UNIT 1: INDIAN SOCIETY : UNITY IN DIVERSITY

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1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- understand the concept of society and culture
- explain the characteristics of Indian society and culture
- discuss the concepts of Unity and Diversity
- discuss the Racial, Religious & Linguistic composition of Indian society
- explain the essence of Unity in Diversity in Indian society and culture

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with the Indian society and culture, its diversities and unity. While going to discuss various characteristics of Indian society and culture, an attempt has been undertaken to define some of the basic concepts and issues we observe in day to day life.

In the very first section of this unit, the meaning and concept of society and culture have been defined briefly. How Indian society has evolved over time has also been discussed.

The second section highlights on some important characteristics of Indian society and culture. While doing so, the concept of diversity has been discussed. For a detailed treatment, focus has been given on geographical, racial, religious and linguistic diversities in India.

The third section discusses the concepts of unity and bonds of unity that bind such a heterogeneous cultural entity of Indian society.

1.3 SOCIETY & CULTURE

We often come across the words society and culture in our day to day life. However, these are not mere words, rather are concepts and carry their own precise meaning. Let us have clear understanding of these two very basic concepts in the study of sociology.

1.3.1 Meaning and definition

The term 'Society' has been derived from the Latin word *socius*, meaning thereby companionship or friendship. According to Morris Ginsberg, 'a society is a collection of individuals united by certain relations or mode of behavior which mark them off from others who do not enter into these relations or who differ from them in behavior'. Thus society is a basic need of human for his/her living, working and enjoying life. Aristotle rightly said, 'man is a social animal'. Thus society is essential for human life to survive and evolve.

Culture is a unique trait of human society. It is a broad concept which includes within it the way of life; our behavior, philosophy, ethics, morals, manners, customs, tradition, religion, language and all the activities associated with economy, politics and all other types of activities.While animals are born and live in natural environment, humans on the other hand are born, brought up, live and evolve in a cultural environment. According to Edward B. Tylore culture is ' that complete whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'.

Society and culture are inseparable. Study of any society necessarily involves the study of the culture of that society. Thus culture and society go together.

1.3.2 The Indian Society and Culture

India is one of the most ancient, extensive, varied as well as continuously evolving society in the world. Extensive archeological evidences obtained from excavation at Mohenjodaro in 1922 has brought to light that there existed a highly sophisticated and urbanized culture known as Harappan civilization, also termed *Indus Valley Civilization* in the North Western part of Indian subcontinent, which dates back to around 2600-2000 BC, more than 5000 years old. It was spread over a vast area of 1600 km from east to west and 1100 km from north to south in the present day India and Pakistan. This exceeds the area occupied by other contemporary civilization like the Egyptian and Mesopotamian. Indian society has witnessed waves of new people and culture which has enriched and contributed to the pluralism in Indian culture and tradition. Throughout the ages from ancient to present day while some came into contact with it temporarily, others settled down permanently; who brought with them new traditions, culture and values only to make Indian society flourish. India has over periods witnessed waves

of migration starting from the Greeks, Aryans,Kushans,Arabs, Persian, Turkish, as well as from Burma and other South East Asian countries; until recently the British, French, Dutch, Danes and the Portuguese.

In the process of Evolution, Indian society has acquired a composite culture characterized by diversified patterns. The present day Indian culture is the result of cultural contact, cultural diffusion, cultural conflict, accommodation, assimilation, and integration that has taken place over the years.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1 : Define society and culture.

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Q 2 : What is the age of Indian society and cultural heritage?]

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1.4 UNITY &DIVERSITY

In this section we shall try to understand the meaning and concept of unity and diversity. A part from that we shall also learn about the different forms of diversity that exists in Indian Society.

1.4.1 Meaning and concept of Unity

According to Merriam Webster dictionary, the term unity means ‘the quality or the state of not being multiple’. From a sociological perspective, it is the feeling of oneness, a state of being in full mutual agreement. Unity gives rise to integration in the society.

It is that bond which holds the members of the society together, with a feeling of we-ness.

An often related term with unity is uniformity. However, there is difference between unity and uniformity. Uniformity consider similarity as prerequisite criteria while it is not so for unity. Uniformity may give rise to unity but not necessarily vice versa. This type of unity, arising out of uniformity is termed as ***mechanical solidarity*** by Durkheim. Such a unity is often observed in case of tribal and traditional societies. Members of such society identify themselves belonging to the same race, religion, customs, traditions, so on and so forth. At the same time, unity may also form out of differences. Such a type of unity was termed as ***organic solidarity,***which we observed in the modern societies.

1.4.2 Meaning and concepts of Diversity

The dictionary meaning of diversity is differences or variety. In Sociological perspective, this diversity or difference is always in terms of people and their society and culture. This diversity however is different from mere differences between two persons; it is rather a collective difference between two or more group of people. Thus, two groups may differ from each other in terms of race, religion, language, caste, social and economic status, way of lifestyle so on and so forth. These differences thus gives rise to diversity in the society, which also is collective in nature. Thus diversity is opposite to uniformity.

1.4.3 Forms of Diversity in India

Plurality and multiplicity characterizes Indian society and culture. India witnesses endless diversity, in terms of its diverse geography, geological structure, climate, flora & fauna, races, religions, languages and dialects, music, arts, craft, customs, tradition and what not. As mentioned earlier, the cultural diversity in India owes primarily to its peculiar geographic location within the

Indian subcontinent and also to the successive waves of people and culture who came here only to enrich her. However, there is something unique about the vast diversity that exist in the Indian society and culture, which has always been challenging and at the same time very inspiring and interesting topic of study and research among different branches of humanities and social sciences. Underneath this unique diversity lies the strong foundation of the Indian society and culture, which has not only survived but prospered over the last 5000 years or more. Thus India has rightly been honored as the “mini world”, the “epitome of the world” and the “ethnological museum”.

Let us now study in detail about some of the most significant diversities that India is known for.

1.4.3.1 Geo-physical Diversity

India is a vast country covering a total geographical area 3,287,240 sq. km, including 120,849 sq. km. under illegal occupation of Pakistan and China. According to the census reports of Indian Census 2011, the population of India is 1,210,854,977 with 623, 724, 248 males and 586,469, 174 females. India is behind only to China, with an estimation of 1.35 billion persons in terms its total population, while ranks 7th in terms of its geographical area. Thus with only 2.4% of the world’s geographical area, India supports and sustains 17% of the world population. According to an estimation, by 2050, India will surpass China in total population, thus becoming the most populous country on the planet.

Geographically India is a diverse country. From North to South and East to West, India extends for 3214 km and 2933 km respectively. India is home to the world’s oldest mountain Aravali and at the same time to the youngest mountain Himalayas. Within the periphery of India lies the Great Thar desert, vast alluvial plains of Ganga-Brahmaputra and other networks of rivers, the wettest place on the earth Mawsynram and Cherrapunji, the cold desert of

Ladakh, and it is also a home to the world's 3rd highest peak Kanchanjangha. Varied geographical settings in India has given rise to varied climatic condition, which has made the country one of the richest biodiversity hotspot on the earth.

Demographically India is one of the most diverse country in the world. Owing to its unique geographical characteristics, the people and their culture has also got influenced. There are such hamlets in India, which are surprisingly cutoff from the so called mainstream India in terms of their accessibility. Most of the interior mountainous and hilly tracks of High Himalayas as well as those in the North Eastern India; the dense and inaccessible forest areas in the heartland of India owing to their remoteness has given rise to distinctly different social and cultural setup in the societies of those people living there. The geographical inaccessibility and uniqueness has thus given rise to distinctive yet diverse cultural practices among different groups of people which includes preaching of different religions, festivals, belief, dialects, customs, tradition, dress,arts & crafts, dance, music,food habit, housing etc. Hence, the geography of the country has added to the diversity in India.

1.4.3.2 Racial Diversity

As mentioned earlier, India has greatly attracted waves of migration from all over the globe since time immemorial. This is the primary reason behind absence of a uniform racial composition of its inhabitants. India has rightly been termed as 'melting pot' of races and tribes. Race can be defined as superficial physical differences that a particular society considers significant. The concept of race may be based on the place from where the members originally belongs to (Mongolia and the Caucus Mountains, for instance) or denoted skin tones (black, white, yellow, and red, for example).

Various scholars have put forwarded their own schemes of racial classification of the Indian people. Here we are going to discuss

only two such schemes of racial classification for the Indian population, put forward by Risley(1915) and Guha (1931).

Sir Herbert Risley is of the first and foremost to come up with a racial classification for Indian population on a scientific basis. He recognized three principal racial types in India, viz., the Dravidian, the Indo-Aryan and the Mongoloid. According to him, there is wide mixing of these three primary races among each other giving rise to varying racial complexion of the people. Thus Risley identified seven different 'physical types' in Indian population as follows:

- **The Indo-Aryan Type:** Predominantly living in North West Indian provinces with tall, fair complexion, dark eyes, growth of hair on body and face luxuriantly with predominantly long head and narrow & long nose.
- **The Dravidian Type:** The inhabitants of the southern plateau regions of India with short or below medium stature, very dark complexion, plentiful hair with occasional curling tendency, dark eyes, long head and a very broad nose.
- **The Mongoloid Type:** They mostly distributed along the Himalayas and North Eastern hills with broad head, short or below average stature, fine to broad nose and flat face with oblique eyelids.
- **The Aryo-Dravidian Type:** They are in fact intermixing of the Aryans and the Dravidians, residing mostly in the Ganga plain of North India with medium stature, light brown to black complexion and medium to broad nose forms.
- **The Mongola-Dravidian or Bengali Type:** They are mixture of Dravidian and Mongoloid elements, residing in Eastern Indian provinces of Bengal and Odissa characterised by medium stature, broad and round heads, dark complexion, plentiful hair on face and medium nose with the tendency towards flatness.
- **The Scytho-Dravidian Type:** They are the mixture of Scythians and the Dravidians inhabiting in the Western part of India with low to medium stature, fair complexion, broader head, fine but not long nose and rather scanty hair on face and body.

- **The Turko-Iranian Type:** They mostly belongs to the former North Western Frontier Provinces of British India.

One of the most authoritative and widely accepted racial classification of Indian population is that by B.S. Guha. Guha has identified six major racial groups in India:

- **The Negrito:** They are the people living in confined pockets in the South, the Kadar, Andamanese, AngamiNagas and the Bagadis of Rajmahal Hills in Bihar. The pople of this racial group are short in stature, with black complexion, black woolly lips and broad nose.
- **The Proto-Austroloid:** They reside in the interior of India and are short to medium in stature, long and high head with small and broad nose form. They are generally called as anas, das,dasyu and nishad by the Indo-Aryans, which are in fact, derogatory terms.
- **Mongoloid:** They are subdivided into Paleo Mongoloid, those living in the North Eastern hills and plains and the Tibeto Mongoloid, living in Bhutan and Sikkim.
- **Mediterranean:** They are the people from Dravidian group. They have further been divided into three sub catagories-
  - **Paleo Mediterranean-** People living in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala with medium height, dark skin tone and slight stature.
  - **Primarily Mediterranean-** People from Punjab, with fair skin colour.
  - **Oriental Mediterranean-** Living in the states of UP, Rajasthan and Punjab; with long nose and fair skin.
- **Western Brachycephals:** They are further classified into the following:
  - Alpinoid- North and Western India
  - Dinaric- Bengal and Odissa
  - Armenoid- the Persis
- **Nordic:** They resemble the Aryans with fair skin, medium to long head, narrow nose form and tall stature.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What do you understand by unity and diversity?

Q 4: Define race.

Q 5: According to B. S. Guha, number of racial group in India are-

i). Theee

ii). Four

iii). Five

iv). Six

1.4.3.3 Religious Diversity

India is a country characterized by religious pluralism. The very constitution of India recognizes itself as a secular country where anyone has the fundamental right to preach any religion of his or her choice. At the same time, religious tolerance is the very basic foundation of Indian secularism. The very idea of religious pluralism in India is based on the belief that all the religions are equally good and that they all lead to the same goal of realization of god.

India is home to almost all the major religions in the world such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and so on. Migration of people with diverse faith and religion over the ages have brought with them their own religion, thus adding to religious plurality in India. There have been various religious movements and reforms in India over periods, which is manifested in such religious cults as Vaishnavite, Sufism, Bahai etc. India is also home to numerous tribes who follow animism. Diversity of religious faith, tolerance and mutual respect & coexistence is thus an important characteristic of Indian Society. Given below is the data on religion in India, as per the census of India report, 2011.

All Religion	100.00%	121 Crores
Hindu	79.80%	96.62 Crores
Muslim	14.23%	17.22 Crores
Christian	2.30%	2.78 Crores
Sikh	1.72%	2.08 Crores
Buddhist	0.70%	84.43 Lakhs
Jain	0.37%	44.52 Lakhs
Other Religion	0.66%	79.38 Lakhs
Not Stated	0.24%	28.67 Lakhs

Table 1.1 Data on Religion in India (Census of India, 2011)

Let us now have a look into the major religions in India.

- **Hinduism :** It is the dominant religion in India, which is followed by more than 80% of the population in India. It is not easy to define the basic principle of Hinduism, which is perhaps, the most diversified religion in terms of its theoretical premises and practical expressions. There is no set of defined 'Hindu religious traits'. Hinduism, unlike majority of the other religions, do not have a specific founder, nor has a particular holy book as its basic spiritual guide. While on one hand, idol of numerous god and goddesses are worshiped by many, at the same time, some only preach and follow the path of 'realization of the ultimate truth', without assigning any form whatsoever. Some also worship spirits, trees, animals, even rocks, mountains, rivers, lakes and various natural phenomenon such as the sun, moon, heavenly bodies, thunder, rain, wind etc. One of the characteristics of Hinduism is the celebration of numerous festivals and rituals. Hindu beliefs rest on such faith as the existence of a supreme creator, preserver and destroyer, existence of Soul or *aatma,* which is beyond the cycle of birth and death, concept of rebirth, *karma fal, paap and punya*etc. The Hindus consider Vedas, Purans, Sastras, Upanishadas, Mahabharat, Ramayana as well as Bhagwad Gita as some of the sacred and holy texts.

- **Islam :** Islam arrived in India along with the traders from Arab during 7th century AD. The followers of Islam are also known as *muslims*, who believe in the existence one god (monotheist) and also consider religion as the matrix and world view within which all the life activities should take place.Every muslim believes in following and performing the five rites which are; only one god (*tawheed*), canonical prayer (*namaaz*), fasting (*roja*), charity (*zakat*) and holy pilgrimage to Macca (*haj*). The Muslims believe the holy book *Koran* to be the words of god, as revealed to Prophet Mohammad through the angel Gabriel (Jibraal). They follow *Sharit*(divine law) and consider life to be governed by the *Sharia* from cradle to grave. According to Census of India, 2011, the percentage of muslims to the total population in India accounts for 14.2%
- **Christianity :** Christianity is considered to have arrived to India in different phases. According to the Syrian Christian tradition, Apostle Thomas, one of the 12 Jesus's original disciples, came to India, to the vicinity of Coachin in 52 AD. Arrival of Christian Missionaries during the early phases of colonization has brought Christianity to India in later period, wherein, the missionaries spread the messages of Christianity specially to those marginalized and peripheral tribal and other groups in the hinterlands. The Christians believe in Jesus Christ as the messenger of god, active service and love for the neighbour. They consider the Bible as the holy text. Christian accounts for 2.3% of the total population in India (Census of India, 2011).
- **Sikhism :** Sikhism emerged during the early 16th century in the Punjab region, spread both in present day India and Pakistan. The founder of Sikhism was Guru Nanak Dev, who was a social and religious reformer. Sikhism was in fact a religious movement or reform of the Hindu belief and faiths, against the ills of caste system in the latter. In Sikhism, there are Gurus, who are worshiped as the teacher or saint. The ten legendary Guru in Sikhism are mentioned below-

- Guru Nanak DevJi - Guru from 1469 to 1539
- Guru AngadDevJi - Guru from 1539 to 1552
- Guru Amar Das Sahib Ji - Guru from 1552 to 1574
- Guru Ram Das Sahib Ji - Guru from 1574 to 1581
- Guru ArjanDevJi - Guru from 1581 to 1606
- Guru HarGobind Sahib Ji - - Guru from 1606 to 1644
- Guru HarRai Sahib Ji - Guru from 1644 to 1661
- Guru HarKrishan Sahib Ji - Guru from 1661 to 1664
- Guru TeghBahadur Sahib Ji - Guru from 1665 to 1675
- Guru Gobind Singh Sahib Ji - Guru from 1675 to 1708
- Guru Granth Sahib Ji - Guru from 1708 to eternity

Sikhism advocate monotheism. Guru Granth Sahib is considered the holy book by the Sikhs, teachings of the Gurus are incorporated in it and is considered also as the last Guru till eternity. The place of worship in Sikhism is known as Gurudwara. The Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab is considered the holiest among the Sikh shrines. Guru Govind Singh created a new brotherhood of Sikhs called *Khalsa,* meaning the pure ones. The member of the new brotherhood were instructed to wear five articles of faith (the five Ks)- *Kesh* (uncut hair), *Kangha* (a wooden brush for the hair), *Kara* (a metal bracelet), *Kachera* (a type of undergarment) and *Kirpan* (a dagger); the men took the name *Singh (lion)* and the women *Kaur* (princes).

- **Jainism** :Jainism too emerged as a religious reform movement and a separate religious tradition against some of the corrupt interpretation in Hinduism around 6th century BC. The Jain religious philosophy is based on the belief that refusal of the worldly desires through self-conquest by mean of right conduct, right faith and right knowledge leads one to perfect wisdom. The Jains adhere to five-fold discipline of non-violence, truth, honesty, sexual purity and indifference to material gain. Fasting and austerity is considered essential for self-purification.

Jains worship twenty four Tirthankaras, 'crossing-makers', transcended from the material world to the spiritual realm, from bondage to freedom in life. The first Tirthankara was Rishabha and Mahavira was the twenty forth. Jainism has two sects- the *Swetambar* and the *Digambara*. The third lesser known sect is *Sthankvasi*.

- **Budhism :** Buddhism too emerged around the same time that of Jainism, during 6th century BC, with the teaching of Gautam Buddha. Followers of Buddhism believes in three doctrines, i.e., Buddha- the enlightened teacher, Dhamma- the teaching given by the teacher and Sangha- the follower of dhamma. According to Buddhist philosophy, there is suffering in life and the cause of such suffering is desire which can be removed by detachment. There is noble eight fold path, that the Buddhist follow to liberate themselves from sufferings- right view, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right meditation. This noble path, they believe leads to *Nirvana,* a transcend state in which there is no suffering, no desire nor sense of self; thus one is liberated from karma and also cycle of birth and death. Buddhism has two sects; *Hinayana* and *Mahayana.*
- **Zoroastrianism :** The Zoroastrians entered India in the tenth century from Iran and settled mostly in Gujrat and Bombay (Mumbai). They are popularly known as the *Parsis.* Zarathustra was the founder of this religion in Iran, some 6000 years before present. They believe in the dualistic philosophy of the existence of opposing power of good and evil. They have distinct dress and also have few houses of worship. *ZendaAvesta*is the holy book of the Parsis. They recite hymns from the religious text five times a day before fire, which they symbolizes to be the realm of truth, righteousness and order.
- **Judaism :** The followers of Judaism are known popularly as the Jewish. It is an ancient monotheistic religion with the *Torah* as its holy book. The three main Jewish communities in India are those of Bene Israel, Kerala Jews and the Baghdadi Jews.

In addition to these major religions, India is also the home to numerous religious cults, follower of which have their own set of belief and rituals, being part of a major religion, but not into the mainstream. Some of the major religious cults in India are: Bhakti, Shakti, Natha, Skanda, Yogini, Arya Samajis, Brahma Samajis, KabirPanthis, DaduPanthis, Parinami, Sufism, Vaishnavites etc.

1.4.3.4 Linguistic Diversity

India is a multilingual country. The Peoples Linguistic Survey of India in their baseline survey has identified 780 distinct languages and 66 different scripts. As per the Census of India 2011, there are 122 languages in India with a speaking population of 10000 and more in each. According to the report, 250 languages have died over the past 50 years in India. The constitution of India has recognized 22 scheduled languages. While Hindi is spoken by as many as 400 million people in India, there is a language in Tripura, known as *Chaimal,* which is spoken by only 5 people. In Arunachal Pradesh, the people speak 66 different languages while in Bengal, there are 9 different scripts with 38 languages spoken by the people living there. Thus India is a home to innumerable languages and dialects which contributes to the Linguistic diversity of India



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6 : Whenand how did Islamism came to India.

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Q 7: What are the five Ks in Sikhism?

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Q 8: What do you understand by Monotheism?

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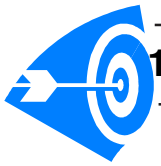
1.5 UNITY IN DIVERSITY

From the ongoing discussion, we now know that the Indian society as a whole is one of the most diverse in terms of its geography, people, religion as well as language. However, despite so much of differences, the Indian society and culture has not only survived a long history of more than 5000 years, but has also evolved to prosperity. Diversity in India is a unique phenomenon and a matter of study and research among the scholars from different branches of social sciences. There exists a rather special kind of unity within this vast diversity. Let us have an example here. People, society and culture in North East are completely different from those living in Jammu Kashmir or say in Gujrat. Their language is different, so is their tradition, customs, religion, belief etc., and differ from one another. However, if we consider the preachers of Hinduism from these regions, they feel and share a common bond of brotherhood and have age old interaction through pilgrimage to each other's places. At the same time, although 38 different languages are spoken in Bengal alone, but all the people living within its periphery identify as one; affinity towards Bengali language, shares common food habit, common literature, art and music and ethinicity. English as the official international language has also united the whole nation, especially thorough the spread of modern education system. Spirituality, secularism and religious tolerance and respect to each other's sentiment and belief has facilitated the Indian society to become a coexisting religious pluralist society. Various religious movements have also added to this cause. Akbar the Great, for example, had introduced a new cult called *Din-e-Illahi* meaning 'Divine Faith' combining teachings from Hinduism, Islam, Jainism and Zorastorianism. Sankardev in Assam propounded *Ek Saran Nam Dharma,* whose disciples were both Hindu, Muslims as well as belonging to numerous tribal and non-tribal groups all across the places. Hence it can be summarized that there are both diversity and unity in Indian society and culture however, this diversity itself lies within an inherent unity in the society. Thus, diversity in India is like different parts of one whole.



1.6 LET US SUM UP

- India is one of the oldest and most extensive society and culture existing since last 5000 years and more.
- Society is like a pack of people sharing some common traits.
- Culture is the way how a society live.
- India has a very diverse society and culture in terms of its geography, race, religion, and language.
- Unity in diversity is a significant characteristic of Indian society and culture.



1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No. 1: According to Morris Ginsberg, 'a society is a collection of individuals united by certain relations or mode of behavior which mark them off from others who do not enter into these relations or who differ from them in behavior'.

According to Edward B. Tylore culture is ' that complete whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'.

Ans to Q No. 2: The Indian society and culture dates back to 2600-2000 BC, more than 5000 years old from the time of Indus Valley Civilization.

Ans to Q No. 3: Unity can be defined as the feeling of one-ness or we-ness among all the members of any society.

Diversity on the other hand, is all the differences in terms of culture in a society.

Ans to Q No. 4: A race may be defined as a division or group of people from a society owing their origin to a particular place (Mongoloids from Mongolia and Caucasoids from Caucus Mountain) or physical appearance (black, white, yellow, and red, for example).