

24

UNITY AND DIVERSITY

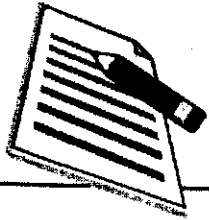
In this lesson you will learn about the basic characteristics of Indian society. For this, you should know about the concepts like cultural and national unity, diversity, pluralism and integration etc. India is a vast country, having a geographical area of 3287263 sq.km. and a population of little more than one billion people. Based on the generous concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam* (the world is one family), we have a great cultural heritage. This has accommodated and integrated many communities and their ways of life from time to time. Human settlement in India had begun from early Stone Age and so far it has been the homeland of many communities who have contributed to its rich cultural heritage. India harboured a great civilization, popularly known as the Indus Valley Civilization, which produced a continuum between rural and urban cultures. Further, India produced a universally respected compendium (collection) of knowledge in the form of Vedas, Upanishads and great epics. It provided a suitable atmosphere for a number of religion and religious ideas to flourish, different languages to develop and diverse ideologies to take root. India shelters many religions coming from outside its boundaries. All these, over millennia, interacting with each other have produced a cultural fabric that is unique in its characteristics and exclusively Indian in nature.



OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain the main characteristics of Indian Society;
- explain the diversities in terms of region, language, religion, culture and caste; and
- describe the nature of socio-cultural unity in ancient, medieval and modern India.



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24.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN SOCIETY

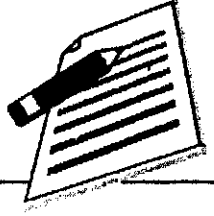
Our society has been projected as a traditional society based on spiritualism, giving less importance to materialistic growth. But this has been only the opinion of others. Today things are changing fast and we are marching ahead towards a strong, secular and modern nation. Undoubtedly the Hindu way of life with its tolerance and non-violent attitude shaped the nation to its present form. There have been impact of many external forces and religions like Islam, Christianity and Western society, but the Indian way of life continues.

The traditional Hindu society believed in ascribed status, it was hierarchical in nature where upward mobility was difficult and slow. The concept of Purusharthas (goals of life) guided the life. They are *dharma* (morality, the path of righteousness, duties of the individual, etc.), *Artha* (pursuit of wealth and well-being), *Kama* (pursuit of bodily desires, particularly sex), and *Moksha* (salvation). The Hindus believed in four Ashrams or 'stages of life' which are related to the above four goals of life. They are *Brahmacharya* (student life), *Grihastha* (the householder's life, earning livelihood and wealth, fulfilling sexual desires and reproducing children), *Vanprastha* (the hermit's life with gradual detachments), and *Sanyas* (renunciation from family and worldly things).

Besides these, there is a notion of 'Rina', i.e. owing debt to the gods, to the sages, to ancestors and to the society. One has to repay these debts through performance of duties. Further there was the doctrine of Karma, which is mainly based on the notion of 'rebirth'. It means one's deeds in the past life influence the present life.

The above aspects are found more in the ideals and less in practice today. Today if we look at tradition, we find certain features are still continuing. They are ritualized way of life, i.e. rituals are observed not in a rigid manner but in a flexible manner. It is not only limited to the Hindu rituals but also extended to the rituals of other communities. The secular doctrine can be found from the fact that all major rituals of all religions have been declared as national holidays. Today Holi, Deepawali, Dussera, Eid, Eid-ul-zuha, Good Friday, Christmas Day, Guru Nanak Jayanti, Mahavir Jayant and Budh Poornima etc. are all occasions of celebrations for all of us. Even these can be compared to Republic Day celebrations and Independence Day celebrations. The point here is that any flexible and modern Indian is not bothered about the rigidity in observance of ritual, but is more interested in enjoying it with the community.

Today India finds a place in the world in every aspect including dance, music, movies, sports, philosophy and astrology etc. Bharatnatyam, Kuchipudi, Kathakali, Odisi, Manipuri, Mohini Attam, Kathak and many other folk dances like Bhangra

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and Garba, etc. have become globalised phenomena.

Yoga and transcendental meditation have a great appeal in the western countries. In fact, Maharishi Yogi has built the first Vedic city in New York. Ayurveda, the science of life and other types of herbal and aromatherapy has influenced the world widely. Thus retaining our Indianess we are marching ahead with a modern outlook. Our modernity is not simply the imitation of the west but is an integration between the indigenous tradition (like the emotional family bond, spiritualism, alternative medicine) with the modern goal-oriented and rational outlook. As many as six Indians have received Noble Prize. They are Rabindra Nath Tagore, Sir C.V.Raman, S. Chandrashekar, Mother Teresa, H.G.Khurana and Amartya Sen. Besides this, several Indians have won Booker's Prize and other international Awards.

24.2 NATURE AND EXTENT OF DIVERSITY

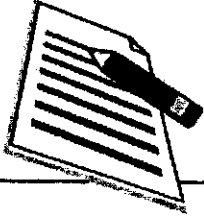
Diversity in India is found in terms of race, religion, language, caste and culture. Sociologists say that Indian unity has been both politico-geographic and cultural in nature. The diversities have remained, but simultaneously provided a mainstream culture. It is estimated that there are 4635 communities found in India. Out of which 751 are scheduled caste communities and 461 are scheduled tribe communities. The highest number of Scheduled castes is found in Uttar Pradesh. Scheduled caste communities are not found in Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Scheduled tribe communities are not found in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Goa and Pondicherry. There is tremendous diversity of communities in living in all the states.

As you already know, the Indus valley civilization is one of the earliest known civilizations of the world, a part of which is now found in Pakistan. With rich material culture it was having, developed variety of art and craft, planned cities with underground drainage system, Port Township, agriculture and religious organisations. It also had a script, which is yet to be deciphered (unreadable).

INTEXT QUESTIONS 24.1

Answer in True or False

1. Indus Valley civilization is partly found in Bangladesh
2. Highest number of Scheduled Caste is found in Uttar Pradesh



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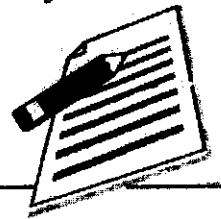
3. In India about 600 Scheduled Tribes are found
4. Highest number of communities in India is found in Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh
5. Indus Valley civilization script has already been read

24.2.1 Religion

Religious diversities are found in India. There are eight major religious communities found in India. Populationwise Hindus are found in majority i.e. about 83 per cent followed by Muslims (11.8 per cent), Christians (2.6 per cent), Sikhs (2 per cent), Buddhists (0.7 per cent), Jains(0.4 per cent), Zoroastrians (0.3 per cent) and Jews (0.1 per cent). Besides these eight religions, some tribal communities have their own religion. They have their own deities and rituals. Out of the eight major religions, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism are indigenous religions, whereas Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Jew came from outside India. All the eight religions are further sub-divided into different sects.

The Hindus worship a wide range of deities. Broadly, there are four types of worshippers: Vaishnav (worshiper of Vishnu), Shaivite (worshiper of Shiva), Shakta (worshiper of Shakti or mother Goddess in different attributes like Kali, Durga etc.) and Smarta (worshiper of all the above three gods). Besides these, the cults of Gurus and saints are widely prevalent among the Hindus (such as Shivanand, Chinmayanand, Anandmayi etc.). Brahmo Samaj and Arya samaj are also a part of Hinduism. In this manner Hinduism provides a broad canvas for all types of believers.

Muslims are divided into two major groups i.e. Sunni and Shia, out of which Sunnis are found in a majority in India. Christians are of two broad denominations: Catholics and Protestants; whereas Buddhism has two divisions: Mahayana and Hinayana which are based on doctrinal differences. Jains are of two types: Digambara (unclothed) and Swetambara (white robed). Both Buddhism and Jainism came into being as protest against the Brahminical supremacy and the caste systems. The Parsis and the Jews in India are very small communities. Parsis live mostly in Maharashtra and Gujarat but have contributed largely into the industrial development of the country (for instance Jamsheджи Nasherbanji Tata, the founder of Tata Group of Companies and the Godrej). The Jews are mainly found in Maharastra and Kerala. Sikhism is based at Punjab. After partition, Sikhs have spread all over the country and their generous tradition of *Gurudwara* and *langar* (free food to all) have become pan-Indic today (*Gurudwaras* are found in almost all towns, cities and big villages throughout India).



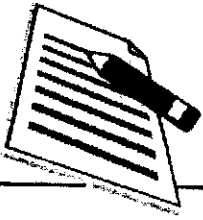
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24.2.2 Language

Linguistic diversities in India are well known. A large number of languages/dialects are spoken in India. There were 544 languages, however, most of them did not have script. At present there are five language families found in India: Andamanese, Austro-Asiatic, Dravidian, Indo-Aryan (and Dardic) and Tibeto-Burman. Sanskrit is one of the oldest and important languages of India. To a greater extent it has influenced almost all-Indian languages. Analysing any modern Indian language one can find a liberal sprinkling of Sanskrit vocabulary. Indian Constitution in its Eighth Schedule included 19 languages, which is used for official purposes. They are Assamese, Bengali, English, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. For official purposes *tribhasi* formula (or three language formula) i.e. Hindi, English and one of the regional languages is followed. Out of all the languages Hindi has been most popularly spoken in India (43 per cent) followed by Bengali, Telegu and Marathi (eight percent each), Tamil & Urdu (six per cent), Gujarati (five per cent), Malayalam, Kannada and Oriya (four per cent each), Punjabi (three per cent) and other languages (Assamese and Kashmiri amounting to one per cent each).

24.2.3 Caste

Caste system is unique in India and originally found among the Hindus. It started with the Varna-Vyavastha during the Vedic period (about 1500 B.C. to 1000 B.C.). There were four varnas: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaish, and Shudra. They were broadly divided into the four strata in terms of their occupations. Purity and pollution have been the main bases of varna vyavastha and it applied to all spheres including occupation, food habits, clothing and language (You will have the details in subsequent chapter). During the Vedic period untouchability was not a phenomenon, it came into being during the later Vedic era (around 1000 B.C.). Later on occupational diversities gave birth to various jatis. There are about 3500 jatis found in India, out of which 751 are Scheduled Caste communities. The Jati system provided a unique system of cooperation through the economic system of *jajmani*. *Jajmani* provided the bases of social structure. It means exchange of goods and services between various jatis. It is based on a patron-client relationship. The patron is known as *Jajman* who used to be a landlord (economically well off). The client is known as *Kamin* (from the service castes). The *Kamin* used to provide services to the *Jajman* and in return was given rewards in terms of kind (food grains, and many other considerations like free residential plot, free food, aid in litigation, use of animal and instruments, etc.). However, *jajmani* system is gradually fading away with the advent of market and monetary economy. Jati system is gradually becoming less rigid in the urban areas in terms of its norms.



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INTEXT QUESTIONS 24.2

1. How many world religions are found in India?

2. Why Hindus are called a majority community?

3. How many languages are found in the eighth schedule of the constitution?

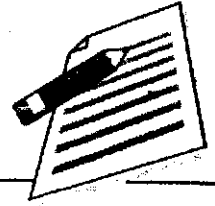
4. How many Varnas are found in India?

5. What is *jajmani* system?

24.3 HISTORY AND TRADITION OF UNITY

Indian society in ancient, medieval and modern times always exhibited an underlying unity that created a composite culture, which is decisively pan-Indian in nature. It produced a mainstream culture, which rulers in different periods of time never interfered particularly in their internal dynamics. The cultural system has always maintained its own status independent of the political system. Various kingdoms were frequently involved in wars at the regional level, but the aspect of cultural unity at the country level remained intact. The notion of Chakravarti Raja and Aswamedhayagna is indicative of political unity. Many kings extended their empires to cover large geographical territories. Kaniska, Kharavela, Ashoka and Samudragupta were powerful monarchs who controlled extensive empires. Ashoka's greatness is well known. He ruled from Pataliputra. He conquered Kalinga. The bloodshed in the Kalinga war turned him into a benign Buddhist. The kingdoms in the south such as Cholas, Chera, Pandya Rastrakuta, Chalukya, Pallava, Vijay Nagar and the Sunga, Satvahana, Kushan, Gupta, and Vakatakas in the north, worked towards the promotion of regional cultures. Most of them were great builders. Due to their patronage, temple architecture reached to glorious heights in South India.

Later in the medieval times, Islam made its inroads into the Indian culture. Bengal, Lucknow and Hyderabad, besides many other places, provide testimony of



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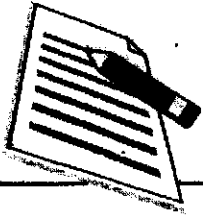
integration of Islamic cultures and traditions into the Indian culture. Islam does not believe in idol worship. It is a monotheistic and non-hierarchical religion. The impact of Islam on Hindu traditions has been analysed in three stages: (a) During the Muslim rule, (b) During the British rule upto 1930, and (c) Between 1930-1947. In the first phase the Muslim rulers destroyed the Hindu temples and tried to spread Islam and converted the Hindus. This was a period marked by conflict and tension as well as some type of cultural adaptation. For e.g. Sufism influenced the Hindus. Akbar's Din-e-Ilahi was a mixture of many religions, which promoted national integration. During the British rule several reforms are found which largely influenced the Hindus. Islam lost its liberal tendencies and gradually the Islamic tradition was highly politicized. Ultimately in the third phase, i.e. during the fag end of freedom movement, sharp divisions were drawn between the two religions, which gave rise to the birth of a separate Islamic nation i.e. Pakistan.

In the modern period, British rule brought in the western culture into India. Western institutions like banking system, administration, military organization and modern medicine, etc. brought in several changes. The western education system broadened the outlook particularly the rational and secular spirits in the people. The western science and technology, transport and communication influence the people to raise their style of life in terms of material development. A sense of entrepreneurship and development paved the way for India to become an industrialized nation. The democratic form of government, adult suffrage and human rights, etc. gave India opportunities to face the challenges of the world. In this manner through out ancient, medieval and modern times cultural unity was of paramount importance.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 24.3

Fill in the blanks with appropriate words from the brackets:

1. The Indian rulers did not interfere in the _____ sphere (cultural, religious, psychological).
2. Ashoka conquered _____ (Pataliputra, Kalinga, Vijay Nagar)
3. The modern educational system in India has the impact of _____ (Muslim, British, French).
4. The Chola, Chera and the Pandyas belong to _____ part of India (South, East, West, North).



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24.4 PROCESS OF UNITY

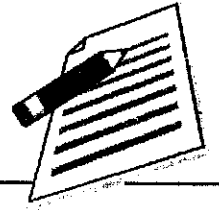
The process of unity in India can be viewed from two angles: (a) unity inherent, and (b) unity threatened. The latter is found largely after the partition of the country in 1947 into India and Pakistan. Communal forces, fundamentalists and vested interest have strengthened this process. Communalism is the result of inter-community intolerance and suspicion. Such conflicting situations are not conducive to the nation building process. They called for mass awareness programmes and proper educational programmes.

On the other hand unity has been the main focus of the nation building process. The idea of unity is attached to concepts like the “melting pot”, “cultural mosaic” and “plural society”. The above three concepts came from the western thinking. Melting pot indicates autonomous cultures juxtaposed in a particular area and have autonomy but melt into a single national culture. In other words, they melt into a composite whole in a “pot” that symbolizes the nation. It means different cultures sink their differences and project a single identity, with a common language (this concept can not be applied to the Indian situation where diversities persist.). The concept of cultural mosaic is woven around the idea of coexistence and projecting a single national identity despite cultural differences. This can be very well applied to India. But the critics point out that India is not a cultural mosaic since it has not produced a mainstream culture. Finally the concept of plural society indicates pluralism in all primordial (fundamental) aspects like food habits, culture, dress pattern, language, region and religion, yet a shared political identity. However, India is only integrated politically and not otherwise, can not be accepted. This is the thinking of the westerners.

The reality as perceived by Indians is that India has a distinct national identity in spite of its composite culture. The process of integration tells us for a larger goal, i.e. attaining nationhood, various cultures in spite of autonomy integrate into a composite whole. The composite whole projects the Indian Mainstream Culture, symbolically resembling a spread out banyan tree whose branches are named as the Bengali culture, Oriya culture, South Indian culture and Awadhi culture etc.

Various religions have coexisted in India peacefully for centuries together. Village studies by prominent sociologists show that in village India the Muslims are a part of the well-knit socio-economic system. The instance of Mool Dwaraka can be cited here.

In Mool Dwarka (in Gujarat), one of the four chief religious centres of Hindus, five graves are found. The Muslim regard them as *panch pirs* (five saints) and offer *green chadar* (shawl) and the Hindus regard them as *panch bir* (five warriors) and offer *yellow chadar*.



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There are several local Muslim deities, which have both Hindu and Muslim followers. Examples of such deities are Saiyad Baba in old Delhi, Deva Sharif in Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh and Ajmer Sharif in Rajasthan etc.

The widely accepted traditions that great religious merit accrue out of a pilgrimage made on foot covering the four *Dhams* located in four directions of the country (Badrinath in Uttarakhand in north, Dwarka in Gujarat in west, Rameswaram in Tamilnadu in south, and Puri in Orissa in east) project the oneness of the great land mass now called India or Bharat. The twelve Shiva lingas (Jyotirlingas) are distributed throughout India. Other prominent centres like Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, Kamakhya in Assam, Gaya in Bihar, Vaishnav Devi in Jammu, Pushkar in Rajasthan, attracting people from every corner of the country, personify the integration process. Satya Sai Baba in Puttapurthy, Sai Baba of Shirdi, Maharashtra, Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry have become the rallying point of Indians in spite of the differences of religion, language and region. The architectural wonders such as Taj Mahal of Agra, Jama Masjid, and Lal Quila of Delhi, Charminar of Hyderabad, Bada Imambara of Lucknow draw a large number of visitors from all walks of life. In this manner, India's unity is not only politico-geographic, but also cultural in nature.

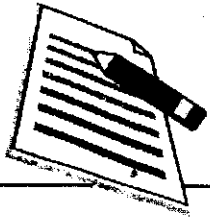
INTEXT QUESTIONS 24.4

Match the following:

- | | |
|------------------|----------------|
| (i) Ajmer Sharif | Lucknow |
| (ii) Imambara | Orissa |
| (iii) Sindi | Andhra Pradesh |
| (iv) Kanyakumari | Rajasthan |
| (v) Puri | Tamilnadu |

WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- In this lesson you have learnt about unity and diversity of a great nation called India.
- Despite several diversities in term of religion, language, culture, caste, and communities, India has maintained unity in the past, present as well as will continue to be united in the future.



Notes

- The history shows that various kingdoms have always promoted and maintained this processes of unity by creating a rich architectural and cultural heritage.
- Today our varieties of cultures and language maintain their identities within the all-India framework.
- The whole world has started recognizing the progress of India in various fields, not by imitating the west but by retaining our Indianness.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. What is meant by unity in diversity?
2. Discuss the diversities found in India in terms of religion.
3. Describe briefly the concept of melting pot.
4. Discuss the nature of coexistence of various communities with examples.
5. How unity is maintained in India?



ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

- 24.1 (i) False (ii) True (iii) False
(iv) True (v) False
- 24.2 (i) Eight
(ii) 83% people in India are Hindu
(iii) Eighteen
(iv) Four
(v) Exchange of goods & services between various jatis.
- 24.3 (i) Cultural (ii) Kalinga
(iii) British (iv) South
- 24.4 (i) Rajasthan (ii) Lucknow
(iii) Andhra Pradesh (iv) Tamilnadu
(v) Orissa