



## **Government of Tamilnadu**

### **Department of Employment and Training**

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**Department of Employment and Training.**



# UNITY IN DIVERSITY

## Introduction:

One feature that is most often noticed about India is its unity in diversity. This overworked cliché has become a part of India's self-identity. India is a country of sub-continental proportions. From north to south, east to west, people from diverse backgrounds have mixed and cultures have intermingled over centuries.

Nevertheless, there has been an underlying continuity in identity. Beneath the bewildering diversity of religion, language and customs of this vast country, the underlying unity is remarkable. The idea of unity is traced back by scholars to ancient times.

The underlying cultural unity was strengthened further with the administrative unity brought about during the British rule and with the construction of India as a modern independent nation after the independence. The enduring nature of Indian unity has always been fascinating.

Indian unity is the product of certain historical factors that are present in various fields of Indian social life. It appears as if the inhabitants from the Himalayas in the north to Kanyakumari in the south, and Kutch in the west to Arunachal in the east are woven together into a beautiful tapestry.

In the process of its evolution, Indian society has acquired a culture characterized by stable patterns of pluralism. However, the acceptance of cultural pluralism does not detract us from the idea of promoting economic, political and social integration.

European Sociology conceptualizes unity in a society in terms of linguistic nationality or in terms of political sovereignty. Thus, the primary basis of unity belongs to a nation. According to many Indian sociologists, however, unity in India and the whole of South Asia, in fact, has been civilisational, going back to ancient times and continuing to the present day. Thus, at the civilisational level there is unity in South Asia, but this South

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Asian civilisation is divided today into many nations like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

## Forms of Diversity in India

### Racial Diversity

You may have seen people of different races in India. A race is a group of people with a set of distinctive physical features such as skin colour, type of nose, form of hair, etc.

- (1) the Negrito,                      (2) the Proto Australoid,                      (3) the Mongoloid,  
(4) the Mediterranean,      (5) the Western Brachycephals,                      (6) the Nordic.

Besides telling you what the various types denote, we shall not go into the details of this issue, because that will involve us in technical matters pertaining to physical anthropology. Here, we need only to be aware of the diversity of racial types in India.

- **Negritos** are the people who belong to the black racial stock as found in Africa. They have black skin colour, frizzle hair, thick lips, etc. In India some of the tribes in South India, such as the Kadar, the Irula and the Paniyan have distinct Negrito strain.
- The **Proto-Australoid** races consist of an ethnic group, which includes the Australian aborigines and other peoples of southern Asia and Pacific Islands. Representatives of this group are the Ainu of Japan, the Vedda of Sri Lanka, and the Sakai of Malaysia. In India the tribes of Middle India belong to this strain. Some of these tribes are the Ho of Singhbhum, Bihar, and the Bhil of the Vindhya ranges.
- **The Mongoloids** are a major racial stock native to Asia, including the peoples of northern and eastern Asia. For example, Chinese, Japanese, Burmese, Eskimos, and often American Indians also belong to this race. In India, the North Eastern regions have tribes of brachycephalic Mongoloid strain. A slightly different kind of Mongoloid racial stock is found in the Brahmaputra Valley. The Mikir-Bodo group of tribes and the Angami Nagas represent the best examples of Mongoloid racial composition in India



- **The Mediterranean** races relate to the Caucasian physical type, i.e., the white race. It is characterised by medium or short stature, slender build, long head with cephalic index (the ratio multiplied by 100 of the maximum breadth of the head to its maximum length) of less than 75 and dark (continental) complexion.
- **The Western Brachycephals** are divided into the following three sub-groups:
  1. **The Alpenoid** are characterised by broad head, medium stature and light skin, found amongst Bania castes of Gujarat, the Kayasthas of Bengal, etc.
  2. **The Dinaric** are characterised by broad head, long nose, tall stature and dark skin colour, found amongst the Brahmin of Bengal, the non-Brahmin of Karnataka,
  3. The **Armenoid** are characterised by features similar to Dinaric. The Armenoid have a more marked shape of the back of head, a prominent and narrow nose. The Parsi of Bombay show the typical characteristics of the Armenoid race.
- **The Nordic** races belong to the physical type characterised by tall stature, long head, light skin and hair, and blue eyes. They are found in Scandinavian countries, Europe. In India, they are found in different parts of north of the country, especially in Punjab and Rajputana. The Kho of Chitral, the Red Kaffirs, the Khatash are some of the representatives of this type. Research suggests that the Nordics came from the north, probably from south east Russia and south west Siberia, through central Asia to India.

## Linguistic Diversity

While the famous linguist Grierson noted 179 languages and 544 dialects, the 1971 census on the other hand, reported 1652 languages in India which are spoken as mother tongue. Not all these languages are, however, equally widespread. Many of them are tribal speeches and these are spoken by less than one percent of the total population. Here you can see that in India there is a good deal of linguistic diversity.

- Only 22 languages are listed in Schedule VIII of the Indian Constitution. These are Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam,

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Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, bodo, dongri, Maithili, santhali.

- The above constitutionally recognised languages belong to two linguistic families: Indo-Aryan and Dravidian. Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu are the four major Dravidian languages.

This linguistic diversity notwithstanding, we have always had a sort of link language, though it has varied from age to age. In ancient times it was Sanskrit, in medieval age it was Arabic or Persian and in modern times we have Hindi and English as official languages.

### **Religious Diversity**

India is a land of multiple religions. We find here followers of various faiths, particularly of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, among others.

You know it that Hinduism is the dominant religion of India. According to the census of 1981 it is professed by 82.64 percent of the total population. Next comes Islam, which is practised by 11.35 percent. This is followed by Christianity having a following of 2.43 percent, Sikhism reported by 1.96 percent, Buddhism by 0.71 percent and Jainism by 0.48 percent. The religions with lesser following are Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Bahaism.

While Hinduism saw a slight reduction in the percentage of their followers by the year 1991, most of the other religions increased their strength though by very narrow margin. According to the 1991 census the Hinduism has 82.41 percent followers to the total population. 11.67 percent followed Islam and 2.32 percent followed Christianity. Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism followed by 1.99, 0.77 and 0.41 percent, respectively. And 0.43 reported to follow other religions.

Then there are sects within each religion. Hinduism, for example, has many sects including Shaiva, Shakta and Vaishnava. Add to them the sects born or religious reform movements such as Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj, Ram Krishna Mission.

More recently, some new cults have come up such as Radhaswami, Saibaba, etc. Similarly, Islam is divided into Shiya and Sunni; Sikhism into Namdhari and

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Nirankari; Jainism into Digambar and Shvetambar; and Buddhism into Hinayan and Mahayan.

While Hindu and Muslim are found in almost all parts of India, the remaining minority religions have their pockets of concentration. Christians have their strongholds in the three southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh and in the north-eastern states like Nagaland and Meghalaya. Sikhs are concentrated largely in Punjab, Buddhists in Maharashtra, and Jains are mainly spread over Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat, but also found in most urban centres throughout the country.

### **Caste Diversity**

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

1. *Varna* refers to a segment of the four-fold division of Hindu society based on functional criterion. The four *Varna* are Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra with their specialised functions as learning, defence, trade and manual service. The *Varna* hierarchy is accepted all over India.
2. *Jati* refers to a hereditary endogamous status group practising a specific traditional occupation. You may be surprised to know that there are more than 3,000 *jati* in India. These are hierarchically graded in different ways in different regions.

It may also be noted that the practice of caste system is not confined to Hindus alone. We find castes among the Muslim, Christian, Sikh as well as other communities. You may have heard of the hierarchy of Shaikh, Saiyed, Mughal, Pathan among the Muslim. Furthermore, there are castes like teli (oil pressure), dhobi (washerman), darjee (tailor), etc. among the Muslim.

Similarly, caste consciousness among the Christian in India is not unknown. Since a vast majority of Christians in India are converted from Hindu fold, the converts have carried the caste system into Christianity.

Among the Sikh again you have so many castes including *Jat* Sikh and *Majahabi* Sikh (lower castes). In view of this you can well imagine the extent of caste diversity in India.



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**Questions :**

1. What are the Various Forms of Diversity in India Examine?

