
SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

Sociology of Indian Society

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| 1. Multifacets of Indian Society Demographic profile, Religious composition, Linguistic groups, Cultural diversity. | Unit 1: Facets of Indian Society (Pages 3-15) |
| 2. Caste System <i>Varna</i> and <i>Jati</i> , Characteristics of caste system, Untouchability, Features of PCR Act, Changing trends in caste system. | Unit 2: Caste System (Pages 17-33) |
| 3. Rural Economy and Religion Economy: Agriculture and allied activities, Cottage and small scale industries, Changes in village economy. Religion: Belief and practices, Village temples and festivals, Changes in religious life. | Unit 3: Rural Economy and Religion (Pages 35-69) |
| 4. Marriage and Family Marriage: Marriage among the Hindus, Muslim's and Christians, Changing trends in contemporary times. Family: Significance, Types, Characteristic features of Joint Family, Changing trends in contemporary times. | Unit 4: Marriage and Family (Pages 71-95) |
| 5. Patterns of Social Change in India Modernization of Indian Tradition, Sanskritisation, Westernization. | Unit 5: Patterns of Social Change in India (Pages 97-111) |

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INTRODUCTION

Sociology is the science that studies the various aspects of society. This book, *Sociology of Indian Society* deals with the various facets of the Indian society. The book has been divided into five units for the convenience of studying these aspects.

The first unit discusses the brief history and nature of the Indian society. It also analyses the demographic composition of the country while examining factors like language, culture and religion which act as uniting as well as dividing factors for the country.

The second unit elaborates on the Indian caste system by detailing the meaning, characteristics and nature of traditional caste systems in India. It also discusses the differences between *varna* and *jati* and the recent changes brought about by legislations in the caste system. The unit analyses the features of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 and the subsequent amendments thereof.

The third unit discusses the nature of traditional rural economy and its social effects. It moves on to discuss the varied changes in the traditional rural economy in the country brought about by worldwide industrialization. The *jajmani* system, the introduction of cottage and small-scale industries and their subsequent effects on the Indian rural socio-economic scenario have also been herein analysed.

The various forms of marriage existing in the Indian society and the effects thereof on the smallest structure of society, family, etc., have been critiqued in the fourth unit. The unit discusses the types of marriages held in the Hindu, Muslim and aboriginal tribal communities in the country.

The last unit elaborates on the various patterns of social change in India. It discusses the traditional social fabric vis-à-vis the influence that the British rule brought along with it. The unit outlines Srinivas' concept of *sanskritization* and the domination of certain castes in the social structure.

The book, *Sociology of Indian Society* has been written in the self-learning format. Each of the units begins with an 'Introduction', followed by the 'Unit Objectives' and then the details of the topic of each unit. At the end of the unit is a 'Summary' and 'Key Terms' to help students recapitulate the contents. The 'Check Your Progress' and 'Questions and Exercises' sections in each unit also help in better understanding of the subject. 'Further Reading' creates a research interest in students for further exploration of the topics covered.

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UNIT 1 FACETS OF INDIAN SOCIETY

NOTES**Structure**

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- 1.1 Unit Objectives
- 1.2 Nature of Indian Society
- 1.3 A Brief History
- 1.4 Demographic Composition of Indian Society
- 1.5 Various Diversities
 - 1.5.1 Religious Composition and Diversity
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will learn about the demographic composition of Indian society. This unit will also help you understand the nature of Indian society and its multidimensional aspects. It discusses the various diversifying factors of Indian society and also analyses how these diversities can act as unifying forces, thereby reflecting on unity in diversity. The unit gives an introduction to Indian society and also analyses the complex nature of Indian society with diversifying influences and the common bond which unifies it.

1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe the nature and characteristics of Indian society
- Explain the various diversities in terms of religion, language and culture
- Analyse the unifying forces of Indian society

1.2 NATURE OF INDIAN SOCIETY

India is a vast country with a geographical area of 3,287,240 sq km and a population of over one billion. The society in India is quite old and complex in nature. Many scholars have diverse opinions on the origin of Indian society. However the old

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heritage of Indian society has shown enough evidence of immigrants from various racial, ethnic and religious groups. 'India's cultural heritage is one of the most ancient, extensive and varied among all those who make up the cultural heritage of mankind. Throughout the ages many races and peoples contributed to India's culture. Some came into contact with her only temporarily, others settled permanently within her borders. The keynote of the distinctive culture thus evolved was synthesis on the basis of eternal values'.¹ So India has a long history and its cultural tradition is very rich.

1.3 A BRIEF HISTORY

Indian society has undergone crises and turbulences in the past. Various aspects of Indian society have contributed to its dynamic character. T.K. Oommen rightly says,

The social formation of the Indian society is the end product of a long historical process. The more important elements which moulded the process are: one, the Aryan invasion estimated to have occurred about 3500 years ago which brought Hinduism, the caste system and Sanskrit to the Indian subcontinent. Before this intervention the land was occupied by pre-Aryan adivasis (early settlers) and non-Aryan Dravidians; two, the emergence of Hindu protestant religions such as Jainism and Buddhism, some 2600 years ago; three, the advent of Christianity in the first century and Islam in the 7th century. These were pre-colonial and pre-conquest intrusions which occurred through immigration and the conversion of local upper castes; four, arrival of tiny immigrant religious communities such as Jews, Zoroastrians, and later the Bahai's; five, Muslim conquest of North India which began in the 8th century and continued till the 18th century turning the Indian subcontinent into the largest Muslim congregation in the world; six, the emergence of youngest Indian religion, Sikhism, nearly 450 years ago with Punjab at its epicentre; seven, Western Christian colonialism which started in South India and gradually spread to the rest of the subcontinent.²

1.4 DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION OF INDIAN SOCIETY

The population of India on 1 March 2001 stood at 1,028,737,436 (i.e. more than 102 crore or more than 1,027 million or more than one billion), according to the provisional results released by the office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India. Of this, 532,223,090 were males and 496,514,346 were females. Thus India became the second country in the world after China to officially cross the one billion mark. India's rich cultural heritage is reflected in its 28 states, each unique in its own way and contributing to the glory of India. Among the states in India, Uttar Pradesh is the most populous with a population of 166,197,921

¹ Excerpts from the introductory remarks in 'The Cultural heritage of India', Vol. 1, Sri Ramakrishna Mission Publication.

² Oommen, T.K., 2005, Crisis and Contention in Indian Society. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

and the state with the lowest population is Sikkim with 540,841 as its population. India's sex ratio is 933 females per 1000 males. The state with the highest sex ratio is Kerala which is 1,058 per thousand, slightly more than the national average. However, Haryana has the lowest sex ratio which is 861 per thousand males.³ The sex ratio is an important social indicator of the equity prevailing between males and females. Though India has witnessed women being accorded a high status during the Vedic times, this has deteriorated with the passage of time. Muslim invasion during the medieval period was also an important factor for the deploring condition of women today. A lot of effort was made by social reformers to enhance the status of women. But gender equality still has a long way to go since patriarchy is deeply embedded in the Indian social structure.

Mahatma Gandhi had said, 'India lives in its villages'. The majority of the population in India lives in villages with agriculture as the main means of livelihood. The Census from the office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2001 shows India's rural population as 742,490,639 (72.2 %) while, the urban population is 286,119,689 (27.8%). Therefore, Gandhiji envisioned 'Gram Swaraj' wherein there would be social and economic changes in the villages. About Harijans he remarked, I have believed and repeated times without number that India is to be found not in its few cities but in its 7,00,000 villages. We town dwellers have believed that India is to be found in its towns and the villages were created to minister our needs. We have hardly ever paused to inquire if those poor folk get sufficient to eat and clothe themselves with and whether they have a roof to shelter themselves from sun and rain (Gandhi, 1936:63). This illustrates how the entire edifice of Indian culture and civilization is built on a platform of tradition.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Name two protestant religions of India.
2. Which is the most populous state in India?
3. Which is the state with the highest sex ratio?
4. Who said, 'India lives in its villages'?

1.5 VARIOUS DIVERSITIES

It is often said that there is no other country that offers the same cultural diversity as India. India is indeed unique when it comes to diversity, with 29 different states each with their own distinct traditions and character, and a population rich with diverse religious faiths, dress and accents. Such a level of diversity could perhaps be found elsewhere in an entire region such as Europe; however, in India this diversity is contained within the boundaries of a single nation.

³. The statistics have been taken from the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India.

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India is a vast country and from north to south and east to west various cultures have amalgamated, promoting cultural pluralism amidst cultural diversity. The composition of Indian society reflects the various diversities existing in India. It is essential to remember that the bulk of the Indian population represents racial admixture in varying degrees. Racial origins, however tenuous, are a part of the ethnic memory of most of the communities. This plays a significant role in shaping their identity and self-image. In this unit we will discuss the religious, linguistic and cultural composition of India and observe how these act as diversifying factors and at the same time have an underlying unity. Diversity in India is found in terms of race, religion, language, caste and culture. Sociologists say that Indian unity has been both politico-geographic and cultural in nature. The diversities have remained, but simultaneously provided for a mainstream culture.

1.5.1 Religious Composition and Diversity

Indian society is divided into a large number of religious communities. Broadly there are seven major religions, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism. In India, Hindus constitute the majority of the population (80.5%). The Muslims are the second largest religious group (13.4%). The Christians about (2.3%), Sikhs (1.9%), Buddhists (0.8%), Jains (0.4%), and other religions like Jews, Zoroastrians, Parsis, etc., comprise (0.6%). All these religions are further divided into various sects. Though the other religious communities are numerically less, yet their contribution to India's cultural heritage is noteworthy. Table 1.1 illustrates the distribution of different religious communities in India.

Table 1.1 Distribution of Different Religious Communities in India

| <i>Religious Composition</i> | <i>Population</i> | <i>Percentage (%)</i> |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Hindus | 827,578,868 | 80.5 |
| Muslims | 138,188,240 | 13.4 |
| Christians | 24,080,016 | 2.3 |
| Sikhs | 19,215,730 | 1.9 |
| Buddhists | 7,955,207 | 0.8 |
| Jains | 4,225,053 | 0.4 |
| Other religions and persuasions | 6,639,626 | 0.6 |
| Religion not stated | 727,588 | 0.1 |
| Total | 1,028,610,328 | 100.0 |

Source: 2010-11, Office of The Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, New Delhi.

Note: Excludes figures of Paomata, Mao-Maram and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur State.

All religious groups are further divided internally. The Muslims make up a large proportion of the total population in Jammu and Kashmir. Some coastal districts in Tamil Nadu and Kerala and in Lakshadweep comprise entirely of

Christians. Sikhs are more numerous in Punjab. Buddhists are mostly found in Maharashtra and Arunachal Pradesh and the Zoroastrians in and around Mumbai. The Christians are more numerous in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and the North-East Region. They make a large proportion of the total population in the North-East.

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Traditionally different religions have existed in India in peaceful coexistence. The secular nature of Indian society was well acclaimed worldwide. But the British policy of 'Divide and Rule' and the partition of the country led to various communal tensions. Communalism, which is blind loyalty towards one's own religion, has created conflicts and tensions among various religious communities. Politics practised in the name of religion has further aggravated the problem as such politics is based on narrow vested interests. Article 25 of the Constitution gives all religious communities the right to 'profess, propagate and practice their religion'. It is pertinent to know that the right to propagate one's religion was included in deference to the concerns of the minority communities, particularly Muslims and Christians, who maintained that preaching and propagating their faith was an essential part of their religion.

Hinduism is the oldest religion and is divided into various sects and cults. Hinduism is basically divided into Shaivite (worshippers of Lord Shiva), Vaishnavite (worshippers of Lord Vishnu), Shakta (worshippers of Shakti or Mother Goddess in different incarnations like Durga, Kali, Parvati, etc.) and Smarta (worshippers of all the three Gods). Even among these there are further sub-divisions making Hindu religion more complex. Moreover, the Hindu religion has accommodated many Gurus, saints and their followers like Swami Chidanand, Shivanand, etc. Some sects like Satnami, Kabirpanthi, Radhaswami, Swaminarayan, etc., are also prevalent in Hinduism. Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj are also a part of Hinduism. Therefore Hinduism with its diverse cults, sects, rituals and doctrinal differences accommodates many believers.

Muslims are divided into two major groups, Sunnis and Shias, out of which Sunnis have a larger population than Shias. Indian Christians are divided into Catholics and Protestants; whereas Buddhism is also divided into two, Mahayana and Hinayana based on differences in religious doctrines. The Jains in India are divided into Digambara (unclothed) and Svetambara (white robed). The Jains do not practise untouchability and no restrictions are observed with regard to commensality and social intercourse. It is interesting to note that both Buddhism and Jainism evolved as a protest against the Brahminical social order and the superior position ascribed to Brahmins.

Sikhism is a synthesizing religion and the majority of the Sikhs are found in Punjab. However, after partition there has been a large scale migration and now Sikhs are found almost everywhere in India and even in other countries like U.K. and U.S. Their unique tradition of Langar (free food for all) has brought together many religious communities and also inculcated the feeling of community and service to mankind. Sikh places of worship, Gurudwaras, are found everywhere in the country.

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The Parsis and Jews in India are small religious communities who have contributed a lot towards the industrial development of India, e.g., Jamshedji Tata who founded the Tata group of industries. The Parsis are mostly found in Mumbai and Jews are found in Kerala and Maharashtra.

While the religious composition of Indian society has also resulted in the diversifying of religion, there is no denying the fact that religion has also acted as a unifying force. While most societies grant individuals the right to religious belief, in India communities enjoy the right to continue with their distinct religious practices. Perhaps the most significant part of this is that in all matters of family, individuals are governed by their community personal laws (Larson, 2001). Religious communities also have the right to set up their own religious and charitable institutions; they can establish their own educational institutions, and above all, these institutions can receive financial support from the state. Taken together, these are the ways by which public recognition has been granted to different religious communities and space given to them to continue with their way of life (Mahajan, 1998).

India has many religious festivals which are celebrated amongst all religious communities. Festivals like Diwali, Id-ul-fitr and Christmas are celebrated by all religious communities. Centres of pilgrimage such as Badrinath, Rameshwaram, Kedarnath, Ajmer Sharif and many more attract people from every corner of India across religious lines and strengthen the process of national integration. The tourist places portraying beautiful Muslim architecture like the Taj Mahal, Lal Quila, Qutub Minar, etc., attract people from all walks of life.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

5. Which are the seven major religions in India?
6. Which two factors led to communal tension in India?
7. Which Article in the Constitution gives Indians the freedom to practice their own religion?
8. Which two groups are Muslims divided into?
9. Name three pilgrimage destinations in India.

1.5.2 Linguistic Diversity

India has always been a multi-lingual country. Language has also been an important source of diversity as well as unity in India. According to the Grierson (Linguistic Survey of India, 1903–28) there are 179 languages and as many as 544 dialects in the country. The Constitution of India, in its 8th Schedule recognizes 22 official languages with English as an important associate language. All the major languages have different regional variations and dialects. Some of the dialects of Hindi are Bhojpuri, Rajasthani, and Haryanvi. Originally, only 14 languages were included in the 8th Schedule. Bodo, Dogri, Konkani, Maithili, Manipuri, Nepali, Santhali

and Sindhi were recognized later. Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru had remarked, 'The makers of the Constitution were wise in laying down that all the 13 or 14 languages were to be national languages.' The languages listed in this schedule have acquired different names at different stages and are better known as the scheduled languages now. The Minorities Commission report and the official Language Resolution 3 of 1968 considered languages listed in the schedule as major languages of the country. The 'Programme of Action' Document, 1992 of the National Policy on Education, 1986 considered them as modern Indian languages.

The highest literary awards in the country are given to 24 literary languages in India by the Sahitya Academy, and newspapers and periodicals are published in 35 languages every year.

English is recognized as an important instrument of knowledge dissemination, commerce and maintenance of international relations. A provision was made to extend the use of English language in the article 343 as 'Official language of the Union' for all official purposes of the Union even after a period of fifteen years with a provision that 'the President may, during the said period, by order authorize the use of the Hindi language in addition to the English language'.

Table 1.2 provides a list of 22 languages arranged in descending order of speakers' strength. Originally among the scheduled languages, the speakers of Hindi had the highest percentage (41.03%). However, it is noticed that the linguistic regions in the country do not maintain a sharp and distinct boundary; rather they gradually merge and overlap in their respective border zones.

Table 1.2 Scheduled Languages in Descending Order of Speakers' Strength, 2001

| <i>Sl. No.</i> | <i>Language</i> | <i>Percentage of Total Population</i> |
|----------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | Hindi | 41.03 |
| 2 | Bengali | 8.11 |
| 3 | Telugu | 7.19 |
| 4 | Marathi | 6.99 |
| 5 | Tamil | 5.91 |
| 6 | Urdu | 5.01 |
| 7 | Gujarati | 4.48 |
| 8 | Kannada | 3.69 |
| 9 | Malayalam | 3.21 |
| 10 | Oriya | 3.21 |
| 11 | Punjabi | 2.83 |
| 12 | Assamese | 1.28 |
| 13 | Maithili | 1.18 |
| 14 | Santhali | 0.63 |
| 15 | Kashmiri | 0.54 |

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| 16 | Nepali | 0.28 |
| 17 | Sindhi | 0.25 |
| 18 | Konkani | 0.24 |
| 19 | Dogri | 0.22 |
| 20 | Manipuri | 0.14 |
| 21 | Bodo | 0.13 |
| 22 | Sanskrit | N |

Source: 2010-11, Office of The Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, New Delhi.

* Excludes figures of Paomata, Mao-Maram and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur for 2001.

** The percentage of speakers of each language for 2001 has been worked out on the total population of India excluding the population of Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur due to cancellation of census results.
N - Stands for negligible.

Though all the languages spoken in India are different from each other, yet they may be grouped into four linguistic families; the Austric Family (Nishada), Dravidian family (Dravida), Sino-Tibetan Family (Kirata) and Indo-European Family (Arya). The languages of the Austric family are spoken by tribal people in Meghalaya, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and in parts of Central Indian tribal belts like Ranchi, Mayurbhanj, etc.

The languages of the Dravidian family are spoken in southern parts of India. The dialects and languages of the Sino-Tibetan family are spoken by the tribal people of the North-Eastern region and in the sub-Himalayan region in the North and North-West. People in the Ladakh region, Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh also speak these languages. The speakers of the languages of Indo-European family are found in North India. The majority of the people in the North Indian plains speak Indo-Aryan (Indo-European family). Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh also have large population of speakers of these languages.

The degree of linguistic diversity in India is perplexing, not only for visitors but also for Indians. Each of the country's 28 states has adopted one or two of the 22 official languages. India's linguistic barriers are compounded by the fact that each language also has a unique written form, with an alphabet that is unrecognizable to people who are ignorant of that language.

The linguistic diversity found across India stems from a history that saw numerous ancient kingdoms, each with its own language. These languages remained distinct to the area even after a kingdom was dissolved or merged with another. State lines later drawn by the colonial rulers often crossed former political and linguistic boundaries.

After Independence, many of the southern states in India opposed the installation of Hindi as India's national language. Simultaneously there was a strong lobby across different regions of the country for organization of states on a linguistic basis. This has resulted in the protecting and encouraging of linguistic diversity.

The formation of groups based on common linguistics, each with the political rights to administer itself within the structure of the federal system, resulted in that particular linguistic community becoming the majority in that specific region. The recent Telengana issue is an important example where there was a demand for a separate linguistic province. 'Language also becomes a diversifying factor when it is used as a vote bank for politics'. (Kamraj Nadar)

Slogans like 'Tamil Nadu for Tamils', 'Maharashtra for Marathis', and so on further aggravated the language problem.

Although there is a great diversity of languages and dialects in India, fundamental unity is found in the ideas and themes expressed in these languages. Sanskrit has influenced many languages in India. However in spite of diversities Hindi continues to be the national language and people of one State can communicate with people of another State and a national language generates national sentiment.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

10. Name three dialects of Hindi.
11. How many languages were officially recognized in the 8th Schedule?
12. What position does English hold in India?

1.5.3 Cultural Diversity

India is a multi-cultural society and is a fine example of diversity and unity in cultures. India's rich natural resources have attracted many from across the world bringing about great diversity in human cultures. Powerful kingdoms and empires contributed to the shaping of India's cultural regions. The various conquests in the historical past have also been responsible for creating diversity. The bulk of the Indian population represents racial admixture in varying degrees. Unlike several other lands where the dominant human cultures have tended to absorb or eliminate others, in India the tendency has been to nurture diversity, which has been favoured by the diversity of the country's ecological regimes. (Gadgil and Guha, 1992)

From the beginning, Indian civilization has witnessed a pluralistic culture. This pluralistic culture which has its roots in the Vedic period, was enhanced by the upsurge of Buddhism and Jainism, and was further reinforced during the early medieval period, which saw the founding of the Bhakti Movement. Vedic society was an admixture of different cultures. It was a combination of Aryan and non-Aryan, with a mix of tribal elements added. There are many cultures which co-exist simultaneously in India. Communities in India demonstrate commonalities in culture traits irrespective of which religious background they belong to, even though these religious groups are further subdivided.

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Many studies on cultural diversity and syncreticism have been conducted by sociologists and anthropologists like Y. Singh, N.K. Das, Madan, Majumdar, etc., which adhere to various sociological approaches like Structural Functionalism of Radcliffe Brown or Functionalism of Malinowski. However, all this research proves that in spite of there being so many contrasts and diversities, there exists an underlying thread of unity which is seen in cultural and regional traits. India has undergone many cultural changes since independence. On one hand, where ethnic and regional groups or castes, tribes, minorities and other groups are fighting for their individual identities, there is a pervasive commonality of many integrative cultural processes. In India we can now increasingly see a rise in 'inter-regional migration' which results in the merging of regional cultural traits, cooking patterns, cultural performances, ritual forms, styles of dress and ornamentation. A sense of synchronization is evolving which helps in dissolving prevailing differences and contributes towards cultural consistency.

Moreover, the role played by Indian religion, philosophy, art and literature in strengthening India's unity is praiseworthy. India celebrates various festivals together which reflect the solidarity of people of India amidst cultural diversity. Thus it is to be noted that diverse societies in India have evolved through dialogue and interactions at different levels. The multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious society in India is the result of a constant exchange of ideas amongst the various groups. India is the best example of portraying various diversities and within this diversity a peculiar thread of unity prevails making India a unique nation.

1.6 UNITY IN DIVERSITY

When India became independent in 1947, freedom fighters and those who framed our Constitution worked on a document which provided for a culturally diverse state. Independent India had to allay the fears of its people and the leadership was urged to keep to its promise of providing equality to all the people of India. Respect for the individual could only come about through respecting the diverse beliefs and traditions that the people represent.

Unity in diversity expresses the opinion that India can remain a strong and unified country while retaining its cultural diversity. As a result of the geographical mobility of people, various parts of the country are found to have commonalities in their ways of life. Religious communities share many common cultural rights but this does not extend to them having any separate political rights, whereas recognized linguistic communities enjoy cultural and political rights. These rights have simultaneously encouraged diversity and strengthened democracy.

Other areas like judiciary or law are also based on the principle of equality. A single Constitution, a national flag, common currency, national anthem, etc., further strengthen the unity of India. All Indians are conscious that they have a

distinct national identity amidst various diversities. The various historical monuments, temples, mosques, churches, gurudwaras attract lot of tourists and reinforce the bond of unity.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

13. What three symbols do Indians have in common?
14. Name an anthropologist who conducted studies on cultural diversity.

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1.7 SUMMARY

- India is a vast country with a population of over one billion. Throughout the ages, many races and peoples have contributed to India's culture. This unit discussed the nature and composition of Indian society. It provides an understanding about the nature of various diversities prevailing in India, namely religion, language and culture, and here you learn how these diversifying forces simultaneously act as unifying forces.
- The majority of the Indian population lives in its villages, impacting the entire edifice of Indian culture and making it traditional in nature.
- Traditionally different religions have existed in India in peaceful coexistence. The secular nature of Indian society was well acclaimed worldwide till the British policy of 'Divide and Rule' and the partition of the country led to various communal tensions.
- Article 25 of the Constitution gives all religious communities the right to 'profess, propagate and practice their religions'.
- India has also always been a multi-lingual country. English is considered the official language of the Union and the unifying factor for the country, while Hindi is the national language.
- A single Constitution, a national flag, common currency, national anthem, etc., are other unifying factors to strengthen the unity in India.

1.8 KEY TERMS

- **Harijan:** Literally means children of God; this is a scheduled caste in India
- **Digambara:** A division of Jainism, those who are unclothed or sky clad
- **Swetambara:** A division of Jainism, those who are robed in white
- **Langar:** Sikh custom of distributing free food to all
- **Gurudwara:** Sikh place of worship
- **Unity in diversity:** Expresses the opinion that India can remain a strong and unified country while retaining its cultural diversity

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1.9 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Jainism and Buddhism
2. Uttar Pradesh
3. Kerala
4. Mahatma Gandhi
5. Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism.
6. The British policy of 'Divide and Rule' and the partition of India.
7. Article 25
8. Sunnis and Shias
9. Kedarnath, Badrinath and Rameshwaram
10. Bhojpuri, Rajasthani and Haryanvi
11. 14 languages
12. English is the official language of the Union.
13. National anthem, currency and a single Constitution
14. Y.K. Das

1.10 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Which are the important elements that contributed to the formation of the Indian society?
2. Write a short note to explain how religion can be a unifying and diversifying factor.
3. What are the rights accorded to religions so that they can be practiced freely?
4. Which are the four linguistic families?
5. What is 'inter-regional migration'?

Long-Answer Questions

1. 'There is no other country that offers the same diversity as India'. Elaborate.
2. Write a detailed note on the religions in India.
3. Elaborate on the linguistic diversity in India.
4. Explain 'unity in diversity'.
5. How can culture be a source of diversity and unity? Elaborate.
6. Discuss the demographic composition of India.

1.11 FURTHER READING/REFERENCES

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NOTES

UNIT 2 CASTE SYSTEM

Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Unit Objectives
- 2.2 Meaning of Caste System
- 2.3 Characteristics of the Caste System
- 2.4 Concept of *Varna*
- 2.5 Difference between *Varna* and *Jati*
- 2.6 Recent Changes in the Caste System
- 2.7 Untouchability
- 2.8 Features of the Protection of Civil Rights Act
- 2.9 Summary
- 2.10 Key Terms
- 2.11 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 2.12 Questions and Exercises
- 2.13 Further Reading/References

NOTES

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Pritim Sorokin's oft quoted statement 'an unstratified society is a myth', clearly reflects that stratification is inherent in nature. Social stratification has existed in all known societies. India has been considered as one of the most divided of all known societies in the history of mankind. Stratification is the organizing of society according to the different social status of individuals. The traditional methods of the stratification of society in India have unique characteristics, and these have been studied by scholars throughout the world. The caste system, with its various levels of super castes and subordinate castes and its many customs and taboos, is responsible for awarding India the dubious honour of being the most divided society in the world. From your study of the earlier unit you are aware of the nature of Indian society and the uniqueness of India as a diverse country, which, at the same times maintain the ethos of unity. This unit will help you to understand the internal dynamics of Indian society through its caste system and how this institution has created inequality for many years.

2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the Indian system of stratification
- Describe the meaning of caste and analyse the characteristics of the caste system

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- Distinguish between caste (*jati*) and colour (*varna*)
- Analyse the modern changes in the Indian caste system
- Understand the notion of untouchability
- Describe and analyse the contents of the PCR Act

2.2 MEANING OF CASTE SYSTEM

Caste is an ancient social institution that has been a part of Indian history and culture for thousands of years. It is an institution uniquely associated with the Indian subcontinent and hence is of indigenous nature. While social arrangements producing similar effects have existed in other parts of the world, the exact form has been found elsewhere. The term 'caste' owes its origin to the Portuguese word *casta* meaning race, pure breed, etc. In India, caste is termed as *jati*. Theoretically the caste system can be understood as the combination of two sets of principles — one based on differences and separation and the other on wholism and hierarchy. M.N. Srinivas in his book, *Caste in Modern India*, provides a sociological definition of caste system. To him, a sociologist would define a caste as a hereditary, endogamous, usually localized group, having a traditional association with an occupation, and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes. He further stated that relations between castes are governed, among other things, by the concepts of purity and pollution, and generally, maximum commensality occurs within caste. According to Irawati Karve in her book *Hindu Society: An Interpretation*, 'The Indian caste society is a society made of semi-independent units, each having its own traditional pattern of behaviour. This has resulted in a multiplicity of norms and behaviour, the existence of which has found a justification in a religious and philosophical system.' Accordingly, the Hindu religion is intrinsic in the particular stratification found in caste.

Many Western and Indian scholars have studied the caste system and have tried to define it. Sir Herbert Risley defined, 'Caste as a collection of families, or group of families, bearing a common name, claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same hereditary calling and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community.' C.H. Cooley stated, 'When a class is somewhat strictly hereditary, we may call it a caste.' However the above views reflect that caste is usually a group of people sharing similarities with regard to race occupation, breed, colour, etc., and this institution is hierarchical in nature.

Caste as a system of social stratification has been an issue of sociological debate. Such debates have generated two viewpoints with regard to the caste system—structural and cultural. The structural principle of stratification can be explained by accepting the caste system as a general principle of stratification which depicts the hierarchical arrangements of people. The cultural view of the caste system can be explained in terms of predominance of ideas like pollution