Salient features of Indian Society and Unity in Diversity

Features of Indian Society

India is a vast country and has a long history. Its society has evolved through the ages and has also been affected by foreign influences giving it extreme diversity and made unity amidst diversity a characteristic of the Indian society. However, to understand the process, we need to understand the meaning of diversity, unity and pluralism as well as their relevance to the Indian society.

Diversity

In literary terms, diversity means differences. However in social context the meaning is more specific; it means collective differences among people, that is, those differences which mark off one group of people from another. These differences may be of any sort: biological, religious, linguistic etc. On the basis of biological differences, for example, we have racial diversity. On the basis of religious differences, similarly, we have religious diversity. The point to note is that diversity refers to collective differences.

Institutionalization

Indian society is institutionalized in nature in the form of well developed systems like Family, Marriage, Gotra and Caste System.

Multi-class

Indian society is a multi-class due to several classes exists in India. This classification is based ones birth as well as his achievements.

Multi-ethnic Society

Indian society is multi-ethnic in nature due to various racial groups coexists in India. Almost all the races of the world can be seen in India.

Multi-Religious Society

Although Hinduism is the major religion in India, there exist various other religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity, Bahai and Parsi etc.

Multi-Lingual Society

There exist more than 1600 languages in India. Major languages are Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Bengali, Odia, Assamese etc

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. There is a difference between unity and uniformity. Uniformity presupposes

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similarity, unity does not. Unity is of two types, first which may be born out of uniformity, and second which may arise despite differences. French sociologist has termed these two types as mechanical and organic solidarity respectively.

Unity in diversity

Inspite of diversities, Indian community shares certain bonds of unity. The first bond of unity of India is found in its geo-political integration. India is known for its geographical unity marked by the Himalayas in the north and the oceans on the other sides. Politically India is now a sovereign state. The same constitution and same parliament govern every part of it. We share the same political culture marked by the norms of democracy and secularism. The geo-political unity of India was always visualized by our seers and rulers. The expressions of this consciousness of the geo-political unity of India are found in Rig-Veda, in Sanskrit literature, in the edicts of Asoka, in Buddhist monuments and in various other sources. The ideal of geo-political unity of India is also reflected in the concepts of Bharatvarsha (the old indigenous classic name for India), Chakravarti (emperor), and Ekchhatradhipatya (under one rule).

Another source of unity of India lies in what is known as temple culture, which is reflected in the network of shrines and sacred places. From Badrinath and Kedarnath in the north to Rameshwaram in the south, Jagannath Puri in the east to Dwaraka in the west the religious shrines and holy rivers are spread throughout the length and breadth of the country. Closely related to them is the age-old culture of pilgrimage, which has always moved people to various parts of the country and fostered in them a sense of geo-cultural unity. As well as being an expression of religious sentiment, pilgrimage is also an expression of love for the motherland, a sort of mode of worship of the country. It has acted as an antithesis to the regional diversity and has played a significant part in promoting interaction and cultural affinity among the people living in different parts of India.

Indian culture, has a remarkable quality of accommodation and tolerance. There is ample evidence of it. The first evidence of it lies in the elastic character of Hinduism, the majority religion of India. It is common knowledge that Hinduism is not a homogeneous religion, that is, a religion having one God, one Book and one Temple. Indeed, it can be best described as a federation of faiths. Polytheistic (having multiple deities) in character, it goes to the extent of accommodating village level deities and tribal faiths. For the same reason, sociologists have distinguished two broad forms of Hinduism: sanskritic and popular. Sanskritic is that which is found in the texts (religious books like Vedas, etc.) and popular is that which is found in the actual life situation of the vast masses. Robert Redfield has called these two forms as great tradition of Ramayana and Mahabharata and the little tradition of worship of the village deity. And everything passes for Hinduism. What it shows is that Hinduism has been an open religion, a receptive and absorbing religion, an encompassing religion. It is known for its quality of openness and accommodation. Another evidence of it lies in its apathy to conversion. Hinduism is not a proselytising religion. That is, it does not seek converts. Nor has it ordinarily resisted other religions to seek converts from within its fold. This quality of accommodation and tolerance has paved the way to the coexistence of several faiths in India.

Indian society was organized in such a way that various social groups were independent of each other. One manifestation of it is found in the form of Jajmani system, i.e., a system of functional interdependence of castes. The term “jajman” refers generally to the patron or recipient of specialised services. The relations were traditionally between a food producing

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family and the families that supported them with goods and services. These came to be called the jajmani relations. Jajmani relations were conspicuous in village life, as they entailed ritual matters, social support as well as economic exchange. The whole of a local social order was involved (the people and their values) in such jajmani links. A patron had jajmani relations with members of a high caste (like a Brahmin priest whose services he needed for rituals). He also required the services of specialists from the lower jati to perform those necessary tasks like washing of dirty clothes, cutting of hair, cleaning the rooms and toilets, delivery of the child etc. Those associated in these interdependent relations were expected to be and were broadly supportive of each other with qualities of ready help that generally close kinsmen were expected to show.

Sociologist M.N.Srinivas has called this 'vertical unity of castes'. The jajmani relations usually involved multiple kinds of payment and obligations as well as multiple functions. No caste was self-sufficient. If anything, it depended for many things on other castes. In a sense, each caste was a functional group in that it rendered a specified service to other caste groups. Jajmani system is that mechanism which has formalised and regulated this functional interdependence. Furthermore, castes cut across the boundaries of religious communities. We have earlier mentioned that notions of caste are found in all the religious communities in India. In its actual practice, thus, the institution of jajmani provides for inter linkages between people of different religious groups. Thus a Hindu may be dependent for the washing of his clothes on a Muslim washerman. Similarly, a Muslim may be dependent for the stitching of his clothes on a Hindu tailor, and vice-versa.

Efforts have been made from time to time by sensitive and sensible leaders of both the communities to synthesise Hindu and Muslim traditions so as to bring the two major communities closer to each other. Akbar, for example, founded a new religion, Din-e-Ilahi, combining best of both the religions. Some bhakti saints like Kabir, Eknath and Guru Nanak, as well as some sufi saints made important contributions in forging unity among to communities. At the time of independence struggle, Mahatama Gandhi laid extreme emphasis on Hindu Muslim unity which was instrumental in India becoming a secular state and moving on the path of progress.

Art and Craft of Gujarat: Socio-Cultural contribution

The style of miniature painting that developed mainly in Gujarat in western India in the 16th–19th century. It evolved from Western Indian manuscript illustrations, though Mughal influence became evident in the later years of its development.

Gujarat Minature painting differs from the Mughal painting of the imperial ateliers at Delhi and the provincial courts in its bolder use of colour, an abstract and conventionalized conception of the human figure, and an orinamental treatment of landscape

Miniature Painting

The Western Indian style of painting prevailed in the region comprising Gujarat, Rajasthan and Malwa. The motivating force for the artistic activity in Western India was Jainism just as it was Buddhism in case of the Ajanta and the Pala arts. Jainism was patronised by the Kings

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of the Chalukya Dynasty who ruled Gujarat and parts of Rajasthan and Malwa from 961 A.D. to the end of the 13th century. An enormous number of Jain religious manuscripts were commissioned from 12th to 16th centuries by the princes, their ministers and the rich Jain merchants for earning religious merit. Many such manuscripts are available in the Jain libraries (bhandaras) which are found at many places in Western India.

The illustrations on these manuscripts are in a style of vigorous distortion. One finds in this style an exaggeration of certain physical traits, eyes, breasts and hips are enlarged. Figures are flat with angularity of features and the further eye protruding into space. This is an art of primitive vitality vigorous line and forceful colours. From about 1100 to 1400 A.D., palm-leaf was used for the manuscripts and later on paper was introduced for the purpose. TheKalpasutra and the Kalakacharya-Katha, the two very popular Jain texts were repeatedly written and illustrated with paintings. Some notable examples are the manuscripts of the Kalpasutra in the Devasano pado Bhandar at Ahmedabad, the Kalpasutra and Kalakacharya-Katha of about 1400 A.D. in the Prince of Wales Museum. Bombay and the Kalpasutra dated 1439 A.D. executed in Mandu, now in the National Museum, New Delhi and the Kalpasutrawritten and painted in Jaunpur in 1465 A.D.

The tradition of miniature painting Gujarat came into existence in eastern India during 8th century, and became popular in the west and Gujarat, in the mid of 10th century. Painted onto palm leaves and tree bark, these examples originally had an ornamental purpose, but soon became visual complement to religious sacred writings. In the beginning, the Gujarat Art of manuscript example was limited to the representation of gods and goddesses. These were taken directly from stone carvings, with idols mostly drawn in three-quarter profile and gods in frontal position as seen in carvings at the Sun Temple in Modhera and Rani Vav in Patan. The faces of gods are characterized by a pointed nose and chin and the further eye protruding beyond the cheek line of the face in profile. The position of the eye is the main characteristic of Gujarat's miniature paintings, which were also used to explain Shvetambar Jain and Vaishnav texts and manuscripts. The Lalbhai Dalpathbhai institute of Indology in Ahmedabad houses about 76,000 handwritten Jain manuscripts with 500 illustrated versions, miniature paintings, cloth paintings, painted scrolls and decorative art.

Oil Paintings - Oil paintings are created using pigments mixed with drying oil. Drying oil is a binding medium for the pigments. Different types of media are selected based on their drying time or appearance. Each drying oil confers different property to the pigment, such as more intense yellow tinge, or difference in the luminosity of the paint. An artist who uses oil paints may use two or more types of oil for the same painting, to give different lustre and texture effects to the painting. Popular oil bases include walnut oil, safflower oil, poppy seed oil, and linseed oil. To add more lustre to the paint, the oil is mixed with pine resin or frankincense and boiled. The resins are responsible for the gloss seen in many oil paintings.

Glass Painting - Glass painting is one of the older art forms of Gujarat. Glass paintings made their first appearance in Gujarat in the eighteenth century, presumably brought in by Chinese artists. The interesting fact is that a pattern is first etched on the reverse side of the glass surface to be displayed. After that, the colours are filled in on the reverse side. Today, glass paintings have diversified to allow different patterns, themes and colours. Glass paintings are notable for the vivid intensity of colours.

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Kalamkari art form - The Kalamkari art found in Gujarat has religious underpinnings, and is called Mata ni Pachedi. The paintings are created on a cream coloured fabric base. The subjects of these paintings are usually religious, pertaining to gods and goddesses. The paintings form the backdrop of Goddess Durga statues in many temples. They are brought in by devotees as an offering to the Goddess if their wish is granted. During religious festivals, these paintings are much sought after in the rural and many urban areas of the state. Keeping pace with the changing times, the hand-painted textiles have given way to partially block-printed fabric, where the borders are created with printing blocks and the rest of the painting is made by hand.

Pethora - Guided by rituals conducted by the Badvo officiating as the head priest for the associated rituals, the pithora or pithoro painting is executed by the Lakahara group. This is a form of painting done either to celebrate an auspicious occasion or call upon Pithora Baba to solve problems like disease or drought. The legends and events related to this revered tribal lord dominate the pithoro and the ceremonies that are an integral part of the art form involve song, dance, drinking, and feasting. The process begins with treating the walls with cow dung and white chalk powder, usually brought by unmarried girls. Powders, earth, and vegetable colours are mixed with milk and mahuda flower liquor to prepare the dye for the pithoro in colours like yellow, indigo, orange, green, vermillion, red and silver. The brushes are made from bamboo, neem, and other twigs that are frayed by chewing, beating, and other methods. The painting begins after the offerings are made to the lord.

The Badvo chanting the prayers and tales go into a trance while the pithoro is being painted. The marriage of Pithora Baba and Pithori with processions of vibrant dancing people and animals dominate most pithoros. They also depict the elements of life among the Rathwas—like musicians, dancers, protecting, feasting, men climbing palm trees, milking of cows, livestock at pasture, women churning butter, and bullock carts ploughing a field. Raja Bhoj with an elephant procession is another distinctive feature of many pithoros. Animistic figures of bulls, horses, birds, and tigers are part of each pithoro. Live sacrifices are offered near the tiger pictures.

Warli painting:- is a form of painting done by artisans at the border of Gujarat. Warli painting is the craft of tribal people. It is popular across India. The philosophy of a way of life, especially those of tribal societies, is best depicted through colorful images. Folk imagination, beliefs and customs are spontaneously expressed in these monochromatic tribal paintings. The whims and moods of tribal life make for interesting themes, which is why Warli Paintings are much more than designs on walls they are authentic depictions of a way of life. From the cracked and unknown walls of the village of Warli, Warli, an Indian folk art painting has travelled across borders and are now cherished possessions of many a collector and art lovers.

Rogan painting :- is a unique craft and practiced by very few families. Rogan painting involves the use of a thick paste which is prepared by boiling the oil of safflower, caster or linseed and pouring it into water. This paste is mixed with chalk colour pigment and a binding agent to form a thick die. The painting on the cloth is done using a stick rod or a

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