were filled with tears and it was unsuccessfully fluttering its wing. I was overcome with pity. I took him in my lap and carefully removed the arrow. As I was taking him for dressing, my cousin Devadutta came over. He said: “I have shot the swan. A prey belongs to the person who shoots it. Please give it to me.” I said: “This swan fell in front of me. I will look after him until his wounds heal so that he can fly again.” Devadutta was very angry. He complained to the king that I had stolen his swan. The king called both of us. I told the whole story. The king said: “One who saves a life is greater than the one who destroys it. So, the swan shall stay with you.” All the noble souls gathered here remember this story. Do not spill blood. Do not destroy life. Respect your elders and do not oppress your slaves. Good conduct is more meaningful than any sacrifice. Do not live in so much of a luxury that you lose fellow feelings with your friends and nature. At the same time do not unnecessarily punish your body by not eating and over-exertion. Follow the middle path.

1.2.3 Jainism

Along with Buddhism, Jainism constituted another parallel non-Sanskrit tradition that carried forward this compassion for all human beings. It acknowledged an existence of rights not only of the downtrodden but also plants and animals. Every creature has life and they are all similar in their sensitivity to pain and pleasure. Jainism defined ‘sin’ as a violence to, and encroachment on, others’ right to life. This may have been the first time in human history that a right to life was laid down as a human right. Likewise, a violation of this right by someone else was considered violence and indeed a sin. What is important is that Jainism extended this right not only to all individuals but also to animals and indeed to all living species.

Another important contribution made by the Jain tradition in the search for truth was evolving a philosophical system known as Syad Vad. The term Syad means perhaps. Syad Vad argued that truth cannot be perceived in totality by anyone and so one should always provide enough space for the possibility of a different understanding and interpretation of truth. A famous Jain story of seven blind men and the elephant conveys this sense very well.

Seven Blind Men and the Elephant

One day an elephant made its presence among seven blind men who could not see the whole elephant but only feel its parts. They were all curious to know what this strange object was. The first blind man felt the feet of the elephant and declared that the strange object was a pillar. The second blind man felt the trunk of the elephant and declared that it was a snake. The third blind man felt the tusk of the elephant and concluded that it was a spear. The fourth blind man felt the head of the elephant and informed everybody that it was a great cliff. The fifth blind man felt the ear of the elephant and told everybody that it was a fan. The sixth blind man felt the tail of the elephant and declared that it was indeed a rope. But the seventh blind man refused to conclude on the basis of a partial enquiry. He felt the strange object up and down, left and right and indeed from all other possible angles. Finally he concluded that the strange new object was indeed sturdy as a pillar, supple as a snake, wide as a cliff, sharp as a spear, breezy as a fan and stringy as a rope. But altogether that something was not a pillar, snake, cliff, spear, fan or a rope but ... an elephant. All the other blind men agreed with him. They also agreed that knowing in part might give a partial truth but real wisdom comes from seeing the whole.
1.2.4 Lokayata

Long before the advent of Buddhism, Indian society had been exposed to another philosophical system called Lokayata, which offered a different and a very radical interpretation of reality. It was a system which persistently rejected the conception of a creator or anything existing prior to matter in one or another form. It however kept company with simple religious beliefs, rites and even cult in daily life.

The Lokayata school of thought was founded by Charvak, who denounced categorically the Karma, Punarjanma, Moksha and Varna System. Some of the Sutras from Lokayata clearly show their humanist and rationalist nature: “The body, the face and all limbs of all people being similar, how can there be any distinctions of Varna and caste? Such distinctions are unscientific and cannot be defended.” Lokayata rejected the superiority of ritualistic Brahmanical functions over others: “Agriculture, cattle breeding, trade, state service etc. are occupations of the wise. They should be followed. But those who smear their bodies with ashes and perform Agnihotra and other religious rites are devoid of intelligence and manhood.” Lokayata also provided a humanitarian, as against an other-worldly, interpretation of Moksha (liberation from this world): “Real bondage lies in servitude. Real Moksha lies in freedom.” The driving impulse of the lokayat was social and not philosophical which is evidenced in various ways. Many of their Sutras were directed against Brahmanical domination embedded in the concept of Chaturvarna.

There were many other non-Vedic-sects—like the Nath, Yoga, Siddha who, too, like the Buddhists, found the key to all religious mysteries in the human body itself. The position of the Nath-panthi siddhas and jogis in Hindu society needs to be understood. Most of the nath-panthi siddhas and jogis belonged to the low castes, opposed caste-based inequalities, denounced the religion espoused by the Brahmins, and did not favour image worship. Another important feature of these sects was that Women played a significant part in these sects, particularly in the Tantra.

1.2.5 Ashoka

No discussion of human rights and their roots in Indian tradition can be complete without a reference to King Ashoka. His significant contribution lay in translating the philosophy of tolerance into an attitude to be adopted by all. Ashoka is perhaps the first ruler who developed a totally anti-war perspective. Wars have been fought between rulers throughout history, and generally glorified by the victors. Ashoka stands out in history as someone who gave up not only war but also the attitude of war. He equated war not with triumph and glory but with misery and human sufferings. Ashoka looked at war not from the perspective of the victor but the vanquished and showed a keen sensitivity towards the all round destruction and suffering brought about by war. His attitude to war has been described in his 13th major rock edict. This rock edict is easily the oldest anti-war statement and should actually be treated as one of the oldest and a very important human rights document.
Ashoka's 13th Major Rock Edict

When he had been consecrated for eight years the Beloved of the Gods, the King Piyadassi (King Ashoka) conquered Kalinga. A hundred and fifty thousand people were deported, a hundred thousand were killed and many times that number perished. Afterwards, now that Kalinga was annexed, the Beloved of Gods very earnestly practised Dhamma, desired Dhamma, and taught Dhamma. On conquering Kalinga, the Beloved of the Gods felt remorse, for, when an independent country is conquered the slaughter, death and deportation of the people is extremely grievous to the Beloved of the Gods, and weighs heavily on his mind. What is even more deplorable to the Beloved of the Gods, is that those who dwell there, whether brahmans, shramanas, or those of other sects, who show obedience to their superiors, obedience to mother and father, obedience to their teachers and behave well and devotedly towards their friends, acquaintances, colleagues, relatives, slaves, and servants—all suffer violence, murder and separation from their loved ones. Even those who are fortunate to have escaped, and those whose love is undiminished (by the brutalising effect of war) suffer from the misfortunes of their friends, acquaintances, colleagues and relatives. This participation of all men in suffering weighs heavily on the mind of the Beloved of the Gods.

The Beloved of the Gods believes that one who does wrong should be forgiven as far as it is possible to forgive him.

The Beloved of the Gods considers victory by Dhamma to be the foremost victory.

What is obtained by this is victory everywhere, and everywhere victory is pleasant.

This inscription of Dhamma has been engraved so that any sons or great grandsons that I may have should not think of gaining new conquests, and in whatever victories they may gain should be satisfied with patience and light punishment. They should only consider conquest by Dhamma to be a true conquest, and delight in Dhamma should be their whole delight, for this is of value in both this world and the next.

Check Your Progress 1

1. What is the difference between the Vedic and the Buddhist traditions? Write in 100 words.

2. Read the two stories: 'the Buddha and the Swan; and 'seven blind men and the Elephant'. What is their relevance for a human rights perspective today?

3. Mention some features of the Lokayata tradition.
1.3 OUR HERITAGE IN MEDIEVAL TIMES

The tradition of tolerance, non-violence and respect for plurality that was initiated in Ancient India continued to flourish in medieval times as well. In fact this tradition developed further and was enriched by contributions both from the rulers and also at the popular level. Some of the Islamic rulers, Akbar in particular, were notable in extending a symmetrical treatment to the population without making any discrimination on the grounds of religion. They also made a contribution to the development of a syncretic culture which has a tremendous relevance for a pluralist country like ours. Let us briefly scrutinise some of the features of medieval India which should inspire a human rights activist today.

1.3.1 Medieval Rulers

Some of the rulers of medieval India were despotic and intolerant, some others liberal and enlightened. Among all the rulers Akbar really stands out for his contribution towards religious tolerance and for promoting brotherhood of all men. Immediately after assuming office he quite generously remitted pilgrim-tax amounting to crores of rupees on Hindus at Mathura and other places. He also forbade the enslavement of wives and children of rebellious villagers. He abolished jizya, a tax that was levied only on Hindus. He completely banned the sale and purchase of slaves. Akbar also extended freedom to all the religions. Those who had been forcibly converted to one religion were allowed to convert back to their original religion. No restrictions were placed on the building of Hindu temples, Christian churches or Jewish synagogues. Given the spirit of the times these were magnanimous steps. Akbar also transformed the educational syllabus by introducing, contrary to the prevailing norms, secular subjects like Mathematics, Agriculture, Geometry, Astronomy, Logic, History etc.

Perhaps Akbar's greatest contribution lay in building an institution called Ibadat Khana (literally hall of prayers), at Fatehpur sikri in 1575, as a place for conducting religious debates. These debates convinced Akbar that all religions contained elements of truth. From this he evolved his universalist ideas on religion contained in the concept of Sulh-i-kul or peace between all religions. It is this spirit of religious universalism and unity of all men during medieval times that should be of interest to a human rights activist today.

However, it is important to keep in mind that the initiative for unity of all religions and syncretism was not just confined to the kings but had powerful roots in the society. Bhakti and Sufi, two powerful social movements did more than anybody else to promote and spread these ideas in the society. Let us now look at the tenets of some of the Bhakti and Sufi saints.

1.3.2 Bhakti and Sufi Saints and Their Contributions

There are many folk religions and sects which came into prominence in the medieval period. Well-known among them are Bhakti and Sufi movements, and also the Baul movement in Bengal. They are remarkable for their simplicity, directness, and for preaching and practising tolerance, love and friendliness.

Bhakti, the path of devotion, implies a belief in the Supreme Person, not a supreme abstraction. It is, therefore, a very straightforward and unsophisticated belief. It was opposed by the Brahmins for a long time because of its utter disregard for caste divisions, religious rituals and ceremonies. But, later they treated Bhakti with respect. The tradition of Bhakti played an important role among the Tamils as mentioned in the works of the Alvar saints, most of whom came from low castes. In the beginning, the movement was restricted to the lower strata of society who were the
chief victims of the Brahmanical tradition. At a later stage, Vaishnavas of even higher castes hailed their literature. One Alvar saint, Andal belonged to a lower caste; she was accepted as a religious leader by the society in general. This is an indication of the popularity of the Bhakti movement. The great scholar, Ramanuja, the best known exponent of this movement, was influenced and inspired by the “works of the Alvars”, which were collected by the disciples of Ramanuja at his special request, and from which Ramanuja himself drew much inspiration and food for this system of thought.

The devotional Bhakti and the Sufi traditions (the first Sufi teacher, Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti came to India in 1193) had much in common. In medieval north India, mysticism was the product of both the Bhakti movement and the tradition of Sufis. One important aspect of this mysticism was its complete independence from orthodox scriptures. These teachers practised and taught tolerance.

The interaction of Bhakti and Islam, specially the Sufi idea, gave rise to a number of progressive movements with the core philosophy of tolerance. Human Rights educationists should give utmost importance to this aspect. It is regrettable that it has, with some notable exceptions, been generally studied in isolation. It should, therefore, be emphasised in our text books that relations between Islam and the religions of India were marked by mutual understanding and tolerance. This spirit of mutual understanding, tolerance and cooperation were, to large extent, promoted by the rise and spread of Sufi and Bhakti ideas.

Namdeva and Tukaram from Maharashtra, the former a tailor and the latter a peasant, made the Bhakti movement increasingly acceptable to the people. Namdeva spread the virtues of simplicity and argued forcefully against rituals and superstitions. He said: “The stone image speaks not, see the lord within, the Tirthas (holy pilgrimage) cannot wash away sins, clean your hearts instead. Fasting and other observance are futile unless your being is purified. What can ceremonies do if love awake not in your heart?”

In Bengal, the well-known Vaishnava poets Jaidev, Vidyapati and Chandidas, as also Chaitnaya popularised the Bhakti movement. It spread to almost all parts of India. Though the movement did not succeed in completely breaking through caste barriers, the very fact that many of its leaders belonged to lower castes, and also that it believed in the equality of men, must be taken note of by human right educationists.

In the fourteenth-fifteenth century, Ramananda (1370-1440) challenged caste divisions, revolted against traditional religious rituals and started preaching in local dialects, and not Sanskrit which was the preserve of the upper castes. His thought is well reflected in his following words: “Wherever I go, I see water and stone, but it is You who had filled them all with Your presence. In vain do they seek You in the Vedas...” Ramananda had 12 important disciples. They all belonged to low castes. One of them, Ravidas was a cobbler. “The recitation of the Vedic Mantras, even for many millions of time will not satisfy the pangs of the longing (to see You)”, sang Ravidas.

The most famous disciple of Ramananda was Kabir, who combined in his writings the essence of Sufi and Bhakti traditions. He struck at the roots of ritualism and superstition. “O God, Whether Allah or Rama, I live by thy name.”, sang Kabir. Since Kabir composed songs for the common people he chose his own language which was a combination of many local dialects. He said: “Sanskrit is like water in a well, the language of the people is a flowing stream.” He practised and preached the gospel of universal tolerance and was one of the exponents of the idea of India with full religious freedom for all. Kabir gave utmost importance to human equality and denounced inequality based on caste, religion and wealth.
The founder of the great Sikh religion, Guru Nanak, was greatly influenced by Bhakti and Sufi ideas. Both Kabir and Guru Nanak found a common link between Hinduism and Islam. The Supreme significance of Nanak was that he was the harbinger of Hindu - Muslim unity, for he sought sincerely to reconcile Islam with Hinduism as the following verse will show: “Guru Nanak Shah, faquir/ Hindu Ka Guru aur/Muslaman ka pir.” (Guru Nanak is a royal pauper. He is a Guru to Hindus and a Pir (saint) to Muslims.)

Bauls are not known outside Bengal. The philosophy of the Baul movement lies in the simple man’s (sahaj) search for the “Man of his heart” - his God. The movement traces its origin to the fall of Buddhism and Vaishnavism. Bauls are like the wind (Baul means wind, vayu)- always free, not tied to any religious traditions. They accepted no caste division, they did not worship any special deity nor did they accept any temple or mosque. Baul devotees belonged to the lowest strata of both Hindus and Muslims. “What need have we of other temples, when our body is the temple where the spirit has its abode”, they sang. They did not observe asceticism, nor did they believe in celibacy. Earthly love, they argued, helps them to feel divine love, and harmony between material and spiritual needs.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Justify Akbar’s eminence among the medieval rulers in 100 words.

2. Write 5 lines on the Bhakti movement.

3. Bring out Kabir’s significance as a proponent of Sufi and Bhakti traditions.


5. What do you know about the Bauls?
1.4 ENVIRONMENTALIST TRADITION

An acute environmental awareness has been the feature of our social life for the last four or five decades. It is generally believed that the 1950s and 1960s brought about an anxiety that the natural resources of the earth were getting depleted as a result of excessive consumption of natural resources in some parts of the world and an increasing population in some other parts. An accompanying anxiety was that mindless developmental activities in the world were polluting the entire earth making it an unsafe place to live. It was felt that the modern man had proved himself unfit to live in harmony with nature at large. The tendency to conquer nature and destroy other species could lead to the destruction of nature as well as man. A powerful environmental movement has now grown throughout the world around these ideas. As a result the environmental awareness has become a considerable part of any human rights activity. In this context, it is crucially significant to point out that although an environmental perspective is completely alien to any western or European tradition, it finds ample references in Indian history and tradition.

The Ancient Indian philosophy did not place man at the apex or the centre of the universe but only as one of the many elements. At the same time every element biotic or non-biotic was perceived to be a living being with a life of its own. Therefore all the trees, forests, mountains, rivers, birds, animals and other species were considered as much a part of nature as man was. It was his duty, therefore, to live along with them and not at their expense. The nature was not placed at the service of man and he was not privileged over other species in any way. This philosophical position proved enough of a safeguard against a man-centred view of nature. It is possible to trace the philosophical origins of the modern environmental awareness to the Ancient Indian tradition.

A crucial aspect of this tradition was that it did not just remain confined to the realm of philosophy but was manifested in concrete practice at the level both of the rulers and the people. Among the rulers, Ashoka is perhaps the earliest one to have prohibited the killing of certain birds and animals in his kingdom. These instructions were inscribed on his pillar edicts. He set up hospitals and reserves for wild animals and birds and also implemented various species-specific protection measures.

Much more than the rulers, the observance of environment friendly practices by some of the local communities is quite remarkable. In this context, mention must be made of Bishnois (followers of Bishnoi faith), a community that has been living in the state of Rajasthan for centuries. Bishnois have, as a matter of practice and routine, used their natural resources judiciously and shown tremendous respect for the environment around them. The community has maintained very strict rules regarding the protection of wildlife and the trees in their area. The penalty for violating any of these community rules is very severe. There is a remarkable and well-known incidence in the history of Bishnois. In 1730, the Maharaja of Jodhpur ordered his men to fetch some wood from a Bishnoi area. The Bishnoi men were away at work. All the Bishnoi women and children got together and decided to protect their trees. They hugged their trees in order to save them from being felled by the king’s men. Over 360 women and children were hacked to death in the process but they did not allow their trees to be cut. The king had to finally ask his men to stop killing innocent women and children, offer atonement for the killings and undertake not to cut any Bishnoi tree. This glorious saga of protecting the environment by laying down their lives inspired the famous Chipko movement centuries later in 1973 in the hills of U.P. The Bishnois still practise the same life-style and treat their environment as sacred. Any human rights activist interested in the environmental question would do well to observe and study some of the Bishnoi practices.
Check Your Progress 3

1. What is the relevance of ancient Indian tradition for an environmentalist perspective today? Write in five lines.

2. What is the relevance of the Bishnoi community for the environmental movement today?

1.5 LET US SUM UP

The purpose of the Unit was to sensitise the learner about the wealth of inspiration Indian history and tradition has to offer to the modern human rights activist. The unit began by evolving a perspective for studying cultures and traditions. It is imperative to avoid the risk of either glorifying India's culture or denigrating it in totality. Indian tradition, like all other traditions, is extremely complex and contains both positive and negative features. There is much in the Indian tradition that is informed by a basic humanitarian concern. Through a cursory glance at the ancient and medieval history you learnt that India has a long tradition of acceptance of contrary viewpoints, tolerance towards others, non-violence, love and compassion, syncretism, religious universalism and an emphasis on the brotherhood of all men. The anti-war declarations made by Ashoka in the 3rd century B.C. and the remarkable respect for the environment practised by the Bishnois of Rajasthan deserve a special mention for any student of human rights education.

1.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. Base your answer on Sub-sections 1.2.1 and 1.2.2.
2. Read the two stories in the respective boxes (Sub-sections 1.2.2 and 1.2.3) and conclude for yourself.
3. Refer to Sub-section 1.2.4.

Check Your Progress - 2

1. Refer to Sub-section 1.3.1.
2. See Sub-section 1.3.2.
3. Refer to Sub-section 1.3.2; para 8.
4. Refer to Sub-section 1.3.2; para 9.
5. Refer to Sub-section 1.3.2; the last para.

Check Your Progress - 3

1. See Section 1.2.
2. Base your answer on Section 1.4. Concentrate on the last para.