

Unity in Diversity

Lesson No.	Title	Activity
24	Unity in Diversity	List out various elements of diversities found in Indian Society.

Summary

Indian society has been shaped by the thought of several thinkers. These thinkers have made a huge contribution to our understanding of Indian society over the ages. They have made invaluable contribution to the culture of India.

Characteristics of Indian Society

- Common projection of Indian society is that of being a spiritual society which gives less importance to materialistic growth. It is evident that the Hindu way of life, with tolerance and non-violence as guiding principles have shaped India as a nation in its present form.
- India (Ancient traditional Hindu society) produced a universally respected compendium (collection) of knowledge in the form of Vedas, Upanishads and great epics. 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). These could be considered as the purpose of human life according to traditional Hindu thought.
- The Hindus believed in four Ashrams or 'stages of life' which are related to the four goals of life. They are Brahmacharya (student life), Grihastha (the householder's life, 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).
- 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. Furthermore, 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.
- Today things are changing fast and we are marching ahead towards a strong, secular and modern nation. 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.
- Today India finds a place in the world in every aspect including dance, music, Movies, sports, philosophy and astrology etc. Yoga and transcendental meditation have a great appeal in the western countries. Ayurveda has influenced the world.

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. (Of which 751 SC and 461 ST).
- ✚ India is a vast country and from north to south and west to east various cultures have amalgamated promoting cultural pluralism amidst cultural diversity. The composition of Indian society reflects on the various diversities existing in India. The bulk of Indian Population represents racial admixture in varying degrees. 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.

Religious Composition and Diversity

- ✚ Indian society is divided into large number of religious communities. Broadly there are seven major religions namely Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism. All these religions are further divided into various sects.
- ✚ Hinduism has been an old religion and is divided into various sects and cults. Hinduism is basically divided into Shaivite (worshippers of Lord Shiva), Vaishnavite (Worshippers of Lord Vishnu), Shakta (worshippers of Shakti or Mother Goddess in different incarnations like Durga, Kali, Parvati etc. and Smarta (worshippers of all the three Gods). Moreover, Hindu religion has accommodated many Gurus, saints and their followers. Therefore, Hinduism with its diverse cults, sects, rituals and doctrinal differences accommodates many believers.
- ✚ Muslims are divided into two major groups; Sunnis and Shias out of which Sunnis have a larger population than Shias. Indian Christians are divided into Catholics and Protestants; whereas Buddhism also is divided into two Mahayana and Hinayana based on differences in religious doctrines. The Jains in India are divided into Digambara (unclothed) and Svetambara (white robed). The Jains do not practise untouchability and no restrictions are observed with regard to commensality and social intercourse. However, both Buddhism and Jainism came as a protest against the Brahminical social order and the superior position ascribed to Brahmins.
- ✚ Sikhism is a synthesising religion and majority of Sikhs are found in Punjab. But after partition there has been large scale migration and now the Sikhs are found almost everywhere in India and even in other countries like U.K and U.S. Sikh places of worship, Gurudwaras are found everywhere in the country. The Parsis and Jews in India are small religious communities who have contributed a lot towards the industrial development of India. (For example, Jamshedji Tata of Tata Motors). The Parsis are mostly found in Mumbai and the Jews were found in Kerala and Maharashtra.

Linguistic Diversity in India

- ✚ India has always been a multi-lingual country. Language has also been an important source of diversity as well as unity in India. India has always been a multi-lingual country. Language has also been an important source of diversity as well as unity in India. The Constitution of India, in its 8th Schedule recognizes 22 official languages with English as an important associate language. All the major languages have different regional variations and dialects'
- ✚ 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.
- ✚ Tribhasi formula (three language formula) i.e., Hindi, English and one of the regional languages is usually followed for official purposes.
- ✚ 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).

Diversity on the basis of 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 are four Varnas: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudras. They are divided into four stratas in terms of their occupations. Purity and pollution are the main basis of Varna Vyavastha and it applies to all spheres including occupation, food habits and clothing etc.
- ✚ During the Vedic period untouchability was not a phenomenon, it came into being during the later Vedic era (around 1000 BC.).
- ✚ Later on, occupational diversities gave birth to various jatis. There are about 3500 jatis found in India. The Jati system provided a unique system of cooperation through the economic system of Jajmani. 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). It is based on a patron-client relationship. Jajmani system is gradually fading away with the advent of market and monetary economy

History and Tradition of Unity in India

- ✚ The cultural system has always maintained its own status independent of the political system. 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.
- ✚ Various kingdoms were frequently involved in wars at the regional level, but the aspect of cultural unity at the country level remained intact. Notion of Chakravarti Raja and Aswamedha yagna is indicative of political unity. Ashoka's greatness is well known as a unifier of the subcontinent politically.
- ✚ Integration of Islamic cultures and traditions into the Indian culture were also found in many places including Bengal, Lucknow and Hyderabad.
- ✚ British rule brought in the western culture into India. The western education system broadened the outlook of the people. 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. are some contributions of the British.
- ✚ In this manner throughout ancient, medieval and modern times cultural unity was of paramount importance

Process of Unity

- ✚ Unity in India can be viewed from two angles:
 - unity inherent
 - unity threatened
- ✚ The idea of unity is attached to concepts like the “melting pot”, “cultural mosaic” and “plural society”.

Melting pot

•It indicates autonomous cultures 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

Cultural Mosaic

•The concept of cultural mosaic is woven around the idea of coexistence and projecting a single national identity despite cultural differences.

Plural Society

The concept of plural society indicates pluralism in all fundamental aspects like food habits, culture, dress pattern, language, region and religion, yet a shared political identity

- ✚ The Indian Mainstream Culture symbolically resembling a spread-out banyan tree can represent its branches 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 rural India the Muslims are a part of the well-knit socio- economic system. Many examples of unity amongst religions can be seen in India.
- ✚ There are several local Muslim deities, which have both Hindu and Muslim followers. Examples of such deities are Saiyyad Baba in old Delhi, and Ajmer Sharif in Rajasthan etc.
- ✚ The architectural wonders such as Taj Mahal of Agra, Jama Masjid and Lal Quila of Delhi and Charminar of Hyderabad draw a large number of visitors from all walks of life.
- ✚ India’s unity is not only politico- geographic, but also cultural in nature

Evaluate Yourself

1. Explain the features of Linguistic diversity found in India?
2. Discuss the diversities found in India in terms of religion.
3. Explain how unity is maintained in India? 7
4. Discuss the main characteristics of Indian Society.
5. Briefly describe the diversities in terms of caste found in Indian society.