

# 03

## Multicultural Society

### Introduction

People belonging to different races, and different religions and people who speak different languages may live in one country. A society consisting of such different groups is called a multicultural society.

By studying this chapter you will be able to understand:

- factors that cause for emerging multicultural societies
- qualities that should be practised as a citizen of a multicultural society
- how a peaceful society with minimum conflicts can be established

A conversation that took place among the students of grade eight during the Citizenship Education period is given below. Read and understand it well.

- Januda : Culture is the way how we live, wear and behave, isn't it?
- Deqni : Not only that, culture includes the way we speak, eat, and all our activities related to it. Every element developed by our ancestors belongs to it.
- Chenethu : What are those elements?
- Fathima : Stupas, temples, artistic creations, tanks and anicuts, kovils, churches are some of those elements. Don't you remember, we learned them when we were in grade 7?
- Ansar : Well, now let's write a definition on culture.
- Devi : Culture means all the activities in life style, clothing, behaving, communicating, and worshipping. In addition, it includes arts and crafts, traditions and customs...

- Dewni : Culture is the device that guides all our activities from being behind us.
- Devi : It controls us with or without our knowledge. doesn't it?
- Ansar : We all have a particular culture. It can differ from region to region, religion to religion, and race to race. but every human being on this earth has a culture.
- Teacher : I feel a great sense of pleasure about the things children in my class know about culture. Actually, when I heard what you said about the culture, I have almost nothing to teach you.

## Culture

A man behaves according to a culture from his cradle to grave. Therefore, culture is the main force that directs any society forward. No person can be in isolation without a culture.

The term "culture " has been defined by different anthropologists in different ways. Two of those definitions are given below:

Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a human as a member of society.

E.B.Tylor (Primary Culture)

Culture is the way of collective living of people who are in a particular area. Rituals, customs, habits, morals, social institutions, arts and religion depict their culture.

Prof. Wimal Dissanayake (Critiques)

A simple definition derived from the above definitions and the conversation of the students of Grade 8 is given below:

**Culture is the totality of whole, acquired by man on knowledge, beliefs, customs, arts and livelihood.**



**Cultural elements**

## **Multiculture**

- Fathima : Januda, what is meant by the term multicultural?
- Januda : People belonging to different races live in one country. They observe different religions, speak different languages and follow different customs and rituals. Such a society is called a plural or multicultural society.
- Dewni : Shall I give a simple example? Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Burgher communities live in Sri Lanka. Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Islam as well as those who speak Sinhala, Tamil and English also live in this country. Therefore, ours is a multicultural society and a multicultural country as well.
- Ansar : Yes, That diversity is known as cultural diversity.
- Dewi : However, there are differences among those cultures, aren't there? Most of the countries such as United States of America, and India are countries with multicultural societies. There are many races as well as social groups speaking different languages and observing different religions in those countries.

Most of the countries in modern world can be regarded as multicultural societies. Every citizen in such societies must work with mutual trust and collective conscience.

Some of the examples for countries with multicultural societies are as follows:

**Sri Lanka**

**India**

**United States of America**

**Britain**

### **Activity**

- Construct a simple definition on culture, through the facts you learn about the culture. Discuss with the other students about that definition.

## **Multicultural Society**

A society with multicultural characteristics is known as a multicultural society. In such a society, all those who speak different languages, observe different religions and follow different customs should work together. It minimizes conflicts and enhances cooperativeness. It builds up a sustainable peace and develops the country.

Since every society in the modern world is multicultural, we have to develop many qualities when we live in such a society. As a universal citizen, you are expected to live in such a society by improving those qualities.



Some of those qualities are as follows:

- Respecting all those who belong to every ethnic group
- Safeguarding the rights of the people of all ethnic groups
- Not discriminating any religious or an ethnic group
- Safeguarding the cultural heritages of all religious and ethnic groups
- Listening to the opinions of others and accepting them if they are reasonable
- Fulfilling the duties honestly

### **Characteristics of a multicultural society**

By now you have already understood the fact that a society in which different races live, different religious groups exist and different traditions follow is a multicultural society. You can recognize those multicultural features from this lesson separately.

### **Existence of different ethnic groups**

Different types of ethnic groups live in a multicultural society. Those ethnic groups are expected to work peacefully and collectively. It is essential for the existence of a multicultural society. We must think of our country and work as a nation disregarding racial differences. As an example, we can see that all the people live in Sri Lanka in harmony, disregarding whether they are Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims or Burghers.



**Various ethnic groups**

## Existence of people of different faiths

Another salient feature of a multiethnic society is that the existence of the people who follow different religions. It is essential to respect one's own religion as well as that of the others. We should not defame the others' religions. We can take all the good things from those religions that are helpful to make our lives successful. We all must determine to continue a mutual co-existence among all religious communities.



Devotees paying homage in different religious places

## Existence of people who speak different languages

Existence of people who speak different languages is another feature in a multicultural society. It is beneficial to learn other languages as well as one's own tongue, use those languages where necessary to exchange ideas and consider every language equally etc. for the betterment of a multicultural society.



Characters (letters) belonging to various languages

## Existence of different customs and traditions

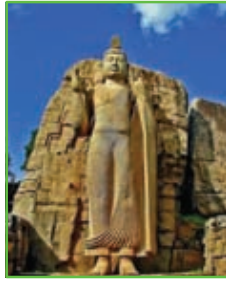
Different customs and traditions can be seen in a multicultural society. Those customs and rituals are bestowed to the next generation by the culture. Different customs, and traditions can exist in the same society. It is important to respect and safeguard them and extract what is good. We should not condemn others' customs or traditions.



Various customs

## Existence of different cultural heritage

Every culture has its own cultural elements. Cultural heritage is the reflection of our cultural identity. For example, stupas and temples can be identified as the heritage of Buddhist culture. By safeguarding cultural features, the prestige and the pride of a country can be exhibited. Protecting and respecting the heritage, will be helpful to the proper existence of a multicultural society.



Various cultural heritages

## Cultural diversity of Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a multicultural country. Different races, religious groups and communities speaking different languages live in Sri Lanka.

Following table indicates the population of the country according to ethnicity and religions:

Ethnicity	Population	Percentage	Religion	Population	Percentage
Sinhala	15,173,820	74.9	Buddhist	14,222,844	70.2
Tamil	2,270,924	11.2	Hindu	2,554,606,	12.6
Muslim	842,323	4.1	Islam	1,967,227	9.7
Burgher	1,869,820	9.2	Catholic/ Christian	150,906	7.4
Other	106,836	0.5	Other	9,440	0.1

Teacher-in-charge of Citizenship Education in grade 8 of Namal Yaya Maha Vidyalaya advised the students to observe the above table carefully. After that, she posed the following questions on a task sheet.



- **Different communities in Sri Lanka**
- **Different religious groups in Sri Lanka.**

A conversation that took place in relation to this task sheet is given below:

- Ansar :- Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher and Malay communities live in our country.
- Narmadha :- Not only that, people from many other countries also live in our country.
- Chenethu :- Religious groups such as Buddhists, Hindus, Islam, Catholics and Christians also live here.
- Ansar :- Yes, That's true. There can be people who believe in other religions as well.
- Devni :- There are people who speak Sinhala, Tamil and English.
- Ansar :- Sri Lanka is a multiracial and multireligious country with people who speak different languages. Hence, Sri Lanka is a multicultural country.
- Narmada :- Diversity of Sri Lankan culture can be explained in association with languages, religions, customs and cultural heritage.
- Chenethu :- I can give another idea according to this table. People who belong to one ethnic group can follow different religions. For example Sinhalese follow Catholicism and Christianity.

### Activity

- Name few places worshipped by all ethnic and religious communities in Sri Lanka in common.
- Mention three duties to be fulfilled by us as the citizens of a multicultural society.

## **Different cultural traditions, customs and festivals**

Different cultures exist in Sri Lanka as it is a multicultural country. There are many cultural places related to those cultures. The Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi, Katharagama Devalaya, Koneshvaram Devala in Trincomalee, Nallur Kovil, Madu church, and Davatagaha Mosque are some of them. Further more, religious festivals and matrimonial customs of different cultures are examples for cultural elements.

## **Customs related to different communities**

As a multicultural country, three main community groups Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims live in Sri Lanka. Every function performed from one's birth to the death and even after death are connected with the culture.

**Customs are both what we should do or what we should avoid doing.**

## **Customs, traditions and festivals related to different religions and the importance of them**

There are four main religions in Sri Lanka as a multicultural country. They are Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism/Christianity and Islam. Different rituals and customs, traditions, and festivals related to those religions are there. The main cultures of Sri Lanka have been built on the basis of religions. Customs and festivals related to those cultures have been built on the basis of religious objectives. Following are the cultures based on religions in our country.

- Buddhist culture
- Hindu culture
- Christian/Catholic culture
- Islam culture

## **Buddhist culture**

The Buddhists use Buddhist teachings in order to build up good life. The doctrine of Lord Buddha discloses the way for a good life and to achieve spiritual freedom. Five precepts are the compulsory precepts to be followed by the laymen. The custom of the Buddhists is to lead day-to-day life by doing religious observances appreciating the qualities of the Buddha. Every aspect of the life of a Buddhist from the conception to his death, is closely related to Buddhist culture.

The most important three religious festivals of the Buddhists are as follows:

- Vesak festival
- Poson festival
- Esala festival

Vesak festival is very important for the Buddhists since it is for commemorating three events of Buddha; the birth, the enlightenment and the Parinibbana (Demise).

It is believed that the Buddhist mission led by Arahath Mahinda Thero arrived in Sri Lanka on a Poson full Moon Poya Day. Therefore, the Poson festival is celebrated by the Buddhists in a grand scale.

After achieving the Great Buddhahood, Lord Buddha preached his first sermon on a Esala Poya Day. Therefore Esala Festival is one of the prominent festivals for Buddhists.

Observing Sil by giving priority to worldly and spiritual Poojas, treating the sick, conducting sermons, organizing Dansalas, (Refectories where free meals are offered to everybody), giving alms to the needy, erecting pandals, are commonly done by the Buddhists along with these festivals. In addition to that, Sil and meditation programmes and other meritorious activities are organized on every fullmoon poya day.

You may have frequently heard the blessings of people in modern society such as "May the blessings of Buddha be upon you!", " May the triple gems bless you! ". It is a good nature of a person who values Buddhist culture.



**Vesak festival**



**Poson festival**

## Hindu culture

Tamils whose religion is Hinduism perform their religious observances according to Hindu culture.

The Hindus conduct Poojas for their gods such as Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha and goddess Kali. They start their daily routine after worshipping their gods.

Some of the religious festivals of the Hindus are as follows:

- Thai-pongal
- Deepavali
- Maha Shivarathri



**Thai-Pongal and Deepavali festivals**

The Hindus in Sri Lanka perform Hindu religious rituals in different occasions in their lives. From the conception to the birth of a child and in many occasions after that, such as, name giving, marriages and funerals customs are followed according to Hindu culture.

## Christian / Catholic culture

Christian and Catholic devotees celebrate two religious festivals.

- Christmas
- Easter Festival

Christmas is held on 25th of December in order to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

Good Friday is for the commemoration of the Crucifixion and Easter is for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.



**Christmas festival**

Baptize a child and make him a child of God is an important religious custom of every Catholic/ Christian. Engagements as well as weddings and all other important occasions are done in church. When a Christian dies, praying for his soul, and burial are done according to Christian / Catholic culture.

Before performing any important task and as an everyday habit, every Christian remembers God.

## Islamic culture

Islam devotees hold three main cultural festivals.

- Milad un-Nabi festival
- Ramadan festival (Id-ul-Fitr)
- Haj festival

Giving alms to the poor and beggars to commemorate the birthday of Mohammed Nabi is done in Milad un-Nabi festival. Fasting from the dawn of the day to dusk continuously for a period of 30 days is a custom followed during Ramadan period. At the end of the fasting period, Ramadan festival is held.

Haj festival is held to celebrate Prophet Mohammed's holy pilgrimage to Macca, the holy land of the Muslims. Many Muslims from Sri Lanka too, go on Haj pilgrimage. Those who do not go there, visit the Masjid in their own areas and engage in prayers.

The Muslims are compelled to do everything in their day-to-day life according to the customs related to Islam culture. It ranges from the conception of a child to his death. Customs and rituals they perform in the birth of a child as well as in weddings are examples.



**Ramadan/Ramadhan**



**Haj/Hajj**

## Activity

- Organize a field trip to visit a cultural venue of another ethnic or a religious group in your area or in other areas. Take the guidance and instructions of your subject teacher for this. Use the task sheet given below: (e.g.:- Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, Madu Church, Nallur Kovil, Red Masjid in Modara or any other place of your convenience)
- The destination of the trip
- Objectives of the trip
- Things watched/seen there
- Other cultural elements
- Experience you obtained by seeing those cultural elements and by exchanging ideas.

## Other countries where multicultures exist

You already know that many countries in the world have multicultural societies. Let us discuss the multicultural nature of India and the United State of America.

### India

India is unique among the countries with multicultures in the world. It is an outstanding feature that the Indian people have been cooperative from the past to the present as a multicultural society. Influence of Buddhism can be cited as one of the reasons for that.

Following are some of the information about ethnic and religious composition of India. It reveals the multiethnic and multicultural nature of Indian society.

Races	Languages	Religions
Tamil, Urdu, Bengali, Muslim, Banjara, Chakma, Marathi, Munda	Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, English, Marathi, Malayalam, Panjabi, Thelingu, Gujarati, Kannada, Sanskrit	Hinduism, Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism, Shaivism

As a multiethnic country, India has taken the following steps to ensure harmony among different groups:

- Treating all ethnic, religious and language groups equally.
- Using English and Hindi as official languages (Tamil Nadu state does not accept Hindi as an official language.)
- Every citizen having knowledge on another language except the official languages.
- Taking steps to safeguard the rights and freedom of individuals to follow their own religion.



With the ethnic, religious and language diversity, India has come forward in the modern world. The sense of nationalism has grown up among Indians since all citizens work together ignoring ethnic, religious and language differences. It has contributed to make India a powerful country in the world.

## The United States of America (USA)

The United States of America is also a country with different ethnic, religious and language groups. It has become a multicultural society since the people who have migrated from different countries are living there. Moreover, USA has become one of the most powerful countries in the world as all work collectively with a sense of cooperativeness.



Following information is about the multicultural nature of the United States of America. Study it carefully.

Ethnic groups	Languages	Religions
The White, the Black, Asians, Red Indians, Alaskans, Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders	English, Spanish, Samoan, Cameroonian, Karuk, Hawaiian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, German, French, Russian, Italian	Protestant Christians, Roman Catholics, other Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Jewish

### Steps taken by the United States of America to maintain multicultural nature of the country

- Recognizing English as the official language
- Not recognizing any religion as the state religion
- Granting equal rights for all citizens
- Accepting democracy and working according to it

### Cultural identity

Every ethnic, religious and language group has its own special culture. A particular culture can be distinguished from another through cultural identity. Every group tries to safeguard its own cultural identity.

e.g. :- Sri Lankan cultural identity

### One's own cultural identity

We all have our own unique culture. It is the cultural identity. It is our duty to safeguard that cultural identity. For example, we all must safeguard cultural identities of Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim communities and the identities of the Buddhists, Christians, Catholics, Hindus and Islamic as well. The culture can be conveyed from one generation to the other, only by safeguarding it. To own a glorious culture, one should safeguard his own cultural identity.



## Cultural identity and national harmony

All ethnic and religious groups pay attention to safeguard their own cultural identity. At the same time, it is important to respect the other cultures too, while safeguarding the elements of them. It leads to ensure national harmony. A country can achieve its prosperity only when every cultural group works in harmony while protecting its own cultural identity. The aggregate of all cultures in a country forms the national culture of it. It is a duty and responsibility of all to enrich it. It is the path for national harmony.

That need is emphasized in our national anthem as well.

“..Eka mawakage daru kela bewina

Yamu yamu wee nopama...”

When we live as citizens of a multiethnic society, it is important to respect the other cultures. It is our duty to respect our culture as well as the other's and refrain from harming them. Then, the mutual trust is built among ethnic groups. It protects national harmony and builds sustainable peace.

## Importance of building up national harmony and sustainable peace while safeguarding one's own cultural identity

When we work as a nation while safeguarding our cultural identities, mutual rapport develops. Then one ethnic or religious group may not look at the other groups with suspicion. Then, mutual rapport, trust and reconciliation build up among the people. The development of a country takes place only if all the citizens of the country work together as one. You must determine to work with a sense of nationality from your childhood disregarding all ethnic, religious and language divisions. It is the prime aim of this subject.



## Merits of building national harmony and sustainable peace

- Conflicts are minimized by working with mutual trust and understanding
- Harmony is ensured among ethnic groups
- Everyone's contribution is received for the development of the country
- People are compelled to work collectively and harmoniously
- People contribute to the development of the country as they engage in productive economic activities.
- One is compelled to fulfil one's duties while respecting cultural diversity.
- A sustainable peace is established.



### Activity

- Write an article to the wallpaper on the topic of "The importance of safeguarding the culture."
- Write an essay on the topic of the importance of national harmony. Make a booklet collecting all the essays of students and getting them edited. Donate it to the school library.

### Summary

- ⇒ The main force that leads a society is the culture.
- ⇒ A society with multicultural characteristics is known as a multicultural society.
- ⇒ Most of the countries in the world have multicultural societies.
- ⇒ Different racial groups, religious groups and languages exist in a multicultural society.
- ⇒ Different customs, and different heritage can be seen in a multicultural society.
- ⇒ When living in a multicultural society, everyone protecting his/her own cultural identity and responding that of others is very important. It is a reliable way to build up national unity and peace among various ethnic, racial and religious groups.