



ASPECTS OF DEAF CULTURE AND LINGUISTIC IDENTITY



Notes



This is an interesting lesson where you will learn how deaf culture is different from culture of hearing people, what comprises deaf culture, and why deaf people feel proud to associate themselves with deaf culture. You will also learn about deaf arts, theatre, films, sports, and other social life events of deaf people in India and other nation



OUTCOMES

After studying this lesson, learner:

- explains the concept of deaf culture
- demonstrates appropriate knowledge of deaf culture including history, social interactions, beliefs, values and the arts
- explains the relationships between deaf culture and linguistic identity
- describes how other deaf cultures compare to India's

5.1 DEAF CULTURE AS A CONCEPT RELATED TO LINGUISTIC

How is deaf culture passed down to deaf children?

Deaf parents can pass on deaf culture to their children.

However, 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents. These hearing parents are not familiar with sign language. As a result, these parents are unable to pass on deaf culture to their deaf children.

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Those born to hearing parents are often exposed to deaf culture through deaf associations, deaf schools, and deaf hostels where they all sign and pass down their culture.

Culture and identity markers

Across the world, various communities have their own distinct identity markers, which give them pride and a sense of belonging, as well as a sense of sameness. This is true of both deaf and hearing people.

The deaf communities have identity markers too. Examples are seen in the Spanish sign PI SOURD and the ASL sign DEAF BING. The same concept may go by different names in different countries.

Such identity markers are a source of pride.

The deaf way: different from the hearing way

Deaf culture has many features that are different from the way hearing people communicate, such as the following:

- Visual-gestural communication mode
- Getting attention by tapping on the shoulder, tapping the floor, or flipping a light switch
- If someone is far away, the attention by throwing paper or a small stone

Communication Technology

- Video chats on mobile phones – this often means signing with one hand, adapting the fingerspelling and signs, and finding creative ways to use the limited signing space
- Earlier, writing back and forth on paper was common, but due to technology this is now slowly declining
- Photos, typed messages, and Google Translate can be used for ad hoc communication with people such as shopkeepers
- Google, WhatsApp, and various other apps can also aid communication

Technology in deaf homes

- In the past, there were many challenges for deaf people at home but with new technology, things have improved:

- Flashing doorbells – when someone presses the button, lights flash in all of the rooms and deaf people know someone is at the door
- Vibrating alarm clocks help deaf people wake up on time
- Smart watches, Mobile Apps etc.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 5.1

1. How can a hearing parent's deaf child be exposed to deaf culture?
2. What distinguishes deaf culture from hearing culture?
3. How has technology improved various aspects of life for the deaf?

5.2 DEAF ART, DRAMA, FILM, SPORT AND SOCIAL LIFE

Deaf art

There are many deaf artists, with impressive work and exhibitions. They have created a lot of artwork related to deaf culture and identity. Deaf art is still new in India, but we have many powerful and creative examples from other countries, e.g. the USA, of art that expresses ideas about deaf life, deaf culture, visual communication, sign language, and deaf identity.



Figure-5.1: Deaf Art



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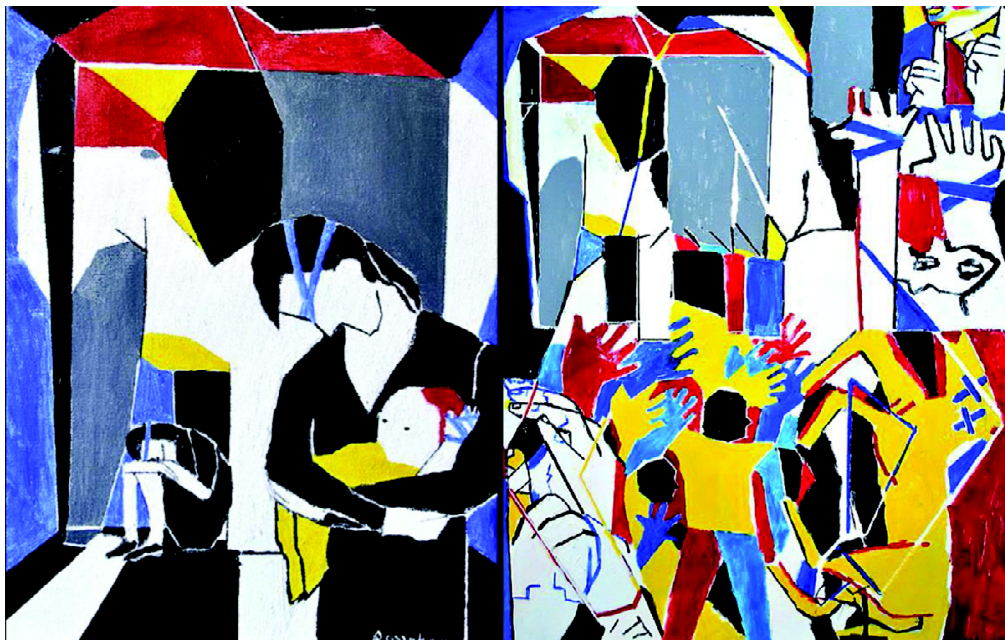


Figure-5.2 : Deaf Art

De'VIA (Deaf View/Image Art)

One example of how deaf art has been promoted comes from a workshop held in the USA in 1989, where artists created a philosophy called De'VIA, which stands for 'Deaf View/Image Art.

The aim of De'VIA was to showcase deaf culture through art. The deaf community wanted to change the negative view of deafness, and this was an attempt to show deaf pride through visual language and art. Many deaf artists have participated through the years to create awareness.

One famous deaf artist, Nancy Rourke, used only three colours in her multiple art works – red, blue and yellow. This helped many hearing people identify it as deaf art, and created awareness about deaf culture and how sign language and visual communication are different from speech.

A colour created by a German artist became characteristic of deaf art. It is a mix of green and blue, first popular in Europe and later accepted and identified across the world as a 'deaf colour'.

Colours and Their Use

Until sometime in 2011, Rourke occasionally used green in her work. She made a conscious decision to stop the use of green and remain only with the three primary

colours, black and white. While any colour can be made with these, she is careful to use only two shades of each primary colour. When colours are next to each other in a piece, she often will place a contrasting colour next to the one she has just used for visual interest.



Black/Gray is negative in most of Rourke's artwork. It often refers to oralism, audism and the Mask of Benevolence. Black can also be used positively to represent diversity.

Black, gray and white can be used neutrally as a reinforcement to provide contrast in a piece between two primary colours to make them stand out. These are also employed when the same colour appears in two areas and would otherwise contact itself.



White refers to positive or neutral feelings in her work. It is a representation of light. Rourke also often uses white for lettering or to outline other elements in her work.



Blue has two tones in Rourke's work. Light blue is overwhelmingly positive and means happiness and the Deafhood journey.



Darker blue refers to oralism, audism and the Mask of Benevolence. A darker blue sometimes looks lighter when it is used for blue tape.



Red refers to power and occasionally refers to love and positive emotions. It often appears in work depicting empowerment or taking a stand for justice.



Yellow means hope - for the future and hope for improvement in life. It also refers to light as Deaf.

People require the ability to see in order to understand language. This is a powerful and important aspect to many pieces of her artwork. The need for light in the darkness is not just a metaphor - Deaf people must literally see to understand information. Light, therefore, becomes a critical aspect of life.

Deaf performing arts – Theatre, music, and mime

Deaf performing artists actively promote deaf theatre, music and mime.

One type of deaf performance is called visual vernacular (VV). It started in the USA. The idea of VV is to focus on the visual sense to express ideas, feelings, poems, music, and art.



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VV is a way of celebrating deaf people’s own unique way of artistic expression.

Now, there are many VV artists across the world who can be found on social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram. Some artists work individually, while others are part of a group.

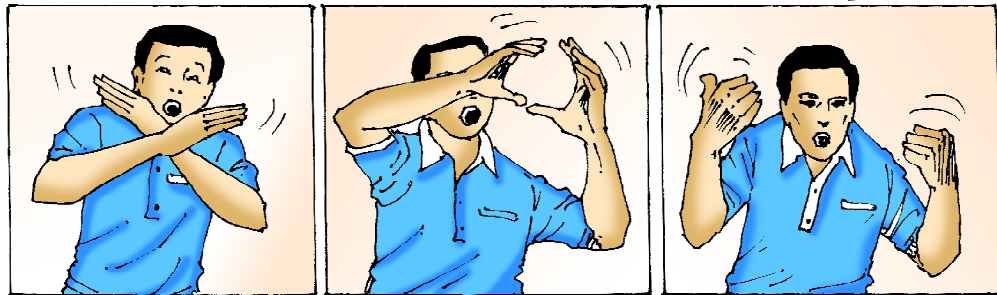


Figure-5.3 : Visual Vernacular in sign language

Deaf film and arts festivals

There are international deaf film festivals as well as national deaf film events are held annually, e.g. in Europe and North America, where filmmakers showcase their movies. Their films are often deeply linked to deaf culture, sign language, and deaf identity. In India, we have the IIDF (India International DeafFilm) Festival, which features many films with deaf actors and stories about deaf life and culture.

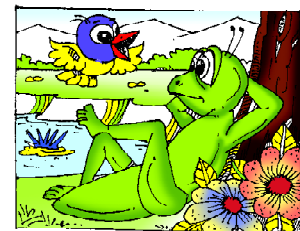


Figure-5.4 : arts festivals

Clin d’Oeil is a famous sign language arts festival held every two years in France. It is recognised as a major event in the deaf community. Every year, thousands of deaf artists and people attend, camp out for a week and enjoy deaf culture, music, drama, comedy and activities.

Deaf Sports

In 1924, Deaflympics was started. It is held every four years in a different country each time, just like the regular Olympics. Many Deaf sportspersons participate in various competitions and win medals. Many Indian athletes have won medals at international deaf sports events. Virender Singh, a deaf wrestler from Haryana, has won several gold medals.



Figure-5.5

Deaf associations

The All-India Sports Council of the Deaf (AISCD) and many state-level sports

associations in India support talented deaf athletes and organise sports competitions.

These events do not only promote sports. As deaf people from different regions come together there is also an exchange of information, culture and language. There is also an All-India Deaf Arts and Cultural Society (AIDACS) which promotes performing deaf arts, theatre, and cultural activities in India through annual programmes.

Deaf culture in India

Deaf people feel alone in their hearing families because their family members do not sign. It is important for them to go to deaf schools and associations to get exposure to sign language and deaf culture.

India's first school for the deaf was founded in Mumbai, and then a second school was started in Kolkata. Later, similar deaf schools were set up across India. But these were mostly oral schools that did not use or raise awareness of sign language. Most of the teachers were hearing and could not sign.

A book written in 1949 by Mr. Banerjee, from Kolkata, said that he noticed deaf children using gestures and hand movements. That means there was signing going on at the schools during those periods, because it was not possible for deaf children to strictly follow oral methods.

It is possible that with the founding of deaf schools, sign language and deaf culture started developing in India. India now has 700-800 deaf schools, including schools run by NGOs and the government. Though most hearing teachers still do not sign, deaf children communicate and converse fluently with each other in sign language.

Research on Indian Sign Language (ISL) has been limited. We do know that deaf people in India use ISL, and the grammar is largely the same across the country but there are some minor word-level (lexical) variations across regions. These variations are not really a barrier for deaf people when they come together for sports and other events.

We do not have BA or MA courses in ISL. There is only one two-year ISL training course for teachers and interpreters.

There is an urgent need for further research and for the creation of ISL courses and resources. This is important to support our understanding of deaf culture. Just as hearing people take pride in their cultures and spoken languages, deaf communities take pride in their sign languages, values, knowledge and deaf culture.

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INTEXT QUESTIONS 5.2

1. What is DeVIA?
2. What is VV and where it started?
3. How frequent Clin diOeid is held?
4. In which year Deaf Olympic started?
5. Who is the deaf sportsman, who won several gold medals at an international deaf sports event?
6. What is full form of AISCD?



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- Concept of Deaf culture is related to the linguistic identity of deaf people as they are mainly visual people who use sign language for communication.
- Unlike hearing children, who acquire the cultural values of their families from their parents, deaf culture usually does not pass down from parents to deaf children as more than 90 % of deaf babies are born to hearing parents who do not know sign language or understand deaf culture.
- Deaf culture usually passes down from older deaf children to younger deaf children in schools for the deaf, hostels and deaf clubs and through deaf events.
- Like hearing people, deaf people too have their cultural identity markers that they are proud of it because it gives them a sense of belonging and sameness.
- Deaf way of using visual language i.e. sign language for communication is the major difference deaf people have from hearing people who use an aural-oral language.
- Deaf people attract the attention of others by tapping on their shoulders.
- Having a sign name is also a distinct feature of deaf culture.
- Advances in technology have greatly facilitated communication among and with the deaf. Whatsapp chatting and video calling have bridged communication gaps.
- Deaf art has progressed a lot. There are many famous deaf artists whose work

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depicts deaf life, deaf culture, visual communication, sign language, and deaf identity.

- De'VIA (Deaf View/Image Art) is a form of art that started after a workshop in the USA in 1989. De'VIA's aim is to show deaf culture through art and dispel negative attitudes towards deafness.
- Famous deaf artist, Nancy Rourke, uses only three colour red, blue and yellow and black and white to create her multiple art works.
- A mix of green and blue colours first created by a German artist has become characteristic of deaf art. It is now identified across the world as a 'deaf colour'.
- Visual vernacular (VV), which started in the USA is a form of performing arts and the idea of VV is to focus on the visual sense to express ideas, feelings, poems, music, and art. VV is way of celebrating deaf people's own unique way of artistic expression. There are many famous VV artists active on social media.
- Clind'Oeil is a famous sign language arts festival held every two years in France, attended by thousands of deaf artists and people to enjoy deaf culture, music, drama, comedy and activities.
- In India, we have the IIDF (India International Deaf Film) Festival, which features many films with deaf actors and stories about deaf life and culture.
- The Deaflympics was started in 1924 and it is held every four years.
- Many Indian athletes have won medals at international deaf sports events.
- Virender Singh, a deaf wrestler from Haryana, has won several gold medals.
- The All-India Sports Council of the Deaf (AISCDC) and many state-level sports associations in India support talented deaf athletes and organise sports competitions.
- All India Deaf Arts and Cultural Society (AIDACS) promotes performing deaf arts, theatre, and cultural activities in India through annual programmes.
- In India, Deaf culture thrives in deaf clubs and deaf associations but the majority of schools still do not use or promote ISL. In more than 700 schools, the majority of teachers are still hearing and neither know sign language nor understand deaf culture and as a result, many deaf still feel isolated and deprived.
- India urgently needs more widespread use of ISL, especially in education.



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**TERMINAL EXERCISE**

1. Give an example of how a deaf signer communicates with a non-signing hearing person. Explain the situation in the past, compared to now?
2. Choose a deaf actor, deaf sportsperson, deaf artist or deaf filmmaker who you admire. Explain what this person does and why you admire him/her.
3. Give two examples of deaf cultural festivals.
4. In what year did the Deaflympics start?
 - a) 1906
 - b) 1924
 - c) 1951
 - d) 1978

Long answer questions

1. What do you understand by Deaf Culture?
2. What do you think about relationship of deaf culture and linguistic identify?
3. Describe all important aspects of deaf culture of India.

**ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS****5.2**

1. 'De' VIA (Deaf/view Image Art) in a form of art that started after a workshop in the USA 1989.
2. Visual Vernacular (vv), which started in the USA, in a form of performing arts.
3. Clin d'Qeil is a famous sign language arts festival held every two years in France.
4. The Deaflympics were started in 1924 and are held every four years.
5. Virender Singh, a deaf wrestler from Haryana, has won several gold medals.
6. The All-India Sports Council of the Deaf (AISCD) support talented deaf athletes and organise sports competitions.