



Research Paper

## Diversity in India- A Challenge for Unity

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### Abstract

India is one of the world's oldest civilization and it is continuously evolving, making it difficult to demarcate India's past into time boundary. This sense of continuity need not be equated with rigid unchangeability. Rather it is India's ability to absorb and assimilate new Ideas and practices which makes this continuity possible. Indian civilization during its long journey evolved various practices and customs, which later became its salient features, which further are also continuously evolving.

### I. Introduction

Diversity means differences. However, in a social context, 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. On the basis of biological differences, for example, we have racial diversity. On the basis of religious differences, similarly, we have religious diversity. The term diversity is the opposite of uniformity. Uniformity means similarity of some sort that characterizes people. When we have groups of people hailing from different races, religions, and cultures, they represent diversity. In India, we have a variety of races, languages, castes, religions, and cultures. Due to this reason, India is known for its socio-cultural diversity.

### Forms of Diversity in India

In India diversity can be found in various sorts. Some of its important forms are the following: racial, linguistic, religious and caste-based.

#### 1. Racial Diversity

A race is a group of people with a set of distinctive physical features such as skin color, type of nose, a form of hair, etc. According to the Anthropological Survey of India, there are Six racial groups in India

- Negritos: They are the people who belong to the black racial stock as found in Africa. They have black skin color, frizzle hair, thick lips, etc. In India, some of the tribes in South India, such as the Kadar, the Irula, and the Paniyan have distinct Negrito strain. In Andaman and Nicobar, some Negritos are found like Onge and Jarawas.
- Proto-Australoid: The Proto-Australoid races consist of an ethnic group, which includes the Australian aborigines and other peoples of southern Asia and Pacific Islands. In India, the tribes of Middle India belong to this strain. Some of these tribes are the Ho of Singhbhum, Bihar, and the Bhil and Chenchus of the Vindhya ranges.
- Mongoloids: The Mongoloids are a major racial stock native to Asia, including the peoples of northern and eastern Asia. In India, the North Eastern regions have tribes of Mongoloid strain. A slightly different kind of Mongoloid racial stock is found in the Brahmaputra Valley. The MikirBodo group of tribes and the Angami Nagas represent the best examples of Mongoloid racial composition in India. Naga, Garo, Khasi, Mizo, Daflas and Mishmi tribe of North-East have the strain of Mongoloids.
- Mediterranean: The Mediterranean races relate to the white race. In India, South India have the tribe of Mediterranean Strain.
- Western Brachycephals: The Western Brachycephals are divided into the following three subgroups:
  - Alpenoid: The Alpenoid are characterized by broad head, medium stature, and light skin, found amongst Bania castes of Gujarat, the Kayasthas of Bengal, etc
  - Dinaric: The Dinaric- They are characterized by a broad head, long nose, tall stature, and dark skin color, found amongst the Brahmin of Bengal, the non-Brahmin of Karnataka.
  - Armenoid: They are characterized by features similar to Dinaric. The Armenoid have a more marked shape of the back of the head, a prominent and narrow nose. The Parsi of Bombay show the typical characteristics of the Armenoid race.

- Nordic: The Nordic races belong to the physical type characterized by tall stature, long head, light skin and hair, and blue eyes. In India, they are found in different parts of the north of the country, especially in Punjab and Rajputana.

## **2. Linguistic Diversity**

The diversity in terms of Language is known as linguistic diversity. Language is an important attribute of a population and has great relevance and significance in a plurilingual and pluri-ethnic land like India. This linguistic diversity has varied from age to age. In ancient times it was Sanskrit, in medieval age it was Arabic or Persian and in modern times we have Hindi and English as official languages. More than 19,500 languages or dialects are spoken in India as mother tongue, according to the latest analysis of a census, 2011. There are different types of languages spoken in India in a different part, some of the languages are discussed below: ● Tibeto-Burman language family: This type of language is mostly spoken in the North Eastern States of Assamese, Manipuri, Bodo etc.

- Dravidian language family: This type of languages is mostly spoken in the southern part of India. Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil, and Telugu are the four major Dravidian languages. The languages of the Dravidian family are spoken by 20 percent of India's total population.

- Indo-Aryan language family: Languages like Hindi, Sanskrit, Urdu, Bengali, Kashmiri, Marathi etc. are part of this family and are spoken in most of the part of North India. The languages of the Indo-Aryan family are spoken by 75 percent of India's total population.

- Austro-Asiatic language family: Most of the tribal languages spoken in Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha are part of this family e.g. Khasi, Santhali, Meitei.

Post-independence India has experienced various types of linguistic conflicts. There was demand for the organization of states based on language. This demand leads to various types of conflict in India and finally accepted through State reorganization act 1956. The case of Tamil Nadu is perhaps the only one of its kind where a language agitation acquired secessionist overtones. This language agitations or more precisely the anti-Hindi agitations The Gorkhaland issue is also based on linguistic conflicts.

Some of the key findings of the 2011 census are discussed below:

- The percentage of the Indian population with Hindi as their mother tongue has risen to 43.63% from 41.03% in 2001.

- Bengali, with 8.03 percent speakers, is second in the list, followed by Marathi at 3rd with 6.86 percent speakers, Telugu at 4th with 6.7 percent speakers and Tamil at 5th with 5.7 percent speakers.

- In all, 13 of the 22 scheduled languages were reported as the mother tongue by at least 1 percent of the population.

- Except for Sanskrit, each of the 21 scheduled languages was reported as the mother tongue by at least 10 lakh people.

- Sanskrit is the only language that is spoken by a set of around 25000 people.

- There is a Decline in South Indian language speakers.

- There is drop in numbers of Urdu speakers.

## **Schedule Languages of India**

Schedule languages are those languages which are included in the 8th schedule of constitution of India. At present there are 22 languages included in the 8th schedule of the constitution.

Classical language of India: A classical language is a language with a literature that is classical. According to UC Berkeley linguist George L. Hart, a Classical Language should be,

- Ancient

- Independent tradition that arose mostly on its own, not as an offshoot of another tradition. It must have a large and extremely rich body of ancient literature. The Government of India evolved a criteria to determine declaration of a language as a Classical language

- I. High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years.

- II. A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers.

- III. The literary tradition be original and not borrowed from another speech community.

- IV. The classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.

At present there are 6 languages declared by the Government as a classical Language. These are Tamil (2004), Sanskrit(2005), Kannad (2008) , Telugu (2008) , Malayalam (2013) and Odia (2014)

The following benefits are available for languages which are declared as classical languages: I. Two major annual international awards for scholars of eminence in the concerned language.

- II. A Centre of Excellence for Studies in Classical Languages can be set up. III. The University Grants Commission can be requested to create, to start with at least in Central Universities, a certain number of professional chairs for classical languages, for scholars of eminence in the concerned language.

### **Religious Diversity**

India is a land of multiple religions. We find here followers of various faiths, particularly of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, among others. Among all Hinduism is the dominant religion of India. According to the Census 2011, Hindu population consists of 79.80 % and estimated population is 96.62 Crores. Hindu Population Growth rate slowed down to 16.76 % from previous decade figure of 19.92% while Muslim population witnessed sharp fall in growth rate to 24.60% (2001-2011) from the previous figure of 29.52 % (1991-2001). Such a sharp fall in population growth rate for Muslims didn't happen in the last 6 decades. Christian Population growth was at 15.5% while the Sikh population growth rate stood at 8.4%. The most educated and wealthy community of Jains registered least growth rate in 2001-2011 with the figure of just 5.4.

### **Sects within Religion**

Then there are sects within each religion. Hinduism, for example, has many sects including Shaiva, Shakti, and Vaishnava. Add to them the sects born or religious reform movements such as Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission. More recently, some new cults have come up such as Radha Soami, Saibaba, etc. Similarly, Islam is divided into Shia and Sunni; Sikhism into Namdhari and Nirankari; Jainism into Digambar and Shwetambar; and Buddhism into Hinayana and Mahayana.

### **Caste Diversity**

India is a country of castes. The term caste is generally used in two senses: sometimes in the sense of Varna and sometimes in the sense of Jati.

- Varna: It refers to a segment of the four-fold division of Hindu society based on the functional criterion. The four Varna are Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra with their specialized functions as learning, defense, trade, and manual service. The Varna hierarchy is accepted all over India. Four Varna are
  - Brahmanas: This is the varna which has the topmost position among all four Varna. The Brahmanas provide education and spiritual leadership. They determine the vision and values of any society. Traditionally their basic needs were fulfilled so that they could dedicate themselves to their spiritual tasks. They are expected to perform some services like to study and teach the Vedas, to perform sacrifice and religious ceremonies.
  - Kshatriyas: They are the Warriors, Police, and Administrators. They are placed in the second position in the Varna system. The kshatriyas are the nobility, the protectors of society. Though permitted a number of privileges, they are expected to display considerable strength of body and character. Some of the services rendered by the Kshatriyas are to protect the citizens from harm, to be the first into battle.
  - Vaishyas: They are the Farmers, Merchants, and Business People. They are placed in the third position in the Varna system. The vaishyas are the productive class. Some of the services rendered by the Vaishyas are to protect animals (especially cows), and the land, to create wealth and prosperity.
  - Shudras: They are the artisans and workers. They are placed in the fourth position in the Varna system. The shudras are the only section of society allowed to accept another's employment; other varnas are occupationally and financially self-sufficient. Some of the Services rendered by the Shudras are to render service to others and to take pride in their work and to be loyal.
- Jati: Jati refers to a hereditary endogamous status group practicing a specific traditional occupation. There are more than 3,000 jatis in India. These Jati are hierarchically graded in different ways in different regions. It may also be noted that the practice of the caste system is not confined to Hindus alone. We find castes among the Muslim, Christian, Sikh as well as other communities. You may have heard of the hierarchy of Shaikh, Saiyed, Mughal, Pathan among the Muslim. Furthermore, there are castes like teli (oil pressure), dhobi (washerman), darjee (tailor), etc. among the Muslim. Similarly, caste consciousness among the Christian in India is not unknown. Since a vast majority of Christians in India are converted from Hindu fold, the converts have carried the caste system into Christianity. Among the Sikh again you have so many castes including Jat Sikh and Mazhabi Sikh (lower castes). In view of this, you can well imagine the extent of caste diversity in India.

### **Is diversity good or bad for India?**

India's diversity is its unity and its greatest asset. India is the best example of unity in diversity. Unity in diversity means oneness in the varieties. "the beauty of the world lies in the diversity of its people". Diversity is a strength for our nation to learn about other culture along with our own culture. India is very big country, it has 29 states and 7 union territories. Different states have different languages and different religious people can live in a different state of India. People in India are united in spite of the much diversity of races, religions, castes, sub-castes, communities, languages and dialects. We can never forget the freedom movements run by the people of all religions of India to gain Independence. The struggle for freedom is the great example of unity in diversity in India.

### **Pros of Diversity**

- Diversity gives rise to the rich culture, which is very much helpful in promoting tourism in India.
- The diversity of culture is very much helpful in promoting diversity of ideas and innovations.
- Diversity promotes tolerance toward other culture and religions.

### **Cons of Diversity**

The drawbacks of diversity in India are as follows

- Diversity could be used for divisive purposes and transformed into disruptive tendencies, such as communalism, casteism and linguistic or regional exclusiveness.
- Communalism: Mob lynchings, caste riots, extremist groups in the northeast and in Jammu Kashmir is attributed to the linguistic and religious diversity within India.
- Administration and Governance problem: Such diversity has made the governance and the administration difficult as seen in the northeast areas where people are bounded to their beliefs and culture.
- It is Giving rise to extremism- Maoists, Naxalism.
- Diversity gives rise to secessionist movement like- Khalistan, Greater Nagalim.

### **Management of Diversity in India**

India's complex diversity is legendary. It consists of a large number of linguistic, cultural and geographic economic zones. India could be unified and its segmentation could be overcome only by accepting this immense diversity and not counterposing it to the process of nation-in-the making. India managed its diversity in several ways.

- The prominent leaders of independent India—Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad, Rajendra Prasad—were not associated with any one region, language, religion, or caste.
- One major factor that kept India away from disintegration was Congress' willing to conciliate and accommodate, to listen and to appease the Opposition parties and dissenting groups. For example, Nehru was willing to persuade and accommodate the Communists, once they gave up recourse to violence.
- Indian administrative services, taking place on the basis of individual merit, irrespective of caste or religion, from all regions and linguistic areas. Indian Army is a national force, whose officers and ranks are recruited from all parts of the country.
- In 1950, the Indian constitution recognized fourteen major languages, besides hundreds others, many of which were spoken by just a million persons.
- Soon after independence, the government set up a Planning Commission and took active measures for planned economic development.
- The constitutional structure established in 1950 encompassed the demands of diversity as well as the requirements of unity.
- It provided for a federal structure with a strong Centre but also a great deal of autonomy for the states. The makers of the constitution kept in view the difference between decentralization and disintegration and between unity and integration and centralization.
- Political parties acted as a great integrating force. All the major post-1947 political parties — Socialist Party, Communist Party of India, Jan Sangh and later the Swatantra Party —were All India in character and in their organization and ideology; they stood for the unity of the country.
- States Reorganisation Act, 1956 was a major step towards managing cultural and lingual diversity.
- Indian Constitution in the Preamble has opted India as a secular country so that every caste, culture, and religion can enjoy their customs and practices.
- Indian constitution in Article 15 has opted for, Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth
- Abolition of untouchability in Article 17.
- Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion in Article 25.
- Freedom to manage religious affairs in Article 26.
- Protection of interests of minorities in Article 29.
- The right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions in Article 30.
- Promotion of educational and economic interests of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other weaker sections in Article 46.
- Official language or languages of a state in Article 345.
- Special provision relating to language spoken by a section of the population of a state in Article 347.

## **II. Conclusion**

India exhibits a remarkable diversity across various dimensions including religion, language, culture, and geography. This "unity in diversity" is a defining characteristic of the nation, with different regions and communities contributing unique elements to the broader Indian identity. India remains one of the most ethnically

diverse countries in the world. Apart from its many religions and sects, India is home to innumerable castes and tribes, as well as to more than a dozen major and hundreds of minor linguistic groups from several language families unrelated to one another. Religious minorities, including Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains, still account for a significant proportion of the population. Earnest attempts have been made to instill a spirit of nationhood in so varied a population, but tensions between neighboring groups have remained and at times have resulted in outbreaks of violence. Yet social legislation has done much to alleviate the disabilities previously suffered by formerly “untouchable” castes, tribal populations, women, and other traditionally disadvantaged segments of society. At independence, India was blessed with several leaders of world stature, most notably Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma) Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, who were able to galvanize the masses at home and bring prestige to India abroad. The country has played an increasing role in global affairs.

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