

## Unity in Diversity in Indian Society

### Sociology / GE / Semester-II

India is a plural society both in letter and spirit. It is rightly characterized by its unity and diversity. A grand synthesis of cultures, religions and languages of the people belonging to different castes and communities has upheld its unity and cohesiveness despite multiple foreign invasions.

National unity and integrity have been maintained even through sharp economic and social inequalities have obstructed the emergence of egalitarian social relations. It is this synthesis which has made India a unique mosque of cultures. Thus, India present seemingly multicultural situation within in the framework of a single integrated cultural whole.

The term 'diversity' emphasizes differences rather than inequalities. It means collective differences, that is, differences which mark off one group of people from another. These differences may be of any sort: biological, religious, linguistic etc. Thus, diversity means variety of races, of religions, of languages, of castes and of cultures.

Unity means integration. It is a social psychological condition. It connotes a sense of one-ness, a sense of we-ness. It stands for the bonds, which hold the members of a society together.

Unity in diversity essentially means "unity without uniformity" and "diversity without fragmentation". It is based on the notion that diversity enriches human interaction.

When we say that India is a nation of great cultural diversity, we mean that there are many different types of social groups and communities living here. These are communities defined by cultural markers such as language, religion, sect, race or caste.

#### **Various forms of diversity in India:**

**Religious diversity:** India is a land of multiple religions. Apart from the tribal societies, many of whom still live in the pre-religious state of animism and magic, the Indian population consists of the Hindus (82.41%), Muslims (11.6%), Christians (2.32%), Sikhs (1.99%), Buddhists (0.77%) and Jains (0.41%). The Hindus themselves are divided into several sects such as Vaishnavas, Shaivates, Shaktas, Smartas etc. Similarly, the Muslims are divided into sects such as Shias, Sunnis, Ahmadiyahs etc.

**Linguistic diversity:** Languages spoken in India belong to several language families, the major ones being the Indo-Aryan languages spoken by 75% of Indians and the Dravidian languages spoken by 20% of Indians. Other languages belong to the Austroasiatic, Sino- Tibetan, Tai-Kadai, and a few other minor language families and isolates. India has the world's second highest number of languages, after Papua New Guinea.

**Racial diversity:** 1931 census classified India's racial diversity in the following groups- The Negrito, The Proto-Australoid, The Mongoloid, The Mediterranean, The Western Brachycephals and the Nordic. Representatives of all the three major races of the world, namely Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid, are found in the country.

**Caste diversity:** India is a country of castes. The term caste has been used to refer to both varna as well as jati. Varna is the four-fold division of society according to functional differentiation. Thus, the four varnas include Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras and an outcaste group. Whereas Jati refers to a hereditary endogamous status group practicing a specific traditional occupation.. There are more than 3000 jatis and there is no one all India system of ranking them in order and status. The jati system is not static and there is mobility in the system, through which jatis have changed their position over years. This system of upward mobility has been termed as "Sanskritization" by M. N. Srinivas.

**Cultural diversity:** Cultural patterns reflect regional variations. Because of population diversity, there is immense variety in Indian culture as it is a blend of various cultures. Different religion, castes, regions follow their own tradition and culture. Thus, there is variation in art, architecture, dance forms, theatre forms, music etc.

**Geographical diversity:** Spanning across an area of 3.28 million square kilometre, India is a vast country with great diversity of physical features like dry deserts, evergreen forests, lofty mountains, perennial and non-perennial river systems, long coasts and fertile plains.

In addition to the above described major forms of diversity, India also has diversity of many other types like that of settlement patterns – tribal, rural, urban; marriage and kinship patterns along religious and regional lines and so on.

## **Factors Leading to Unity Amidst Diversity in India**

### **Constitutional Identity**

The entire country is governed by one single Constitution. Even, most of the states follow a generalized scheme of 3-tier government structure, thus imparting uniformity in national governance framework. Further, the Constitution guarantees certain fundamental rights to all citizens regardless of their age, gender, class, caste, religion, etc.

**Religious co-existence:** Religion tolerance is the unique feature of religions in India due to which multiple religions co-exist in India. Freedom of religion and religious practice is guaranteed by the Constitution itself. Moreover, there is no state religion and all religions are given equal preference by the state.

**Inter-State mobility:** The Constitution guarantees freedom to move throughout the territory of India under Article 19 (1) (d), thus promoting a sense of unity and brotherhood among the masses.

Other factors such as uniform pattern of law, penal code, and administrative works (eg. All India services) too lead to uniformity in the criminal justice system, policy implementation etc.

**Economic integration:** The Constitution of India secures the freedom of Trade, Commerce and Intercourse within the Territory of India under Article 301. Further, the Goods and Service Tax(GST) have paved way for 'one country, one tax, one national market', thus facilitating unity among different regions.

**Institution of pilgrimage and religious practices:** In India, religion and spirituality have great significance. From Badrinath and Kedarnath in the north to Rameshwaram in the south, Jagannath Puri in the east to Dwaraka in the west the religious shrines and holy rivers are spread throughout the length and breadth of the country. Closely related to them is the age-old culture of pilgrimage, which has always moved people to various parts of the country and fostered in them a sense of geo-cultural unity.

**Fairs and festivals:** They also act as integrating factors as people from all parts of the country celebrate them as per their own local customs. Eg. Diwali is celebrated throughout by Hindus in the country; similarly Id and Christmas are celebrated by Muslims and Christians, respectively. Celebration of inter-religious festivals is also seen in India.

**Climatic integration via monsoon:** The flora and fauna in the entire Indian subcontinent, agricultural practices, life of people, including their festivities revolve around the monsoon season in India.

**Sports and Cinema:** These are followed by millions in the country, thus, acting as a binding force across the length and breadth of India.

### Factors that threaten India's unity:

**Regionalism:** Regionalism tends to highlight interests of a particular region/regions over national interests. It can also adversely impact national integration. Law and order situation is hampered due to regional demands and ensuing agitation.

**Divisive politics:** Sometimes, ascriptive identities such as caste, religion etc. are evoked by politicians in order to garner votes. This type of divisive politics can result in violence, feeling of mistrust and suspicion among minorities.

**Development imbalance:** Uneven pattern of socio-economic development, inadequate economic policies and consequent economic disparities can lead to backwardness of a region. Consequently, this can result in violence, kick start waves of migration and even accelerate demands of separatism.. For instance, due to economic backwardness of the North East region, several instances of separatist demands and secessionist tendencies have sprung up in the region.

**Ethnic differentiation and nativism:** Ethnic differentiation has often led to clashes between different ethnic groups especially due to factors such as job competition, limited resources, threat to identity etc. E.g. frequent clashes between Bodos and Bengali speaking Muslims in Assam. This has been accentuated by son of the soil doctrine, which ties people to their place of birth and confers some benefits, rights, roles and responsibilities on them, which may not apply to others.

**Geographical isolation:** Geographical isolation too can lead to identity issues and separatist demands. The North-East is geographically isolated from the rest of the country as it is connected with the rest of the country by a narrow corridor i.e the Siliguri corridor . The region has inadequate infrastructure, is more backward economically as compared to the rest of the country. As a result, it has witnessed several instances of separatism and cross-border terrorism, among others.

**Inter-religious conflicts:** Inter-religious conflicts not only hamper relations between two communities by spreading fear and mistrust but also hinder the secular fabric of the country.

**Inter-state conflicts:** This can lead emergence of feelings related to regionalism. It can also affect trade and communications between conflicting states. For instance, Cauvery river dispute between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Sometimes external factors such as foreign organizations terrorist groups, extremist groups can incite violence and sow feelings of separatism. E.g. Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has been accused of supporting and training mujahideen to fight in Jammu and Kashmir and sow separatist tendencies among resident groups.

In spite of the challenges posed by diversity, there can be no doubt on the role played by socio-cultural diversity in sustaining and developing Indian society. Problem is not of diversity per se, but the handling of diversity in India society. The problems of regionalism, communalism, ethnic conflicts etc. have arisen because the fruits of development haven't been distributed equally or the cultures of some groups haven't been accorded due recognition.