

CUET · SOCIOLOGY · CLASS XII · CODE 326

Cultural Change

CUET unit: Social Change and Development in India — Cultural Change (Sanskritisation, Modernisation, Secularisation, Westernisation; 19th-century social reform movements)

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Snapshot

- Builds on Chapter 1 by shifting focus from structural change (industrialisation, urbanisation under colonialism) to **cultural change** — changes in norms, values, fashions, body language.
- Two related developments: (i) deliberate **19th-century social reform movements** against sati, child marriage, widow remarriage ban, caste discrimination; (ii) less deliberate processes — **sanskritisation, modernisation, secularisation, westernisation**.
- Sanskritisation pre-dates colonial rule; the other three are complex responses to colonialism.
- Introduces key thinkers: M.N. Srinivas (sanskritisation, westernisation), Satish Saberwal (three aspects of modern framework), Rudolph & Rudolph (modernity), Rajni Kothari (caste and politics).
- CUET tests definitions, coinage of terms, criticisms of sanskritisation, reformers and their causes, distinction between westernisation and modernisation.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

Building on Chapter 1's structural change — industrialisation, urbanisation, the new mode of production introduced under colonialism — the focus here is the parallel **cultural change** brought about by these processes. Sociologists define **social structure** as "a continuing arrangement of persons in relationships defined or controlled by institutions" and **culture** as "socially established norms or patterns of behaviour" (NCERT §Intro, p. 16). Cultural change refers to changes in norms, values, fashions, language, body language, and ideologies. Two intertwined outcomes of colonial impact stand out: deliberate 19th-century reform efforts on the one hand, and four less deliberate processes — **sanskritisation, modernisation, secularisation, westernisation** — on the other. Of these four, sanskritisation pre-dates colonialism; the other three are complex responses to colonial rule.

The 19th-century social reform movements (§ 2.1) arose against social evils like sati, child marriage, the ban on widow remarriage, and caste discrimination. Reformers combined modern western liberal ideas with a fresh look at traditional literature; they

did not simply import European ideas but read shastras and hadith to recover counter-arguments from within their own traditions. **Raja Ram Mohun Roy** attacked sati using both humanitarian/natural-rights doctrines and Hindu shastras; **Ranade** wrote *The Texts of the Hindu Law on the Lawfulness of the Remarriage of Widows*; **Sir Syed Ahmed Khan** emphasised free enquiry (ijtihad); **Kandukiri Viresalingam** wrote *The Sources of Knowledge* and translated Julius Huxley (NCERT Box 2.1, p. 17). Sociologist **Satish Saberwal** identifies three aspects of the modern framework: **modes of communication, forms of organisation, the nature of ideas** (NCERT §2.1, p. 17). New technologies — printing press, telegraph, microphone, steamship, railways — sped up the exchange of ideas; **Keshav Chandra Sen** visited Madras in 1864; **Pandita Ramabai** travelled widely. Modern social organisations like **Brahmo Samaj** (Bengal), **Arya Samaj** (Punjab), and the **All-India Muslim Ladies Conference (Anjuman-E-Khawathn-E-Islam, 1914)** were founded (NCERT §2.1, p. 17). **Jotiba Phule** opened the first school for women in Pune; Phule recalled the glory of the pre-Aryan age, while **Bal Gangadhar Tilak** emphasised the Aryan period (NCERT §2.1, p. 18). **Jahanara Shah Nawas** proposed a resolution against polygamy at the All India Muslim Ladies Conference; **Tahsib-e-Niswan**, a leading Punjab women's journal, supported it (NCERT §2.1, p. 19). Orthodox Hindus in Bengal formed the **Dharma Sabha** and petitioned the British, arguing that reformers had no right to interpret sacred texts (NCERT §2.1, p. 19) — this is a counter-movement, not a reform body.

Sanskritisation (§ 2.3) — coined by **M.N. Srinivas** — is "the process by which a 'low' caste or tribe or other group changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, 'twice-born' (dwija) caste" (NCERT §2.3, p. 20). Where non-Sanskritic castes were dominant in a region, the reverse process — **de-Sanskritisation** — operated; in Punjab, Persian influence dominated until the third quarter of the 19th century. Srinivas argued that sanskritisation usually improves a group's position in the local caste hierarchy and presupposes either economic/political improvement or sustained contact with the '**Great Tradition**' — a pilgrim centre, a monastery, or a proselytising sect (NCERT §2.3, p. 21). **Kumud Pawade**, a Dalit Sanskrit teacher, illustrates the obstacles low castes faced when adopting upper-caste customs (NCERT §2.3, p. 21). There are **five criticisms of sanskritisation**: (1) it exaggerates social mobility — sanskritisation produces only **positional**, not **structural**, change; (2) it accepts upper-caste ways as superior and lower-caste ways as inferior; (3) it justifies a model resting on inequality and exclusion (purity-pollution); (4) it leads to the seclusion of women, dowry instead of bride-price, and the spread of caste discrimination to groups that did not earlier practise it; (5) it erodes Dalit culture and devalues their labour and knowledge (NCERT §2.3, p. 22).

Westernisation (§ 2.3) — Srinivas defines it as "the changes brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule," covering technology, institutions, ideology, and values. There are two kinds: (i) the emergence of a **westernised sub-cultural pattern** among intellectuals — anglicised lifestyles, English-medium education, western dress and dining; (ii) the general spread of western traits like television, refrigerator, sofa, dining table (NCERT §2.3, pp. 22–23). Westernisation

involves the imitation of external forms and "does not necessarily mean that people adopt modern values of democracy and equality" (NCERT §2.3, p. 23). Indian artists like **Ravi Varma, Abanindranath Tagore, Chandu Menon, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya** grappled with the colonial encounter; **Ravi Varma's 1870 portrait of Kizhakke Palat Krishna Menon's family** blended western perspective and illusionism with Indian elements (NCERT Box 2.2, p. 24). Srinivas suggested that 'lower castes' sought sanskritisation while 'upper castes' sought westernisation — but the **Thiyyas in Kerala** (not upper caste) consciously westernised to critique caste, showing that this generalisation is "difficult to maintain" in a diverse country (NCERT §2.3, p. 24).

Modernisation (§ 2.3) — Rudolph and Rudolph characterise modernity as a cluster of attributes: local/parochial ties give way to **universal commitments and cosmopolitan attitudes**; utility, calculation and science precede emotion, the sacred and the non-rational; the **individual** becomes the primary unit of society; associations are based on **choice not birth**; mastery replaces fatalism; identity is **chosen and achieved**, not ascribed; and work is separated from family in bureaucratic organisation (NCERT §2.3, p. 26). Modernisation and westernisation are not the same thing — a person can wear western clothes (westernised) yet hold conservative, non-egalitarian views (not modern); and conversely a person can dress traditionally yet hold egalitarian values.

Secularisation (§ 2.3) — in the modern west, the term usually means "a process of decline in the influence of religion." Sociologists track this through three indicators: people's involvement with religious organisations (e.g., church attendance), the social and material influence of religious organisations, and the degree to which people hold religious beliefs (NCERT §2.3, p. 27). Secularisation in India does not simply replicate the western pattern. Rituals in India often have **secular dimensions** — occasions for socialising, displaying wealth, and indexing household standing; cars at weddings and VIPs in attendance are markers of social status. **Rajni Kothari** (1977) introduces the idea of the **secularisation of caste**: in traditional India caste operated within a religious framework of purity and pollution; today it functions in the political arena as **political pressure groups, caste associations, and caste-based parties** — caste persists but its mode of operation has shifted from the sacred to the secular-political (NCERT §2.3, p. 27; Box 2.5, p. 28).

Taken together, the four processes — sanskritisation, westernisation, modernisation and secularisation — are best understood as overlapping responses to the long colonial encounter and its post-Independence aftermath. Sanskritisation existed long before colonialism but acquired new visibility because colonial censuses began to record caste rank and because emerging Dalit/non-Brahmin movements challenged the upper-caste reference model from below. Westernisation introduced new technologies, institutions and lifestyles but did not automatically carry democratic values. Modernisation, in Rudolph and Rudolph's sense, is the deeper attitudinal shift — universalism, achievement, individualism, mastery — that may or may not accompany the visible markers of westernisation. Secularisation, in its Indian form, names not a vanishing of

religion but a shift in the way old institutions (especially caste) operate in the new public sphere of mass democracy. CUET items reward students who can keep these four processes analytically separate while also recognising that in practice they intersect — a westernised family may sanskritise its rituals to claim higher caste rank while voting for caste-based political parties that exemplify the secularisation of caste.

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Social structure	"A continuing arrangement of persons in relationships defined or controlled by institutions"	16
Culture	"Socially established norms or patterns of behaviour"	16
Cultural change	Changes in norms, values, fashions, language, ideology	16
Sanskritisation	Process by which a 'low' caste/tribe/group takes over customs, rituals, beliefs, ideology and style of life of a high, particularly a 'twice-born (dwija) caste' (coined by M.N. Srinivas)	20
De-Sanskritisation	Reverse process where non-Sanskritic dominant castes influence the region (e.g., Persian influence in Punjab)	21
Westernisation	"Changes brought about in Indian society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule" — covering technology, institutions, ideology, values (Srinivas)	22
Modernisation	Universalism, cosmopolitanism, science/utility over sacred, individual as primary unit, choice over birth, achieved over ascribed identity (Rudolph & Rudolph)	26
Secularisation	Process of decline in the influence of religion (in western sense); in India also describes caste shifting from ritual/religious framework to political-pressure-group role	27
Secularisation of caste	Rajni Kothari's term for caste functioning through politics, caste associations and parties rather than purity/pollution	27–28
Ijtihad	Free enquiry — emphasised by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in his interpretation of Islam	17
Great Tradition	Source of high Hindu cultural prestige — pilgrim centre, monastery, proselytising sect — contact with which can trigger sanskritisation	21
Twice-born / Dwija	Upper castes (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya) whose customs serve as reference model for sanskritisation	20
Brahmo Samaj	Reform organisation founded in Bengal (Raja Ram Mohun Roy)	17
Arya Samaj	Reform organisation founded in Punjab (Dayanand Saraswati)	17
Dharma Sabha	Counter-movement organisation that opposed reformers in Bengal	19

Term	Definition	Page
Anjuman-E-Khawatr-E-Islam	All-India Muslim Ladies Conference (1914)	17
Tahsib-e-Niswan	Leading Punjab women's journal that supported anti-polygamy resolutions	19
Positional change	Change in the rank of an individual/group within an existing hierarchy — what sanskritisation achieves	22
Structural change	Change in the hierarchy itself — what sanskritisation does NOT achieve	22
Westernised sub-culture	Anglicised lifestyle, English education, western dress among intellectuals	23
Universalism (Rudolph & Rudolph)	Modernity's preference for universal commitments over parochial ties	26
Ascription vs achievement	Modernity favours achieved identity over ascribed identity	26
Purity / pollution	Traditional religious framework in which caste operated before secularisation of caste	27
Caste association	Modern organisational form through which secularised caste operates politically	27–28

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- Photographs of social reformers on p. 16 (Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Pandita Ramabai, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan) and p. 18 (Viresalingam, Vidyasagar, Jotiba Phule).
- Saberwal's three aspects of the modern framework (p. 17): **modes of communication** → **forms of organisation** → **nature of ideas**.
- Five-point criticism of sanskritisation (p. 22): positional-not-structural change → accepts upper caste superiority → justifies inequality → leads to gender oppression/dowry → erodes Dalit culture.
- Ravi Varma's 1870 portrait of the Krishna Menon family (Box 2.2, p. 24) — illustrates western technique (oil, perspective, illusionism) in a matrilineal Nayar context.
- Rudolph & Rudolph's seven attributes of modernity (p. 26): universalism, cosmopolitanism, calculation, individualism, choice-based associations, mastery, achieved identity.
- The reformer-cause matching ladder: Ram Mohun Roy → sati; Ranade → widow remarriage; Phule → women's education; Sir Syed → ijtehad; Viresalingam → Telugu translations.

- The Srinivas–Thiyya counter-example (p. 24): the generalisation "lower castes Sanskritise, upper castes Westernise" breaks down because the Thiyyas were not upper caste yet westernised.

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- **Westernisation ≠ Modernisation.** A person can wear western clothes (westernised) yet hold conservative/non-egalitarian views (not modern). NCERT explicitly says westernisation "does not necessarily mean people adopt modern values of democracy and equality" (p. 23).
- **Sanskritisation was coined by M.N. Srinivas, not Satish Saberwal.** Saberwal gave the **three aspects of the modern framework**.
- **Sanskritisation pre-dates colonialism;** the other three processes are responses to colonial rule (p. 16).
- **Dharma Sabha opposed reform** (it defended sacred texts against reformers) — students confuse it with a reform body.
- **Thiyyas of Kerala** are a counter-example to Srinivas's generalisation that only upper castes westernised.
- **Sanskritisation leads to positional, not structural, change** — inequality persists.
- **"Secularisation of caste"** in Kothari does NOT mean caste disappears — it means caste functions through politics instead of through purity/pollution.
- **Rudolph & Rudolph** are associated with the seven attributes of modernity; do not confuse them with Srinivas (sanskritisation/westernisation) or Kothari (secularisation of caste).
- **Anjuman-E-Khawatn-E-Islam** was founded in **1914**, not 1924 or 1940; common NTA date trap.

2.5 Thinkers / theories table

Name	Concept	Key Idea	NCERT page
M.N. Srinivas	Sanskritisation; Westernisation	Coined "sanskritisation"; defined westernisation as 150 years of British rule's cultural impact	20, 22
Satish Saberwal	Three aspects of modern framework	Modes of communication, forms of organisation, nature of ideas	17
Rudolph and Rudolph	Modernity	Universalism, cosmopolitanism, individual as primary unit, achieved over ascribed identity	26
Rajni Kothari	Secularisation of caste	Caste functions through political pressure groups, associations and parties rather than purity/pollution	27–28

Name	Concept	Key Idea	NCERT page
Raja Ram Mohun Roy	Anti-sati campaign; Brahmo Samaj	Combined humanitarian/natural-rights doctrines with Hindu shastras	17
M.G. Ranade	Widow remarriage	Wrote The Texts of the Hindu Law on the Lawfulness of the Remarriage of Widows	17
Sir Syed Ahmed Khan	Ijtihad (free enquiry)	Reformist interpretation of Islam	17
Kandukiri Viresalingam	The Sources of Knowledge ; Telugu translations	Translated Julius Huxley into Telugu	17
Jotiba Phule	Women's education; pre-Aryan past	Opened the first school for women in Pune	18
Bal Gangadhar Tilak	Aryan past	Emphasised the Aryan period of Indian history (contrast to Phule)	18
Pandita Ramabai	Women's rights; travel as reformist tool	Travelled widely, organised for women's education	17
Jahanara Shah Nawas	Anti-polygamy resolution	Proposed resolution at All India Muslim Ladies Conference	19
Kumud Pawade	Dalit experience of Sanskritisation	Dalit Sanskrit teacher who illustrated obstacles to low-caste adoption of upper-caste customs	21
Ravi Varma	Colonial-encounter artist	1870 Krishna Menon family portrait blending western and Indian techniques	24
Dharma Sabha	Counter-movement	Orthodox Hindu organisation opposing reformers in Bengal	19

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This chapter appears regularly in CUET Sociology papers (typically 2–4 MCQs per year). Frequent question patterns include: who coined sanskritisation (Srinivas), Saberwal's three aspects of the modern framework, distinction between westernisation and modernisation, criticisms of sanskritisation, identification of reformers and their causes (Ram Mohun Roy–sati, Phule–women's education, Sir Syed–ijtihad), and statement-based/

match-the-following items on the four processes (sanskritisation, modernisation, secularisation, westernisation).

CUET 2025 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.33 (CUET 2025) Match List-I with List-II: (A) Sanskritisation (B) Westernisation (C) Modernisation (D) Secularisation / (I) Dalit groups adopting use of fork and spoons (II) Dalit groups adopting the practice of dowry (III) Public advertisements for jobs stating qualification only (IV) Public holidays for festivals of all religions.

- A) A-II, B-I, C-III, D-IV B) A-I, B-II, C-III, D-IV C) A-II, B-III, C-I, D-IV D) A-III, B-IV, C-I, D-II

Tests: Distinguishing sanskritisation, westernisation, modernisation and secularisation with examples. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2024 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.21 (CUET 2024) Which festivals are related to agriculture? (A) Bihu (B) Baisakhi (C) Holi (D) Pongal

- A) A, B and D only B) A, B and C only C) A, B, C and D D) B, C and D only **Tests:**

Cultural change and agricultural festivals. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2023 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.13 (CUET 2023) In Bengal, the campaign to abolish Sati was led by:

- A) M. G. Ranade B) Raja Ram Mohan Roy C) Jotirao Govindrao Phule D) Periyar **Tests:** Raja Ram Mohan Roy's reform against Sati. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.21 (CUET 2023) Which of the following statements about Westernisation is incorrect?

- A) Changes in Indian society due to British rule B) Includes changes in technology, institutions and values C) Includes imitation of external forms of culture D) It necessarily means adopting democratic and equality values **Tests:** Westernisation does not automatically imply democratic values. **Answer:** Not in extracted key