Unity and Diversity in India

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India is a plural society both in letter and spirit. It is rightly characterised by its unity and diversity. A grand synthesis of culture, religions and languages of the people belonging to different castes and communities has upheld its unity and cohesiveness despite multiple foreign invasions.

India is a country carrying a long cultural stream. Therefore, India is considered one of the most ancient civilisations in the world. India has always been a land of diversified faith, multiple languages, different races, and distinct ethnic groups who came to India at different points in time and made India their home. National unity and integrity have been maintained even through sharp economic and social inequalities that have obstructed the emergence of egalitarian social relations. India presents a seemingly multicultural situation within the framework of a single integrated cultural whole.

Unlike western societies, we are not people speaking in a given language, practising common culture, participating in a state and dropping out the people belonging to other cultures. India in its contrast has always been more tolerant, accommodative, and integrative than assimilative. When unity in uniformity is a strength to the people of the West, diversity and mutual coexistence have been a foundation of Indian society. Nowhere in the world pluralism is practised so well as it is practised in India.

India's pluralism is not only universally respected but also in many situations challenged. The people of India have negotiated the challenge of pluralism and diversity evolving India as a cultural, pluralistic society. Respecting this pluralism, the centre-state relationship is spelt out by the Indian constitution. Similarly, Secularism in India protects against discrimination, and also the various constitutional mandates contribute to the pluralistic character of the Indian society. Hence, pluralism in India is having strong historical route and constitutional interface. Unity in diversity is important for India for its national integration, growth and development, global recognition and peaceful co-existence.

FORCES OF DIVERSITY

The term 'diversity' emphasizes differences rather than inequalities. It means collective differences, that is, differences which mark off one group of people from another. It is the opposite of uniformity. The forces of diversity can be analysed with reference to caste, tribe, race, religion, language and territoriality. These forces of diversity instead of segmenting India, promote unity. Therefore, India is called a land of unity in diversity.

1. RACIAL DIVERSITY

India has always been a land of multiple races and the 1931 census classified India's racial diversity into the following groups:

● The Negritos,
● The Proto-Australoid,
● The Mongoloid,
● The Mediterranean,
● The Western Brachycephals, and
● The Nordics.

However, unlike western society and colonial Africa where discrimination of race was largely practised, the context of India was not the same. Therefore, race was a system of inequality and form of exploitation in the case of the West, whereas in India it was a force of difference. Different racial groups have been living in various parts of India and on the basis of physical traits, one does not notice exploitation and deprivation.

2. LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

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. India has a good deal of linguistic diversity. But only 22 languages are listed in Schedule VIII of the Indian constitution.

The major language families of India are the Indo-Aryan languages spoken by 75% of Indians, and the Dravidian languages are spoken by 20% of Indians. Other languages belong to Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burmese, Andamanese and a few others.

India has the world's fourth-largest number of 'living' indigenous languages. In spite of the linguistic diversity, we have always had a sort of link language, though it has varied from age to age. In ancient times it was Sanskrit, in the medieval age it was Arabic or Persian and in modern times we have Hindi and English as the official languages.

3. RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

India is a land of multiple religions. Apart from the tribal societies, many of whom still live in the pre-religious state of animism and magic, the Indian population consist of Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and other religions like Zoroastrians, Jews, etc. Out of the eight major religions, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism are indigenous religions, whereas Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Jew came from outside India. All eight religions are further sub-divided into different sects. For example; Hindu worshippers are divided into four types: Vaishnav, Shaivite, Shakta and Smarta, etc.

3. CASTE DIVERSITY

Caste system is unique in India and originally found among the Hindus. It started with 'Varna-Vyavastha' during the Vedic Period. There were four Varnas: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Purity and pollution were the main basis for Varna Vyavastha. Untouchability came into being during the later Vedic era.

Later on, occupational diversities gave birth to 'Jatis'. It refers to a hereditary endogamous status group practising a specific traditional occupation. There are about 3500 Jatis. The Jati system provided a unique system of cooperation through the economic system of 'Jajmani'. M N Srinivas has described the dynamic nature of caste through 'Sanskritization'. These castes are hierarchically graded in different ways in different regions.

However, the practice of the caste system is not confined to Hindus. Caste is found among the Muslims, Christians, Sikhs as well as other communities. For example; the hierarchy of Shaikh, Saiyed, Mughal, etc. in Muslims, etc. Therefore, India has a very rich caste diversity.

5. TRIBAL DIVERSITY

India is a land of multiple tribes. It is generally considered that the original inhabitants of India were tribes. History indicates that many tribal kingdoms were present in India. There are around 645 distinct tribes in India. For example, Santhals, Bhils, Naga, Baiga, Khasi, etc.

Famous Anthropologist S C Roy advocates that tribes and castes co-exist in India, since the date of origin of Indian society. G S Ghurye, the founder of Indian Sociology advocates that Tribalism and Hinduism can't be mutually separated. Tribalism provides the raw material for the growth and development of Hinduism.

Hence, it can be advocated that hundreds of caste and tribes create space for each other, borrowing from the culture of one another without diluting their inherent cultural characteristics make India a classic example of a pluralistic society.

6. TERRITORIAL DIVERSITY

Territory refers not only to geographical space but to people living in a territory and sharing emotional connections with each other. Each territory is having a history and culture. Therefore, people living in a territory develop a distinctive identity for themselves. Today, India's political territorial division consists of 28 states and 8 Union Territories. This division is accompanied by significant regional diversity which is distinct and visible as one moves from state to state. Diversity exists in language, food, dress and customs. In India, we have mountains, sea coasts, deserts, plain areas, etc. This territory provides a strong platform for mutual harmony, interdependency, and coexistence. It promotes the composite culture and pluralistic character of Indian society.

BONDS OF UNITY

Unity means integration. It is a social psychological condition. It connotes a sense of one-ness, a sense of we-ness. It stands for the bonds, which hold the members of a society together. Unity in diversity essentially means "unity without uniformity" and "diversity without fragmentation".
There are various Bonds of Unity, such as;
● Geo-political unity,
● Institution of pilgrimage and religious practices,
● Tradition of accommodation,
● Tradition of inter-dependence, etc.

Philip Mason considers that India is a pluralist society because the foundation of pluralism is different cultural communities accepting inherent differences and they still co-exist together. People from different pockets of the world carrying their culture, language, and religion came to India. They made India their home. They went for cultural exchange, and developed fraternity, toleration and mutual trust to make India a pluralistic society.

CHALLENGES TO INDIAN PLURALISM
1. REGIONALISM
There are several regions in India having their unique traditions, food habits, dress and languages. Each region differs from the other in one or other ways which can lead to the disintegration of the country. Regionalism tends to highlight the interests of a particular region/regions over national interest. Law and order situation is hampered due to regional demands and ensuing agitation.
2. CASTEISM
Caste is an important part of our social fabric. This was developed in the past on the basis of the division of labour in society. But now casteism has segregated the society. The feeling of socially neglected scheduled castes under the suppression of upper caste ruined the sense of 'we-feeling' and unity. Various politicians practice 'divisive politics' in order to garner votes. This type of divisive politics can result in violence, feeling of mistrust and suspicion among oppressed castes.
3. COMMUNALISM
Religious antagonism has posed a serious problem to national integration in India. India is a multi-religious land. Political manipulation has projected one religion against the other which resulted in communal riots, bloodbaths, mutual distrust and disintegration of the country. Large-scale illiteracy and superstition are responsible along with other causes for rising of communalism in the country. It hinders the secular fabric of the country.
4. LINGUISTIC FANATICISM
Multilinguism is one of the important pluralistic characteristics of India. There is conflict on the language issue. People of one language try to establish their language over others. When Hindi was declared the national language people of South India resented this decision to support the English language. Language issues became a barrier on the way of national integration.
5. SOCIAL DISPARITY
Social disparity among the people of different communities, castes and sometime within the community and caste causes tension and imbalance among the people.
6. DEVELOPMENT IMBALANCE
Uneven pattern of socio-economic development, inadequate economic policies and consequent economic disparities can lead to the backwardness of the region. Consequently, this can result in violence, kickstart waves of migration and even accelerate demands for separatism. For instance, due to the economic backwardness of the North-East region, several instances of separatist demands and secessionist tendencies have sprung up in the region.
7. 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, threats to identity, etc. Eg: frequent clashes between Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam.
8. GEOGRAPHICAL ISOLATION
It too can lead to identity issues and separatist demands. The North-East is geographically isolated from the rest of the country as it is connected with the rest of the country by a narrow corridor i.e. the Siliguri Corridor. The region has inadequate infrastructure and is more backward economically as compared to the rest of the country. As a result, it has witnessed several instances of separatism and cross-border terrorism, among others.
9. INTER-STATE CONFLICTS
This can lead to the emergence of feeling related to regionalism. It can also affect trade and communications between conflicting states. For instance, the Cauvery river dispute between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
10. EXTERNAL FACTORS
Sometimes external factors such as foreign organizations, terrorist groups, and extremist groups can incite violence and sow feelings of separatism. For example, ISI has been accused of supporting and training mujahideen to fight in Jammu and Kashmir and sow separatist tendencies among resident groups.

CONCLUSION
In a nutshell, India is a plural society both in letter and spirit. Pluralism in India is having strong historical route and constitutional interface. The forces of diversity with reference to caste, tribe, race, religion, language and territoriality clearly highlight India's pluralism. As M N Srinivas advocated that emotional integration among the people of India from Jammy and Kashmir to Kanyakumari, India is one constitutional integration, making India a land of "Unity in Diversity". In spite of the challenges posed by diversity, there can

be no doubt about the role played by socio-cultural diversity in sustaining and developing Indian society. The problem is not diversity per se, but the handling of diversity. The problems of regionalism, communalism, ethnic conflicts, etc. have arisen, but the rise of dangerous incidents is mostly temporal and pathological. Hence, Constitution and its values must form guiding principles of our society, and once we neutralize the genesis of these conflicts, India can evolve into one of the perfect examples of a pluralistic society.

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