

MALUKA IAS

INDIAN SOCIETY



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SALIENT ASPECT OF DIVERSITY OF INDIA AND INDIAN SOCIETY

India offers astounding variety in virtually every aspect of social life. Diversities of ethnic, linguistic, regional, economic, religious, class, and caste groups crosscut Indian society, permeating immense urban-rural differences and gender distinctions.

Differences between north India and south India are particularly significant, especially in systems of kinship and marriage.

Indian society is multifaceted to an extent perhaps unknown in any other of the world's great civilizations—it is more like an area as varied as Europe than any other single nation-state.

Adding further variety to contemporary Indian culture are rapidly occurring changes affecting various regions and socioeconomic groups in disparate ways. Yet, amid the complexities of Indian life, widely accepted cultural themes enhance social harmony and order.

If you were to ask 20 people "What is diversity?", it is likely that you will get 20 different answers. Diversity is an evolving concept that is rarely defined in the research literature. On the most fundamental level, diversity means "difference." Diversity is a characteristic of groups, not of individuals. You can talk about a member of a diverse community but not about a diverse individual.

Diversity refers to all of how people differ, including primary characteristics, such as age, race, gender, ethnicity, mental and physical abilities, and sexual orientation; and secondary characteristics, such as nationality, education, income, religion, work experience, language skills, geographic location, family status, communication style, military experience, learning style, economic background, and work style.

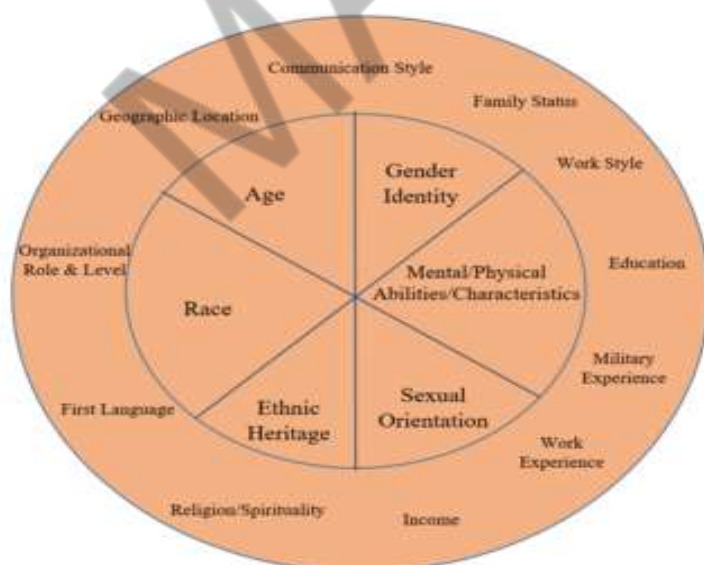
Defining diversity becomes the first challenge for any institution. Institutions should develop their definition for diversity that is dependent on their specific needs for creating a representative pool of participants.

The idea of diversity can be further complicated and be mistaken for terminologies such as equity, multiculturalism, and inclusion.

Inclusion exists when traditionally marginalized individuals and groups feel a sense of belonging and are empowered to participate in majority culture as full and valued members of the community, shaping and redefining that culture in different ways.

Multiculturalism acknowledges and promotes the acceptance and understanding of different cultures living together within a community. As such, multiculturalism promotes the productive coexistence of different races, ethnicities, and other cultural groups in a given social environment.

Primary and Secondary Characteristics of Diversity



Primary characteristics of diversity are usually the most visible; for example, gender, race, sexual orientation, and age, although often these may not be apparent. The visibility of primary characteristics is critical to the assumptions made by the majority society about the presumed worth of minority group members. The values and judgments assigned to these attributes by the majority group may determine whether minority group members are accepted as full participants.

Secondary characteristics are defined by way of experience. Secondary characteristics, such as family status, education, income, and communication style are vital in shaping one's educational and career trajectories. Secondary characteristics account for human agency and choice, so the influence of secondary characteristics is more variable and presumably less defining, although not always, than primary characteristics. In structurally inequitable societies where access to opportunities is not equal across populations, personal choice in secondary characteristics is not always fully realized.

India has been considered as perhaps the largest and most plural society in the world. In India, people speak an array of languages and use a wide range of scripts. As a country, India has major religions - Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, -living side by side.

India is the world's most complex and comprehensively pluralistic society, home to a vast variety of castes, tribes, communities, religions, languages, customs, and living styles.

It was estimated by the Anthropological Survey of India that there are nearly 4,599 separate communities in India with as many as 325 languages and dialects in 12 distinct language families and some 24 scripts.

Meaning and Nature of Social Diversity

By 'social diversity, we mean the co-existence of different social groups within a given geopolitical setting or in simpler terms, differentiation of society into groups. Other terms such as, '**plurality**', '**multiculturalism**', '**social differentiation**' etc. are also interchangeably used to explain this feature.

Diversity may be both functional and dysfunctional for a society depending on its composition. The question that may arise at this stage is 'how much pluralists a society can become without losing its organic unity?'

Despite divisions of groups, an underlying unity runs through the whole Indian social system. In order to understand the nature of social diversity in India, it is important to understand the nature of group identities that form diversity.

Types of Social Diversity

The main sources of social diversity are ethnic origins, religions, and languages. According to Sorokin, social differentiation can be classified into two types:

- a) Intra-group (i.e. differentiation within a group and
- b) Inter-group differentiation (i.e. differentiation among the groups).

Further groups may also be classified as:

- a) Unibound (i.e. groups whose members are bound into a solidarity system by one main value or interest such as, race, sex and age;
- b) Multi bound (i.e. groups formed by the coalescence of two or more unibound values such as castes, tribes, classes etc.

A Intra-group differentiation means a division of the group into subgroups that perform Social Diversity and different functions and are not graded superior or inferior to each other.

However Education when subgroups are ranked 'superior and inferior' or 'higher and lower', intergroup differentiation becomes intergroup stratification such as castes in the Indian Caste System.

Language

Language is one of the main markers of group solidarity in any society. The social categorization in terms of languages is much stronger than any other social markers such as religion, class, caste, tribe etc.

Group identities are expressed in stronger terms when language identities' are combined with other types.

India is highly diversified in terms of languages. Despite the language-based reorganization of states, India has not been able to solve many language-related problems.

Under the state reorganization, only a few major languages have been given official recognition and resource support. The following issues need to be looked into:

Language nationalism operates at the regional level rather than at the national level; three-language formula devised for imparting education at different levels is still not fully implemented; The states have not devised their policy for protecting the educational, cultural, and economic interests of the language minority groups who inadvertently have fallen in particular state territory.

The educational implication of language diversification has not been worked out and incorporated into the education system. Unity at the national level should have a national language component in the policy framework.

The Indian constitution lists 15 languages as major languages. All major languages have regional and dialectical variations. Besides these, 227 languages/dialects have also been recognized as mother tongues making the task of language planning and promotion more difficult.

Furthermore, the diversification of tribal groups in terms of languages makes the situation that much more complicated.

Religion

Religion is an important binding force of social integration among individuals and groups. By religion, we generally mean belief in supernatural beings or entities. Religion has been playing an important role in Indian society from the very evolution of human society.

It has never been static. India is a multi-religious society. Changes have taken place in religions from time to time. Religious reform movements have been integral parts of India's socio-cultural life.

The 1961 Census of India listed 7 religious categories, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, and other religions and persuasions. However, there are other religious groups such as Jews, Zoroastrians, and tribal which find mentioned in the 1931 Census.

Religion is a complex phenomenon in India. Conservative and progressive elements are found among different groups highlighting intra-religious differentiation

Religious conversion has been a controversial issue throughout Indian history.

It still draws attention even in the contemporary situation.

In recent years, the religious conversion of tribal has generated considerable antipathy and conflict.

Religion also brings out internal cohesion by cementing internal class, language, and other Emerging Concerns in divisions.

Even the introduced religions such as Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrian, etc. Indian Education has developed Indian character. Hinduism, the main religion has allowed other religions to grow alongside.

It not only affected other religions but has also been affected by other religions. The Bhakti movement and the Sufi tradition are a testimony to this give-and-take situation

The Constitution of India considering the country as secular has treated all religious groups on equal terms.

It has made provision for freedom to all religious groups to hold and practice their beliefs and rituals.

Secularism has been ingrained in the national policies and planning of education and development.

Pluralism

Nature of Indian Society The attitude of pluralism may be traced to the ontological make-up of the Hindu worldview.

It is a method of allowing each individual or group to get the ultimate truth in his own tradition by means of the discipline of mind and morals.

The Bhagwat Gita calls this 'Swadharma'. Nothing is good which is not self-chosen and no determination is valuable which not self-determination is. In another outlook pluralism is the value of adjustment to reality.

Often, it is felt that the fundamental drive in the thought and activities of the group seems to be towards the goal of adjustment of the individual to the universe.

The theme of pluralism in Indian culture is borne out from historical necessity and has a strong basis in the Hindu religious practices supported by the Hindu ontology. Apart from the polytheistic manifestations, this configuration of values reflects in the life of the averages Indian the following cluster of values:

1. **Multiplicity** of approaches to social problems as a social value.
2. **Tolerance** is a valued concept both in religious and secular life.
3. **Unity in diversity** as an underlying value, along with pluralistic approach.
4. **Swadharma** as directional value toward self-chosen and self-determined social behavior within the purview of unity in diversity.
5. Adjustment as a value leading to non-controlling the universe but towards establishing a passive balanced recording of the environment.

Caste

Caste is a system of social relations. It is an important feature of Indian society based on endogamy, hierarchy, occupational association, purity and pollution, and inscriptive status.

Although caste seeks ideological roots in the Varna scheme of Hinduism, it is an all-pervasive and very complex phenomenon that holds its sway till today. It has provided an internal structure and social base to Indian Society sometimes cutting across religious barriers.

The social system that emerged out of social division labor has received perpetual religious sanction. The caste system has been responding to empirical realities and has been changing. The four-fold Varna has gave way to several castes often addressed as Jatis.

The inscriptive status (i.e. caste ranking based on birth) has made the caste system a bit inflexible.

However, despite the inscriptive nature of caste ranking, the caste has never been static. The prevalence of thousands of sub-castes, clans, and sub-clans within a caste is a testimony of diversification, differentiation, and change in the caste system.

The Indian caste system has also been analysed from the class point of view by several social scientists.

The caste and class debate has arisen to analyse social differentiation within the caste system.

Caste and class are two different forms of social stratification, and changes are taking place from caste (ranking of groups) to class (ranking of individuals).

The following need to be taken into account

Despite transformation and changes, the caste system has persisted as an ideology, social structure, and practices; The caste system inherits problems related to economic, political, and social domination and privileges, subjugation, and deprivation, etc.;

The Constitution of India has made special provisions for the protection of the deprived castes mainly the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Castes (OBC).

Tribe

Tribal people are other important sociocultural groups in India, constituting over 8 per cent of the Indian population (2001 Census). However, given the current classification of tribal groups in India, it is difficult to define the term 'tribe'. In the Imperial Gazetteer, the word 'tribe' has been defined as a collection of families which have a common name and a common dialect and which occupy or profess to occupy a common territory and which have been endogamous'.

In fact, with regard to tribal groups, the task has often been to identify the tribal groups, rather than to define them. The academic considerations have not been given due attention in identifying these groups (Betteille, 1986).

According to Singh (1994). 'Tribe' is an administrative and political concept in India. The categorization of tribal groups has been done state-wise and has not been uniform.

There are cases of the groups that have been classified, as scheduled tribes in one state, have not been categorized as the tribes in other states. The tribal groups are much behind their non- Social Diversity and, tribal counterparts in terms of their educational attainment. With regard to tribals, the Education following issues need to be looked at:

The tribal groups differ from other disadvantaged groups in terms of their cultural specificities. The tribal people in themselves are highly diversified groups.

The degree of tribalism varies from the extremely primitive isolated tribal groups located in the Andaman Islands to the modern-developed tribal groups such as the Meena in Rajasthan.

The tribal groups are further differentiated in terms of size, territorial locality, racial features, marriage and kinship patterns, languages/dialects, economy, religious beliefs and practices, development and educational attainment, etc.

The tribes being a local community perceive their identity largely at the regional and local levels than at the national level. The problems faced by the tribal groups vary from region to region, state to state, and from one tribal group to another.

Gender

A gender is a form of socio-biological difference between man and woman. The sexual difference is socially constructed contracting characteristics labelled as masculine and feminine.

Conceptually **the term 'gender' differs from 'sex'**, as the latter refers mainly to the bimodal distribution of biological demographic characteristics between males and females. In the case of gender differences, it is the socio-biological differences that have been historically conditioned and are accepted as part of the social institutions.

The elements of power and control are embedded in the gender difference. Although both sex and gender differences are universal, the nature and degree of difference varies from one social group to another.

The educational development in India is characterized by a widening gender gap in education.

The picture is dismal, as the female literacy is 54.16 percent as against 75.85 percent for males (2001 Census). Gender disparities exist at all levels of education. For example, **the gender gap** at the primary enrolment level was 22 percent (Haq and Haq, 1998).

The gender gap in education needs to be understood in terms of disadvantaged position of women in Indian society.

Although the Indian women suffer from biases in almost all spheres of their social life, the nature and intensity of this biasness may however vary across different social groups.

The problem is intensified further, when gender disadvantage is combined with class, caste, religious and other disadvantages. For instance, the dropout rate at the elementary schooling stage is the highest among rural ST female children (NSS, 50th Round, 1993-94) social diversity resulting from social differentiation is characterized by the problems of disparities and disadvantages.

Very often, these group disparities get reflected in regional imbalances, if there is concentration of disadvantaged groups in certain pockets or regions. So 'region' although not a social category, shows a certain pattern indicating a particular socioeconomic status, because of certain categories of social groups inhabiting the region.

For instance, the northern and eastern regions are backward in terms of educational and economic development, as the regions have higher proportions of the disadvantaged groups. Disparities within and among different groups need to be studied from different angles. The following section deals with the impact of social diversity on education.

FAMILY AND MARRIAGE

Family in India is the basic unit of society. Unlike the Western societies, it is the social group, such as family, which determines the status of the individual rather than the individual herself or himself. There are nuclear types of families, where a couple with their children live together and also extended type of families are found, where more than one generation of members live together, such as grandparents, parents, children, uncles, and aunties.

Family, in most cases, is founded in a marital relationship between a man and a woman. Basically, the family legitimizes procreation. Marriage provides the sanction to the couple to engage in a physical relationship leading to reproduction. It also provides the first social environment to children from whom they learn about their society and culture. This process of learning the culture and way of life as part of growing up is referred to as 'socialization'.

Family is an important agent of socialization. As children grow up, they learn what it is to be a human being in society, what is expected from them, how they are expected to behave and conduct themselves, and what they may expect from others. In India, the family is the basic unit of society.