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Salient Features of Indian Society

Introduction

Meaning of Society: Society may be illustrated as economic, social, industrial, or cultural infrastructure, made up of a varied collection of individuals. R.M. MacIver (1937) also defined society as a "web of social relations which is always changing" where an individual forms the basic unit of it.

"Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization." - Mahatma Gandhi

Characteristics of Indian Society

- 1. Multi-ethnic society:** Since time immemorial, its society has evolved through the ages and has also been affected by foreign influences giving it extreme diversity.
- 2. Multi-lingual society:** Multilingualism in India is a product of its rich history and a reflection of its diverse cultures.
- 3. Multi-class society:** Indian society is segmented into multiple classes. This division can be on the basis of birth as well as financial and social achievements during one's lifetime.
- 4. Patriarchal society:** Indian society is largely a patriarchal society where men hold primary power, predominating in the roles of political leadership, moral authority, special privilege and control of property.
- 5. Unity in Diversity:** Indian Society is a grand synthesis of cultures, religions and languages of the people belonging to different castes and communities has upheld its unity and cohesiveness. However, beneath this diversity, there is fundamental unity in social institutions and practices.
- 6. Co-existence of traditionalism and modernity:** The spread of education and technological advances has played a major role in the increase of modern thinking among Indians.

7. Balance between Individualism and collectivism:

Individualism is a moral, political or social outlook that stresses human independence, self-reliance and liberty. Whereas collectivism is the practice of giving a group priority over each individual in it.

Major sources of diversity in Indian context

- Diversity refers to differences which mark off one group of people from another. These differences may be biological, religious, linguistic, etc. For example, we have racial diversity on the basis of biological differences. India is a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-linguistic society. It is one of the most diverse societies of the world with plurality rooted in its social and cultural richness. Diversity does not mean deprivation; in fact, the diverse elements of Indian society have retained their inherent value and are equally important in their own domains. Being one of the oldest civilizations, India had extensive time period to develop and evolve various social institutions and cultures resulting in diversity of society.
- Foreign influence in the form of influx of various religions, ethnicities and cultures due to foreign invasions (Turks, Mughals, Britishers), proximity to trade routes connecting Central Asia and Europe, and visit of travellers (Fa-Hein, Ibn Battuta, Hiuen Tsang, etc.) Led to cultural interaction and assimilation of foreign features in our society. Geographical barriers such as the Himalayas in the north, hill ranges (Vindhya and Satpura) in central India and presence of dense forests restricted free movement of people. It led to societies developing their unique identity and culture on the basis of food habits, dressing patterns, festivals and cultural activities across these divisions. For example- cultural differences between the Aryan and Dravidian communities. Similarly,

dense forests led to the isolation and a distinct growth of tribal culture. Additionally, the presence of numerous kingdoms since ancient times and their distinct set of policies led to the development of many local languages and diverse socio-cultural practices. For example: Bengali language developed under the patronage of the Pala kings.

- The philosophies of Vasudhaiva-Kutumbakam, tolerance and open outlook of India have heavily contributed to the enrichment of India's diversity. For example- the persecuted communities such as Parsis and Jews were granted asylum in India and their culture influenced our social practices, especially culinary traditions. The diversity of the Indian society has also led to a vibrant Indian culture i.e. The general customs and beliefs of a particular group of people. The Indian cultural mosaic consists of various elements such as religion, castes, languages, traditions, races, art and architecture. Observing the rich diversity of India, Thomas Berry has said "the greater the diversity, the greater the perfection". In the next section, we shall discuss major elements of diversity in the Indian context.

Social Institution

Social institutions are structures of society like family, education, religion, etc. That fulfil the needs of the society. They guide and shape the expected behaviour of individuals, they also help to build and sustain the society itself. There are social institutions that constrain and control, punish and reward.

1. KINSHIP

- The Kinship system represents one of the basic social institutions. Kinship is universal and, in most societies, plays a significant role in the socialisation of individuals and the maintenance of group solidarity.
- Kinship assigns guidelines for interactions between persons. It defines a proper, acceptable role relationship between father-daughter, brother-sister etc. Kinship determines family line relationships, gotra and kula.
- Kinship decides who can marry with whom and where marital relationships are taboo. In rural and tribal societies kinship or

kinship relations determine the rights and obligations of the family and marriage, system of production and political power.

2. MARRIAGE

- Marriage is an important social institution to satisfy physical, psychological, social, cultural and economic needs of men and women. It is a relationship, which is socially approved and sanctioned by custom and law. It is also a set of cultural mechanisms that ensure the continuation of the family. It is more or less a universal social institution in India.

Types of Marriage

- 1. Monogamy:** Monogamy is that form of marriage in which a man or woman remains married to only one woman or man at a time. One can marry in certain extraordinary circumstances such as the death of the spouse or divorce.
- 2. Polygamy:** In this form of marriage, a man or woman is permitted to marry more than one woman or man and live with all the wives or husbands at the same time. Polygamy may be further divided into Polygamy and Polyandry.

Caste

Caste is a unique feature of Indian society and also an element of cultural diversity of India. There are more than 3,000 castes in India. The word caste has its genesis in the Portuguese word 'casta', meaning species, race, or kind. It is derived from the varna system – based on the occupational division of society. Each varna is further segmented into a hierarchy of caste or Jatis.

Caste can be defined as a hereditary, endogamous group, having a common name, common traditional occupation, common culture, relatively rigid in matters of mobility, the distinctiveness of status, and forming a single homogenous community. The word refers to a broad institutional arrangement that in Indian languages is referred to by two distinct terms:

- **Varna:** Literally 'colour', is the name given to a four-fold division of society into brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and shudra.

➔ **Jati:** It is a generic term referring to species or kinds of anything, ranging from inanimate objects to plants, animals and human beings.

The term is also synonymous with Jat, Biradri, and Samaj. Caste system is characterized by notion of purity and pollution. It indicates the association of higher status with purity and lower status with pollution. The most commonly cited defining features of caste are:

1. Caste is determined by birth i.e. A child is born into caste of parents.
2. Membership in caste involves strict rules about marriage.
3. Caste membership also involves rules about food consumption and sharing.
4. It is a system consisting of many castes arranged in hierarchy and rank.
5. Caste also involves sub division i.e., castes almost always have sub-castes, sub-sub castes etc.
6. Castes were traditionally linked with occupations.

The caste system is not confined to Hindus alone. It is prevalent among Muslim, Christian, Sikh as well as other communities. One may have heard of the hierarchy of Shaikh, Saiyed, Mughal and Pathan among Muslims. Furthermore, there are castes like teli (oil pressers), dhobi (washerman), darjee (tailor), etc. As well.

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 too, we have castes like Jat Sikh and Mazhabi Sikh (lower castes).

History of the Caste System

Ancient age

- ➔ The caste system is associated with the Hindu religion, as per Rig Veda, there were four categories known as 'varnas.' Varnas consist of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras.
- ➔ It is only in the post-Vedic period that caste becomes the rigid institution that is familiar to us from well-known definitions.

Colonial times

- ➔ The dominant view in the nationalist movement was to treat caste as a social evil, but on the other hand, leaders like Mahatma Gandhi were able to work for the upliftment of the lowest caste — Harijan.
- ➔ The post-independence state inherited and reflected these contradictions. While the state was committed to the abolition of caste, it was both unable to push through radical reforms, which would have undermined the economic basis for caste inequality.

Post-colonial times:

- ➔ 1901 census that sought to collect information on social hierarchy. Land revenue settlements gave legal recognition to the caste-based rights of the upper class that became landowners in the modern sense.
- ➔ Government of India Act 1935 gave legal recognition to the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes and scheduled caste by marking out special treatment by the state.

Difference b/w caste and class

CASTE	CLASS
➔ Acquired by birth and no amount of money, wealth, power, knowledge, education or struggle can change it.	➔ A person is placed in class by virtue of his acquisition of education, money, wealth, power, status or other achievement
➔ In general, there is no vertical social mobility but in practice there can be social mobility for Group Only. E.g Sanskritization	➔ Horizontal and Vertical both Social mobility is possible, i.e. It is possible to improve social status by acquiring wealth, money, education power etc.
➔ Members are normally not conscious of their social status.	➔ Members are generally conscious of their social status.
➔ Caste system expects members to follow certain customs, folkways, rituals etc.	➔ Social class has no prescribed customs rituals and folkways.
➔ It is Impossible for a person to marry outside the caste without social annoyance.	➔ Marriage outside class is allowed without being thrown outside of society.

Features of caste system

1. **Segmental Division of Society:** The Indian society is stratified into various small social groups called castes. Caste is never a matter of choice, caste is acquired by birth. One can never change one's caste, leave it, or choose not to join it, although there are instances where a person may be expelled from their caste.
2. **Hierarchy:** It is a ladder of command in which the lower rungs are encompassed in the higher ones in regular succession. The castes teach us a fundamental social principle of hierarchy.
3. **Endogamy:** The most fundamental characteristic of the caste system is endogamy i.e. The members of a caste or sub-caste should marry within their own caste or sub-caste.
4. **Civil and religious disabilities:** These consist of restrictions based on contact, dress, speech, rituals etc. And are placed on every caste group. It was done in order to maintain purity of specific caste groups.
5. **Hereditary Occupation:** Castes were traditionally linked to occupations. A person born into a caste could only practice the occupation associated with that caste, so that occupations were hereditary.
6. **Untouchability:** It is the practice of ostracizing a group by segregating them from the mainstream by social custom, wherein the untouchables were deemed impure and polluted.
7. **Manual scavenging:** Manual scavenging is linked to India's caste system and it refers to the practice of manually cleaning, carrying, disposing or handling in any manner, human excreta from dry latrines and sewers by the so-called lower castes. It has been officially abolished by the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013.
8. **Conflict resolve mechanisms:** The status of each caste is carefully protected, not only by caste laws but also by the conventions. These are openly enforced by the community.

Transformation of castes system

1. **Trends for inter-caste marriage:** In the last few decades due to economic and social necessities, inter-caste marriages on western lines are being performed at increased frequency.
2. **Decline in the supremacy of Brahmins:** In the traditional caste system, the Brahmins were at the apex of the social and religious sphere and thus they enjoyed supremacy over others. But due to the processes of secularization and westernization, the authority of the Brahmins gradually declined and they ceased to enjoy the traditional respect and honour in the society.
3. **Challenge to orthodoxy:** Orthodox practices of the caste system such as child marriage, ban on widow remarriage, ban on conversion, insensitiveness of superior class towards the low caste people are being challenged in the wake of urbanization.
4. **Changes in commensality:** People are no more confined to their places of origin. They have migrated to different places and so it becomes very difficult to stick to the restrictions relating to the food habits.
5. **Occupational changes:** In a caste-ridden society, occupations were hereditary and an individual's birth into a particular caste determined his occupation forever. But when the rigidity of the caste system broke down, occupational changes were also marked.
 - **Changes in the sphere of culture:** It has changed the lifestyle of different caste groups, their modes of living, patterns of worship and performance of rites and rituals, customs and traditional practices.
 - **Attitudinal changes:** Changes in the attitude towards castes have been noticed within the system. This relates to loss of faith in the ascriptive pattern and jurisdiction of the system itself.

Factors affecting the changes in the caste system

1. **Sanskritization:** It is a process whereby members of a lower caste attempt to raise their social status by adopting the rituals & social practices of the higher castes. By changing such customs and rituals like,

adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, people belonging to the low castes are claiming a 'higher' position in the caste hierarchy.

2. **Westernisation:** It indicates adapting to western style of living, language, dress pattern, and behaviour pattern. In India largely due to the advancement in the spheres of education, food habits, dressing sense, manners etc., Later on, the lower castes also adapted to this process.
3. **Modernisation:** The process of modernisation is related to the scientific outlook, rational attitudes, industrialisation, urbanisation, high standard of living, development of civilization and broadness of view point. This has greatly affected the caste system in the sense that it has become more flexible.
4. **Dominant caste:** Refer to those castes which had a large population and were granted land rights by the partial land reforms affected after Independence. With this they acquired considerable economic, political and social power and became dominant in their regions.
5. **Industrialisation and urbanization:** With the growth of industrial towns and cities, migration has spiralled up. Unlike the source regions, destination areas witness fewer adherence to caste rules.
6. **Democratic decentralization:** Through the introduction of Panchayati Raj, local self-government has been created in the villages. The reservation provided in the Panchayati Raj system has allowed the lower castes to empower themselves.
7. **Caste and politics:** They both are closely linked to each other. In fact, the link has led to empowerment among the lower castes since they ventilate their feelings through elections and power lobby.
8. **Legislative measures:** A plethora of social legislations have been introduced in the post-independence era to safeguard the interests of the marginalised section of the society, to eradicate untouchability, and to facilitate the social and economic development of the depressed castes.

A paradox in the present caste system

Weakening caste system	Strengthening caste system
➡ Change in hierarchical structure: Caste hierarchy based on purity and pollution has weakened because of secularization.	➡ Caste and politics: Prevalence of caste politics resulted in the enactment of legislations to protect the rights of disadvantaged and marginalized sections of society.
➡ Breakdown of Jajmani system: Jajmani system involved exchange of goods and services, with each jati contributing its share based on occupational specialty.	➡ Democratic decentralization: The reservation in the Panchayati Raj system has given the opportunity for the lower castes representation in the democracy.
➡ Disruption of traditionally ordained occupational systems: Due to globalization and rise of the services sector.	➡ Caste based affirmative actions: Provision of caste-based reservation in education and jobs has strengthened the caste identities.

Religion

India is divided into 28 states and 8 uts with each state having its unique cultural & traditional identity due to differences in geographical, cultural & socio-economic conditions. Even within a state, diversities exist. For example, Maharashtra comprises in itself many sub-regional identities like Vidharbha, Konkan, Marathwada & west Maharashtra due to differences in socio-economic & geographic factors. Regional differences also affect cultural traditions, for instance, in North India, there are mostly patrilineal groups and marriage is prohibited between the same gotra or clan, whereas, in Southern India, matrilineal and matrilineal systems also exist and marriage alliances are often made within the members of extended family. Cooking styles and habits, clothing patterns, festivals, etc. Also vary across regions. The people living in mountainous regions have a 'pahadi' culture and have dependence on dairy and poultry, whereas habits of people living in coastal areas are influenced by the hot and humid climate and staple diet includes seafood.

Regional identities are also based on a strong sense of attachment to a place, i.e., topophilia, which has sometimes given rise to secessionist expressions, for example, the demand for 'Dravida Nadu' by the southern states. India has dealt with these regional diversities by providing a platform for engagement with different states through interstate and zonal councils. Recently constituted GST council is also a good example for ensuring competitive and cooperative federalism.

Religious pluralism

- ➔ Indian society is composed of diverse cultures, peoples, languages and religions. Since ancient times India has been a land of diverse cultural groups professing many faiths. The Indian subcontinent is the birthplace of four world religions - Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism.
- ➔ The Indian Constitution has rightly reflected the idea of multi-religions. It states that "every citizen has a right to freely practice, preach, profess and propagate any religion or faith".

Pluralism in Indian Perspectives:	➔ In India, pluralism describes the reality of cultural diversity. It attempts to create a society in which the best of all inputs continues to integrate.
	➔ It allows for many different groupings but does not try to impose a uniform status on all of them.
Multiculturalism in Indian Perspectives	➔ Multiculturalism means showing respect and tolerance to other cultures and faith. It holds that all minority values must have equal status to those of the majority. It also allows assertion of different identities in every sphere of life.
	➔ The Indian constitution also provides fundamental rights for the preservation of this variety. No community is left out in creating a rainbow nation.

Pluralism in Indian	Multiculturalism
➔ Here individuals in a common (neutral) public sphere are treated as equals.	➔ As per multiculturalism, the public sphere is not culturally neutral, it is an arena for cultural negotiation.

Pluralism in Indian	Multiculturalism
➔ Different cultures are allowed in a separate cultural sphere, but society has no obligation to acknowledge or support alternative cultural forms.	➔ Different cultures are encouraged. Individuals are considered part of collectivities that provide meaning to their lives. Multiculturalism seeks ways to support these collectivities.
➔ The dominant principals for pluralism are - Equality of opportunity, Freedom of association.	➔ The dominant principals for multiculturalism are Affiliation, Cultural recognition.

India is the land where almost all the major religions of the world are practiced by their respective followers. Religious diversity is one of the most important features of our culture. All major religions from Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism can be found in India.

Religion	Percentage	Estimated population (In crores)
Hindu	79.80%	96.62
Muslim	14.23%	17.22
Christian	2.30%	2.78
Sikh	1.72%	2.08
Buddhist	0.70%	84.43
Jain	0.37%	44.52
Other Religion	0.66%	79.38
Not stated	0.24%	28.67

India has a history of accepting, nurturing and influencing different religious ideas and beliefs. For example- Sufism which was a broader, less conservative and transcending version of Islam has been deeply influenced by the liberal Indian values. Among all, Hinduism is the followed by majority of people in India.

Religious life but secular state:

India is home to 1.4 billion people belonging to a variety of ethnicities and religions. While the majority religion is Hinduism, there is also substantial population of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and adherents of folk religions. In a 2015 Few Research Centre survey, eight-in-ten Indians said that religion is very important in their lives. Religion dominates India's value system, worldview and overall way of life. However, the Indian Constitution mandates

that the Indian State be secular and has provided religious freedom to all, as a Fundamental Right, under Article 25. According to the Constitution-makers, only a secular state could realize its objectives to ensure that- numerical strength of majority does not become 'tyranny of majority', that some members do not dominate other members of the same religious community; and that the State does not enforce any particular religion nor take away the religious freedom of individuals.

Sects within religion:

There are sects within each religion as well. Hinduism, for example, has many sects including Shaiva, Shakti, and Vaishnava. 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.

Despite the presence of diverse religions, there are elements of commonality across them. Indian society and culture preaches respect, love, compassion and non-violence for all living beings. Central to the Indian philosophy are the concepts of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family) and 'Atithi devo bhavah' (Guest is like God- one of the taglines of Indian Tourism). The ideologies of Dharma, Karma, Varna and Purushartha are also integral to the Indian way of living. Dharma here does not mean religion, but it stands for duty, obligation, righteousness and upholding of the natural law. It is a way of life in which ethical values are considered supreme and everyone is expected to perform his or her duty according to their position in society and stage of life (ashrama). The four ashrama are: brahmacharya, stage of Studentship; grihastha, stage of the householder; vanaprastha, life in the forest; and sanyasa, renunciation. The concept of four ends of life (Purushartha) is also very important as they are needed for fulfilment of human aspirations. These are righteousness (dharma), worldly gains (artha), fulfilment of desires (kama) and liberation (moksha). In the Bhagavad-Gita, selfless action (Nishkama karma) is advocated. It is a desire-less action which is required to be performed without consideration

of personal consequences i.e., duty needs to be performed without expectation of fruits.

Multiculturalism and pluralism

- India is an inherently multi-cultural society that believes in plurality of ideas, belief and faith. It enriches Indian culture and adds to our diversity.
- We have vibrant communities of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis etc. That have blended well and enhanced the progress of India.
- Striking a balance between unity amidst this vast diversity is always a challenge for a nation. Pluralism and multiculturalism are the two ways to manage this conundrum simultaneously.

Linguistic conflicts in India

Post-independence India has experienced various types of linguistic conflicts such as demands for the organization of states based on language that led to enactment of State Reorganization Act 1956, issue of a National language for India, anti-Hindi agitations in Tamil Nadu in 1960s that had acquired secessionist overtones, etc. Present day Gorkhaland issue is also based on linguistic conflicts. The National Education Policy 2020 also recommends the 'three language formula' (which is a cause of conflict due to allegations of Hindi imposition) to be followed in all the states, with the medium of instruction to be in the mother-tongue/local language in primary classes.

Issues and Challenges

1. ***Increasing Regionalism and Parochialism:***
The people of different linguistic groups who are concentrated in a state seem to think only in terms of interest of their own states. This undermines consideration of national issues and causes parochial feelings.
2. ***Formation of Regional Political Parties:***
Linguism has resulted in regionalism which has ultimately led to the formation of regional political parties in some states. Some of these regional political parties have also formed governments.

3. Persecution of the Linguistic Minorities:

The State Reorganization Commission had provided for safeguard of linguistic minorities in States. But in reality the linguistic minorities have been harassed in different States.

4. Demand for Separate States: Linguistic conflicts take place due to selfish motive of politicians. These politicians instigate the linguistic minority to demand a partition of the States along linguistic lines.**5. Erosion of National Feeling:** The national feeling is eroded due to linguistic and regional loyalties. The erosion of national feeling threatens the sovereignty of the country.**6. Inter-State Border Dispute:** Language problems have created tensions in the border which are bilingual. For example, the Goans are divided on the basis of Konkani and Marathi languages.**Way forward**

➤ Government should be sensitive towards the people's aspirations. Any attempt of forceful imposition of any one language on masses should be refrained. Rather efforts should be made to preserve and protect the languages under threat of extinction. For ex: Advanced technologies like Artificial Intelligence can be used to translate and digitize ancient regional texts.

➤ Programmes like 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' are a step in the right direction to promote unity in diversity. The three-language formula envisaged by Kothari Commission should be implemented in such a way that the choice of language(s) must be left with the citizens and not the Government.

Stakeholders in Indian society

1. Women

➤ The history of women in India is the story of progressive decline. In general throughout the early historical and early medieval periods women were not encouraged to take up any intellectual activity.

➤ Under the influence of modern education, a set of social reformers campaigned for legislation which would uplift the status of women in society.

➤ However, in spite of some efforts, a lot of problems are being faced by women - Domestic violence, Dowry, Selective abortion and female infanticide, Disproportionate education, Gender discrimination, Sexual harassment, etc. Empowering women is not only morally essential, but also economically important for the country.

2. Children

➤ A child is the future citizen of the country. Only those children who grow in a healthy atmosphere can contribute to the development and strength of their country. No country can progress unless it pays adequate attention to the development of children.

➤ A large number of children, because of poverty, do not go to school or are withdrawn from schools before they complete their elementary education and are forced to start working at a young and tender age in factories, brick-kilns, restaurants, hotels, shops etc.

➤ This hampers their growth physically, mentally, and emotionally. They grow with hatred and agony and fail to become worthy citizens of the nation.

➤ Right to Education Act, 2009 provides for education of all children between the age of 6 - 14 years of age.

Elderly/senior citizen

➤ With the joint family breaking down, especially in the urban areas, where nuclear families are the trend, the aged are increasingly becoming unwelcome members in their own families.

➤ Our culture to respect elders should be again imbibed in young generation so that the aged can maintain their self-respect. Providing social, economic, and psychological support to the aged is emerging as a fundamental concern of social development.

Scheduled castes

➤ The Scheduled Caste is a politico-legal-term. It was first coined by the Simon Commission and then Government of India, Act, 1935.

➤ Another term used for the Scheduled Castes or Untouchables as "Harijans" (the children of God), was first used by Mahatma Gandhi.

They were also known as depressed class or classes, this term was used by Dr. Ambedkar.

- Scheduled castes are those castes/races in the country which are notified as Scheduled Castes as per provisions contained in Article 341 of the Constitution.
- Gol introduced a reservation policy to help Scheduled Castes to come up, within specified time, at par with others in the society.
- The reservation policy has three major components:
 1. Reservation in government appointments,
 2. Reservation in admission to educational institutions and
 3. Reservation of seats in the House of People (Lok Sabha) and the Legislative Assemblies of the States.
- By the 89th Amendment Act, Gol also formed the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) under Article 338.

Schedule tribe (ST)

- The tribal communities in India have been recognized by the Indian Constitution under 'Schedule 5' of the constitution. Hence the tribes recognized by the Constitution are known as 'Scheduled Tribes'.
- Article 366 (25) defined ST as "such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be ST for the purposes of this constitution".
- Article 342, which is reproduced below, prescribes procedure to be followed in the matter of specification of ST.
- The ST are notified in 30 States/UTs and the number of individual ethnic groups etc. Notified as ST is about 705. The ST population represents a heterogeneous group scattered in different regions of India.
- The differences are noticed in language, cultural practices, socio-economic status, and pattern of livelihood.
- By 89th Amendment 2003, Gol also formed the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) under Article 338 A.

Other backward class (OBC)

- OBC is a collective term used by the Government of India to classify castes which are educationally or socially disadvantaged.
- In the Indian Constitution, obcs are described as socially and educationally backward classes (SEBC), and the Government of India is enjoined to ensure their social and educational development — for example, the obcs are entitled to 27% reservations in public sector employment and higher education.
- In the Mandal case judgement (1992), the Supreme Court directed the central government to constitute a permanent statutory body to examine the complaints regarding the list of backward classes.
- In pursuant to these directions Parliament passed the NCBC Act in 1993 and constituted the NCBC.
- The 102nd Constitutional Amendment Act of 2018 inserted a new Article 338-B in the constitution.

Minorities

- The term "Minority" has not been properly defined anywhere in the Indian Constitution, but minority status has been conferred on many groups.
- The constitution recognizes minorities based on religion and language, but it neither defines the term 'minority'.
- As per sec 2(c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act 1992, 'minority' means a community notified as such by the Central govt.
- The Union Government notified Six religious communities, viz; Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Zoroastrians (Parsis), and Jains as minority communities which constitute about 19% population of the country.
- The word 'minority' mentioned in the Constitution of India used in various articles viz. Article 29, 30, 350 A, and 350 B.
- According to Article 29 of the Constitution, any group living within the jurisdiction of India is entitled to preserve and promote its own language, script or literature, and culture.

- Article 36 states that a minority group, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- States governments are also empowered to designate state minorities and set up State Minority Commissions.

Beggars

- India is a large country in area with 1.3 billion population, with such a huge population, some economic problems have developed. There are the problems of unemployment, inflation, poverty and price rise.
- Chronic unemployment and the consequent poverty are responsible for the erosion of human values and often leads to begging.
- It is well settled that the right to life is the right to live with dignity and with necessities of life required for it.
- Begging in India has become a big racket in the country. In fact, there are begging cartels in cities like Delhi, Noida, Gurgaon, Mumbai, Kolkata etc.
- There is no central Act on beggary, however, many States and Union Territories have used certain sections of the Bombay Prevention of Beggary Act, 1959, as the basis for their own laws.
- The Centre made an attempt at repealing the Act through the Persons in Destitution (Protection, Care and Rehabilitation) Model Bill, 2016, with provisions including doing away with the Beggary Act and proposing rehabilitation centres for the destitute in each district.
- Through these legislations, the governments try to maintain public order, address forced begging or "begging rackets", and prevent annoyance to tourists.
- The LGBT face innumerable difficulties in the society where the only accepted orientation is heterosexuality and homosexuality is regarded as abnormal, they also face problems like — Heterosexuality, Inequality & Violence, Deprived in Rights, Isolation from society, Conflict in Family itself, Victims of Hate Crimes.
- The right to sexual orientation was meaningless without the right to choose a partner. In Hadiya's case, the apex court observed that neither the State nor one's parents could influence an adult's choice of partner.
- Various other Judgments in Favour of the LGBT Community - Naz foundation v/s Government of Delhi case and Koushal Judgment.

Victims of substance abuse

- The habitual use of or dependence on harmful substances like liquor/alcoholic drinks, tobacco, bidis/cigarettes, drugs (for other than prescribed medical treatment) called substance abuse or addiction.
- As the range of addictive substances continues to expand, more and more persons particularly, in the younger age groups get addicted. Pushing factors include peer-pressure, non-conducive family environment and stress. Substance abuse is a condition which needs medical and psychological help.
- The parents have to be considerate to children, particularly during their transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood, when many changes occur in their physique.
- Addiction should not be seen as a character flaw, but as an ailment that any other person could be struggling with. Society needs to understand that drug-addicts are victims and not criminals.
- Radical political decisions like one of alcohol prohibition in Bihar may be another solution. When people do not exercise self-control, a state has to step in, as part of the Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 47).
- Education curriculum should include chapters on drug addiction, its impact and also on de-addiction. Proper Counselling is another alternative.

LGBTQ

- The LGBTQ community is one of the most vulnerable sections in India and mainstreaming them is a great challenge. Despite the Constitution's focus on liberation, the marginalised segments such as LGBTQ did not receive enough attention so far.

Unity In Diversity

Indian society is characterized by its unity amidst diversity. There are undercurrents of commonality and oneness, encompassing our diverse way of life. The factors of unity can be seen in the context of cultural heritage - such as common practices of pilgrimage across the region, common value system, secularism, rural and agrarian society (agriculture being the predominant occupation of India), Indian Constitution and its uniqueness, parliamentary form of government providing for federal structure, educational system, unified transportation and communication, industrialization and urbanization and so on. Uniqueness of India as a nation, lies in the fact that it is inhabited by people belonging to diverse religions, linguistic groups, castes & ethnicities. The people, irrespective of their different identities, are united under a composite national identity characterized by a rich history of cultural evolution and common national anthem, flag, citizenship and constitutional values.

Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat:

In order to institutionalize process of cultural engagement between people of different states, government of India, has launched "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat" (EBSB) campaign to celebrate unity in diversity, foster sense of common identity among people of different states by showcasing each other's heritage and promote cooperation between various states by sharing best practices & experiences.

Under EBSB, pre-decided pairs of states & uts will enter into cultural engagements for one year & prepare action plan containing different activities & implementation responsibilities in consultation with each other. Activities like translation of local language books in each other's language, cultural exchange programs, educational tours between students, literary & film festivals, culinary festivals, mutual tourism, etc. Would be taken up. Recently, Madhya Pradesh participated in Sangai Mahotsav being organized in its partner state of Manipur & likewise, teams from Nagaland & Manipur will participate in Lok Rang and Bal rang programs in MP spreading awareness about their culture among people of MP.

Q. "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat" is an attempt to promote the spirit of national integration through a deep and structured engagement between all Indian States and uts. Discuss.

Mutual respect and tolerance

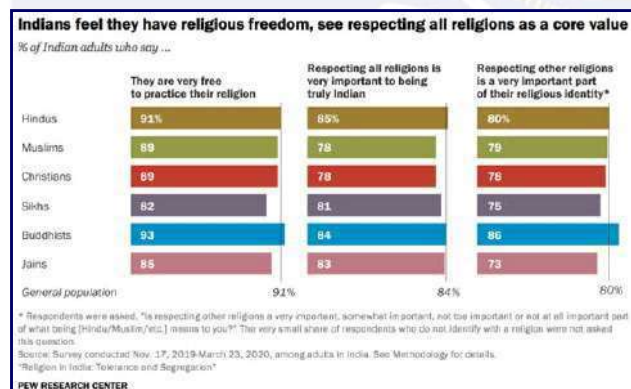
Mutual respect and tolerance refer to the ability of accepting and accommodating the views, beliefs, or ways of living of others even if they are opposite to ours. Mutual respect between groups has been the identity of India since ancient times. This is also reflected in the Indian Constitution, for instance in the form of the secularism principle.

Is intolerance increasing in India?

Tolerance is a core principle of Indian ethos. However, with the advent of modernization and globalization, the incidences of inter-community strife are on the rise. This communal disharmony has generated debate over intolerance in society. Historically, the policy of 'divide and rule' adopted by the British, the communal riots during partition or sporadic incidents of communal tensions in recent times have created turbulences in the pluralistic ethos of India. This has manifested in decreasing acceptance for diverse views. For example, murder of rationalist like Gauri Lankesh, protest against movies/books, increase in cases of mob behavior and lynching- cases of Akhlaq and Pehlu Khan, alienation among youth and increased distrust- exodus of people of north-east from Bangalore, etc. Social instability and disturbance in social fabric also leads to change in location of industries, diversion of Foreign Direct investments and most of all the image of India is maligned.

There are various causes behind acts of intolerance, such as spread of false information and fake news at fast pace due to digital/social media, to get more attention by spreading a sensational news item; high unemployment amongst youth which has raised their frustration level; weak law & order and delayed justice delivery system, etc. Increase in extremist ideology across the world is also another reason for the recent incidents of hate crimes, mob lynching and xenophobia, which have categorically manifested in decline of mutual tolerance and understanding.

As India is home to diverse cultures, right to dissent and tolerance of dissent are sine qua non of our liberal democratic society. The incidences of intolerance such as over religion, food habits, etc. That were reported from few states are episodic, and it might not be correct to say that the overall intolerance level of the society has increased based on a few of them. Indian society has overcome these social undercurrents time and again with strong accommodative credentials, and the value of tolerance continues to guide our social relations. We have a strong criminal justice system as well that has helped time and again in upholding of Constitutional values- specifically the Fundamental Rights for all citizens of the country. Our history, system of polity, and cultural heritage teach us about tolerance and respect for diverse humanity. It reminds us of our better nature and like the standing bodhisattva, helps us all live in a more humane world. Therefore, 'pluralistic ethos' which is the core strength of India, should be preserved. Appropriate actions should be taken by government like creation of social media hub to keep a check on fake news, etc. Emphasis should also be laid on the fundamental duty of promoting harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people, to promote the spirit of tolerance.



How has India managed its diversity?

Diversity has been a feature of the Indian society since its beginning and is not an appendage. India has survived and thrived irrespective of its inherent differences. Even after independence, India stayed unified and its segmentation was overcome only by accepting this immensely complex diversity and not addressing it as an obstacle to the process of nation-in-the making.

India managed its diversity in several ways, made possible by the prominent leaders of independent India—Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad, Rajendra Prasad—who were not associated with any one region, language, religion, or caste. Another major factor that kept India away from disintegration was the willingness of the Congress party to conciliate and accommodate, to listen and to appease the opposition parties and dissenting groups. Parties having diverse ideologies like communism, socialism, capitalism, etc. Were assimilated within the political spectrum. Additionally, administrative services, army services were started based upon individual merit, irrespective of caste or religion, from all regions and linguistic areas. States Reorganization Act, 1956 was another major step towards managing cultural and lingual diversity.

The Preamble of the Indian Constitution also opted India as a secular country so that every caste, culture, and religion could enjoy their customs and practices. Fundamental Rights under the Constitution provided inalienable rights for the individual, such as Article 15 (against discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth), Article 17 (Abolition of untouchability), Article 25 (Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion in) etc. This accommodative approach towards multiple religious, cultural & linguistic diversities has not only kept India united but also promoted social cohesion among various diversities. It also 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.

Pluralistic Nationalism of India

Nationalism is a political & socio-economic system characterized by the promotion of interests of a particular nation, especially with the aim of gaining & maintaining sovereignty over the shared territory. Its roots lay in 16th century Europe. It believes in leveling out diversities. For example, extreme nationalism emerged in Germany under the leadership of Hitler in 20th century and emphasized superiority of Aryan race. Pluralistic nationalism of India was born as

a reaction against colonial exploitation & hence demanded unity. It promoted a feeling of unity amongst people belonging to different regions. People with diverse socio-cultural-economic life came together and put up a fight against the colonial power.

Hence, while conventional nationalism on one side believes in uniting everyone under one sociocultural identity of majority or a powerful community, pluralistic nationalism, which India decided to follow, on the other side, promotes coexistence of multiple identities and believes in idea of unity in diversity. Post-independence, this inclusive & pluralistic aspect of Indian nationalism got reflected in the Constitution and the policies Indian state adopted towards various diversities. As a result, on one side, ethnically diverse countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, etc. Followed path of conventional nationalism and consequently failed to integrate their ethnic minorities in mainstream & faced civil wars, India on the other hand, followed the path of pluralistic nationalism and was able to integrate its minorities and promote social cohesion among them.

Q. While nationalism conventionally privileges one socio-cultural identity over others, India's pluralistic nationalism celebrates the coexistence of multiple identities. Discuss.

Is diversity good or bad for India?

Diversity is India's greatest asset. It is a strength of our nation. People in India are united in spite of the diversity of races, religions, castes, sub-castes, communities, languages and dialects. We can never forget the freedom movement championed by the people of all sects and communities of India to gain independence. Diversity has also given rise to the rich cultural heritage, which is very much helpful in promoting tourism in India, diversity of ideas, innovations and promote tolerance toward other cultures and religions. Diversity of thoughts and opinions is also necessary precondition for democratic governance.

However, problems arise when diversity and difference become reasons for prejudices and deprivations. This leads to certain drawbacks of diversity in India, such as, diversity being used for divisive purposes and being transformed into disruptive tendencies, like communalism, casteism

and linguistic or regional exclusiveness. Politically, presence of diversifying factors naturally tends to breed sub-national aspirations in people leading from pluralism to fragmentation. For example, demand of having separate flag by the state of Karnataka, secessionist demands from Jammu & Kashmir & Naga tribes, etc. Even maintaining the balance between diverse socio-cultural traditions and Constitutional ideals, has been a bone of contention for our policy makers. During Constituent Assembly debates as well, there was a lack of consensus on Uniform civil code (UCC) due to diversity of customs, practices and traditions. Another topic of debate was related to secularism and freedom to practice, profess and propagate one's religion. However, this is leading to a shift in the Indian society from pluralism to polarization in recent times. For instance, the principle of secularism is being challenged by sectarian and communal forces. Similarly, continuation of practices like restrictions on entry of women in some religious places, Santhara (fasting unto death-practiced by Jain community), etc., which are integral to their respective religions, pose a threat to the Fundamental Rights as enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

The problems of regionalism, communalism, ethnic conflicts, conflicts in societal reforms, etc. Have arisen because the fruits of development haven't been distributed equally; or cultures of some communities haven't been accorded due recognition; or our legislative and political process have failed to generate social consensus for reforms. Hence, Constitution and its values must form guiding principles of our society. Any society which has tried to forcefully homogenize itself, has witnessed stagnation in due-course and ultimately decline. For instance, the case of Pakistan which tried to impose its dominant culture on East-Pakistan, ultimately leading to a war and creation of Bangladesh. There is also a need of persuasion by eminent people, and political willingness to increase awareness on such issues to build social consensus over them. In a country as diverse as India we need both – a legal push in the form of Constitutional ideals and a social push for building social consensus, to push forward as an enlightened and just society. Pluralism and celebration of diversity are central

to Indian philosophy. Our society has lived with the idea of unity in diversity for centuries beginning from ancient Vedic times. The problem therefore, is not of diversity per se, but the handling of diversity in Indian society.

- Q. India's pluralistic society in order to conserve its socio-cultural tradition, has always posed a threat to our Constitutional ideals. Comment.
- Q. In light of recent judgments, discuss how the judiciary has kept a check on.

Diversity of India

- ➔ Diverse means 'differing from each other' and 'made up of distinct characteristics, qualities, or elements'. India is a melting pot of religion, races, language, art and cultures.
- ➔ The historical development is conscientious for the emergence of the modern India nation state as a multi-religious, multi-racial, multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multilingual country.
- ➔ This 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.
- ➔ Thus the phrase 'unity in diversity' is the beauty of India when compared with any other homogenous society.

Various forms of diversity in India

1. **Geographical diversity:** India is a vast country with an area of about 3.2 lakh sq km. The diverse topography consisting of dry deserts, evergreen forests, snowy Himalayas, along the coast, and fertile plains.
2. **Religious diversity:** India is a land of diversities. This diversity is also visible in the spheres of religion. India is a multi-religious country consisting of Hindus (79.9%), Muslims (14.2%), Christians (2.32%), Sikhs (1.7%), Buddhists (0.6%) and Jains (0.41%).
3. **Language:** India is called a 'veritable tower of Babel' and according to A. R. Desai, "India presents a spectacle of Museum of tongues." In India, each state has its own language. It is not just the accent, but the dialect that also changes from region to region. The Census 2011 identified about 122 languages.

4. **Cultural Diversity:** India is among the most diverse societies with a plurality and diversity of cultures which marks it out as perhaps the largest multicultural society in the world
5. **Caste diversity:** As a form of stratification, the caste is peculiar to Indian society. It may be called as an extreme form of closed class system. The status of individuals in the social hierarchy is determined by birth.
6. **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 the absence of a uniform racial composition of its inhabitants. India has rightly been termed as 'melting pot' of races and tribes.

Factors leading to unity amidst diversity in India

1. **Geographical factor:** India has its own fixed natural boundary. At broadest level, the country can be divided into several regions viz. Himalaya, northern plains, plateau of central India and Deccan, Western & Eastern Ghats, Thar Desert etc.
2. **Constitutional identity:** The Constitution guarantees certain fundamental rights to all citizens regardless of their age, gender, class, caste, religion, etc.
3. **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.
4. **Religious co-existence:** India is a country where people are largely influenced by religious principles and doctrines. Freedom of religion and religious practice guaranteed by the Constitution promotes religious coexistence with peaceful means.
5. **Cultural Unity:** Indian culture and civilization is unique in its features. There are people who follow different languages and customs but one can find a basic unity of literary ideas, philosophy, literature, and conventions throughout the country.
6. **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.

7. Emotional Unity: Sports and cinema act as a binding force across the length and breadth of India. The institution of national awards and titles for acts of bravery, social service, spirit of unity concerts cut across the communal, linguistic or regional bias and evokes the feeling of emotional unity.

Factors that threaten india's unity

- 1. Regionalism:** Regionalism is a strong attachment to one's own region/regions over national interests. It can adversely impact national integration. Law and order situation is hampered due to regional demands and ensuing agitation.
- 2. Development deficit:** The unequal pattern of socio-economic development, inadequate economic policies and consequent economic disparities can lead to the backwardness of a region, further threatening the unity of the nation.
- 3. 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, feelings of mistrust and suspicion among minorities.

4. 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.

5. Geographical isolation: Regional consciousness and regional identity evolved due to vast Indian geography. Geography, when combined with the ideology of aggressive regionalism, acts as a divisive factor.

6. Inter-religious conflicts: Inter-religious conflict not only hampers relations between two communities by spreading fear and mistrust but also hinders the secular fabric of the country. E.g. Sikh-Hindu conflict in Punjab, Religious riots over Babri masjid and ram mandir, Gujrat riots etc.

Conclusion

There are problems like regionalism, communalism, ethnic conflicts etc., which pose a threat to India's social fabric. But this can be corrected by upholding the values of mutual respect and tolerance towards each other, the accommodation of multiple aspirations of a diverse population is necessary. Also the proper and equal distribution of economic development will eventually help in preserving the very ethos of India i.e. Unity in Diversity.