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## **Diversification and Unification in Indian Social Identity**

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### **Abstract**

*India has more than two thousand ethnic groups, and every major religion is represented, as are four major families of languages (Indo-European, Dravidian, Austroasiatic and Sino-Tibetan languages). 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. Unity holds tightly together the various relationships of ethnic groups or institution in a detailed manner through the bonds of contrived structures, norms and values. The bond of unity in relation to India heritage in a certain underlying uniformity of life, have been reflected in the observations of many foreigners also. Unity amidst diversity is visualized in the geo-political sphere, institution of pilgrimage, tradition of accommodation, tradition of interdependence, emotional bond etc. One feature that is most often noticed about India is its unity in diversity. The various diversities evidenced in India, there are the bonds of unity which are located in a certain underlying uniformity of life as well as in certain mechanisms of integration. Notwithstanding the various diversities evidenced in India, there are the bonds of unity which are located in a certain underlying uniformity of life as well as in certain Mechanisms of integration. That is the unity of common culture and tradition, common historical growth, common fight for freedom against the British rule, common allegiance to India and common loyalty to the Indian national flag.*

**Key Words:** *Culture, Diversity, Race, Religion, Unity.*

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**Introduction:** India is the second most populous country in the world, with over 1.277 billion people (2015), more than a sixth of the world's population. Already containing 17.5% of the world's population, India is projected to be the world's most populous country by 2022, surpassing China, its population reaching 1.6 billion by 2050. Its population growth rate is 1.2%, ranking 94th in the world in 2013. The Indian population had reached the billion mark by 1998. India has more than 50% of its population below the age of 25 and more than 65% below the age of 35. It is expected that, in 2020, the average age of an Indian will be 29 years, compared to 37 for China and 48 for Japan; and, by 2030, India's dependency ratio should be just over 0.4.

India has more than two thousand ethnic groups, and every major religion is represented, as are four major families of languages (Indo-European, Dravidian, Austroasiatic and Sino-Tibetan languages) as well as two language isolates (the Nihali language spoken in parts of Maharashtra and the Burushaski language spoken in parts of Jammu and Kashmir). Further complexity is lent by the great variation that occurs across this population on social parameters such as income and education.

Only the continent of Africa exceeds the linguistic, genetic and cultural diversity of the nation of India. 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.

Indian society is traditionally divided into castes or clans, not ethnicities, and these categories have had no official status since independence in 1947, except for the scheduled castes and tribes which remain registered for the purpose of affirmative action. In today's India, the population is categorized in terms of the 1,652 mother tongues spoken.

**Diversity in Indian Society:** In literary terms, diversity means differences, variety or assortment. However in social context the meaning is more specific; it means collective differences among different distinct group of 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, different group belongs to different racial group - we have racial diversity. On the basis of religious differences, similarly, which mark with several variety of religious group - we have religious diversity. The point to note is that diversity refers to collective differences.

The term diversity is opposite of uniformity. Uniformity means similarity of some sort that characterizes a people. "Uni" refers to one; "form" refers to the common ways. So when there is something common to all the people, we say they show uniformity. For instance, when students of a school, members of the police or the army wear the same type of dress, we say they are in 'uniform'. Like diversity, thus, uniformity is also a collective concept. When a group of people share a similar characteristic, be it language or religion or anything else, it shows uniformity in that respect. But when we have groups of people hailing from different races, religions and cultures, they represent diversity. Thus, diversity means variety.

**1. Linguistic Diversity:** The high degree of large diversity found in India is due to the existence of diverse population groups. The greatest variety in languages can be found in the one of the biggest democracies in the world. Most of these languages are distinct and have their own distinct form of writing and speech. The dictionary defines 'Diversity', as variety or different. Languages are defined as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication.

In India, the tribal communities are smallest in geographical spread and in population strength. They cover only 8.6% (2011 census) of the Indian population. Not only we should consider linguistic diversity as a resource of human kind but also should conceive both the decline in the number of languages and the emerging trend in having mono linguistic dominance over small languages as a threat to our plural existence. It is to be accepted that even in the very ecological sense, like bio-diversity, linguistic diversity should also need to maintain.

**1.1 Development of Languages during the British rule in India:** The British Government was cautious and well planned in all its moves. The British Raj was keen on developing the regional languages, however, for the purpose of administration, they needed a common language. The major cause for the slow paced development of the nationalistic movement was mainly due to the diversity in languages. After Independence, the country was in its worst state. There was chaos and confusion everywhere. It was now time to choose a national language. But there were at least a hundred languages that were spoken in India.

**1.2 Post Independence Period:** After India obtained its independence, policies had to be formulated for the administration of the newly born nation. While forming the constitution of India, the leaders of the nation had to come up with a national language. They decided on Hindi as the national language and the use of English for official purposes.

**1.3 The Present situation:** Though the situation has improved from the early fifties, there has not been a significant development. India still faces the problems due to the diversity in languages. One of the foremost problems is the lack of a unified language system. Though a national language was chosen among the 22 officially recognized regional languages. There are 1365 rationalised mother tongues, 234 (Census of 2001) mother tongues and 122 major languages in India, only 25% of the populations speak hindi as their native language. People in India have a sense of belonging to a particular language speaking community rather than the nation as a whole.

**2. Religious Diversity:** Religion is a major concern of man. Religion is universal, permanent, pervasive and perennial interests of man. The institution of religion is universal. It is found in all the societies, past and present. Religious beliefs and practices are, however, far from being uniform. Religious dogmas have influenced and conditioned economic endeavours, political movements, proper dealings, and educational tasks. The major religions in India are following: Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam, Parsi, The basic ideas and faith of the each religion differs. But they co-existently stood in Indian society.

**2.1 Religious Diversity in India:** The preamble of the Constitution of India proclaims India to be a secular republic where citizens may freely worship and propagate any religion of their choice. The right to freedom of religion is also declared as a fundamental right by the Constitution of India. Indian religions have exerted significant influence all over the world.

The major Negative impact of religions is follows:

- a. Groupism—religion divides people such divisions may come in the way of development of the country
- b. Frequent conflicts—people belonging to different religions feel that their religion is superior. They even try to impose their religious practices on others which would lead to conflict situations. In India communal conflict has become a common feature.
- c. Dogmatism—every religion has a set of beliefs which may be superstitious quite often such ideas block the development of society and the progress of individuals, e.g in some communities there is no improvement of status of women on account of religious attitude.
- d. Block social change—it is highly challenging to transform the attitude unity and diversity of India is unique. It presents endless varieties of physical, social and cultural patterns. It is probably in India that one can find all the major religions of the world. These are strong unifying which bind the nation as homogeneous socio cultural entity.

**3. Racial Diversity:** Race is a concept. The term race is used in various senses, even by human biologists, not to speak of politicians, historians and other who have little interest in biological races. The racial classifications are made on the basis of certain genetic traits. Such types of traits used in classification of races are referred to as racial criteria. The racial criteria should fulfill certain requirements. Bodley suggested a few conditions which should be satisfied by criteria chosen for racial classification. Most contemporary anthropologists classify Indians as belonging to one of four major ethno-racial groups, which often overlap with each other because of a continuous process of racial admixture: Caucasoid, Mongoloids and Negritos. Mongoloids are largely confined to the

Northeastern region of the country and for the most part, speak Tibeto-Burman languages; and Negritos are found on the Andaman Islands located on the south-eastern side of the country. Horton has defined race as a “great division of mankind, the members of which, through individually varying are characterized as a group by certain combinations of morphological and metrical features, principally, non-adaptive, which have been derived from their common descent.”

**3.1 Racial Diversity in India:** It is an arduous task to construct a systematic ethnography of the teeming millions of Indian population. As per the 1901 census the following eight different ethnic groups are found here. 1. Pre-Dravidian 2. Dravidian 3. Indo-Aryan 4. Turko-Iranian 5. Scytho-Dravidian 6. Arya-Dravidian 7. Mongoloid 8. Mongoloid-Dravidian. India has been described as an ethnological museum. Race formation is a dynamic process and environmental stimuli have caused many changes in the ethnic types. There is a wide variety of differences in physical features, complexion and even in language. Often linguistic terms like Aryan and Dravidian have been applied to ethnic units.

It is difficult to assume that this vast subcontinent was once a vacuum and the races have migrated into this ethnological paradise from faraway places. There have never been attempts to ascertain how far India bred her own races. According to some scholars, the Indian race had been classified in seven different categories in earlier age among which the Turko-Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Scytho-Dravidian type, Aryo-Dravidian type, Mongolo-Dravidian type, Mongoloid type and Dravidian type were in the list.

**4. Ethnic Diversity:** Unity holds tightly together the various relationships of ethnic groups or institution in a detailed manner through the bonds of contrived structures, norms and values. It has also been described as a social psychological condition. However, unity does not mean uniformity which implies similarity unity may be born out of similarity. Macdonald John, define as “ethnos” in the narrow meaning of word in the most general form can be defined as a historically formed community of the people possessing common relatively stable, specific features of culture as well being aware of their unity and difference from their communities”.

Ethnic group is a social category of people who shared common culture, common language or dialect, a common religion, a common norm, practices, customs and history. Ethnic group have a consciousness of their own culture bound. India is an ethnological museum. The waves of immigration have drawn the ancestors of the majority of present population into India from the surrounding territories across the Himalayas. 1. The Negrito, 2. Proto – Austroloid, 3. Mongoloids, 4. Mediterranean or Dravidian, 5. Western Brachycephals, 6. Nordic Aryans.

However, diversity needs to be differentiated from fragmentation. Diversity means existence of differences in a whole. It does not mean separate parts. Fragmentation does not mean differences, it means different parts and in that situation each part would be a whole in itself. For all practical purposes it means variety of groups and cultures. We have such a variety in abundance in India. We have here a variety of races, of religions, of languages, of castes and of cultures. For the same reason India is known for its socio-cultural diversity.

**Unity in Indian Society:** Unity means integration. It is a social psychological condition. It imply a sense of together. There is a difference between unity and uniformity. Uniformity presupposes similarity, unity does not. Unity is of two types, first which may be born out of uniformity, and second which may arise despite differences. Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), a french social scientist, has termed these two types as mechanical and organic solidarity respectively- the social

cohesiveness of small, undifferentiated societies (mechanical) and of societies differentiated by relatively complex division of labour.

Mechanical solidarity is generally found in less advanced societies and characterized by being based on resemblance, segmentation (clan or territorial type), ruling with repressive sanctions and prevalence of penal law, highly religious and transcendental and attaching supreme value to the society and interests of the society as a whole. On the other organic solidarity is generally found in more advanced societies and is based on division of labour, characterized by the fusion of markets and growth of cities, rules with restitutive sanctions and prevalence of cooperative law, is increasingly secular, human oriented and attaches supreme value to the individual dignity, equality of opportunity and social justice. It is a social cohesion based upon the dependence of individuals have on each other in advanced societies.

Unity implies oneness or a sense oneness meaning integration. However, unity does not mean uniformity which implies similarity. Unity may born into similarity. "M.N. Srinivas observes that the unity of India is essentially a religious one. People may worship different deities but the religious scriptures – Puranas, Brahmanas, Epics and Vedas – knite the numerous heterogeneous groups together into one religious society and give them the sense that their country is sacred. The bond of unity in relation to India heritage in a certain underlying uniformity of life, have been reflected in the observations of many foreigners also. Unity amidst diversity is visualized in the geo-political sphere, institution of pilgrimage, tradition of accommodation, tradition of interdependence, emotional bond etc. One feature that is most often noticed about India is its unity in diversity. The various diversities evidenced in India, there are the bonds of unity which are located in a certain underling uniformity of life as well as in certain mechanisms of integration. Notwithstanding the various diversities evidenced in India, there are the bonds of unity which are located in a certain underlying uniformity of life as well as in certain Mechanisms of integration. That is the unity of common culture and tradition, common historical growth, common fight for freedom against the British rule, common allegiance to India and common loyalty to the Indian national flag. Thus national unity of India had its first upsurge in 1857 A.D. in the first

Indian war of independence known as Sepoy Mutiny. In the independent India, this unity of the Indians proved its might during the wars with Pakistan and China. All the people of Indian soil, sinking down all their differences, stood as one integrated whole against the Chinese and the Pakistani aggressors.

**A. Geographical Unity:** The natural boundaries provide India a geographical unity, a unity which surprises the Europeans scholars who themselves live in small countries and find it difficult to comprehend how such as vast country which varieties of nature can be united. India is most popularly called by the name "bharatvarsha". In the name "bharatvarsha" lies the historical significance which symbolizes unity. Nature has bestowed on India its gift through natural bounderies to maintain her unity. In the himalayans stands the great mountain the Himalayas and the sea washes her feet in all other directions. The concept of mother India also indicates the realization of geographical unity. The boundaries of India vary from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. Climate conditions vary to a large extent in different parts of India. The geography of India plays a crucial role in India's unity and the sense of oneness. India is a vast country having diverse geographical features. Even then India looks like a single geographical entity. India is known for its geographical unity marked by the

mountain ranges in the north and the oceans on the other sides. The abundant natural resources in the country also promote unity in India.

India absorbed and assimilated different cultures. People of different cultures such as the Aryans and the Dravidians lived here together. Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs all lived in close proximity and participate together in government, trade, industry, commerce and other activities. According to M.N.Srinivas, the unity of India is essentially a religious one. Religious centers of all the religions spread though out the country are powerful factors of unity. India like every other country has its own fixed boundaries that are natural. India is limited within boundaries that are evidence of a geographical unity, a unity which baffles the scholars who themselves live in small European countries and find it difficult to comprehend how such a large country with so much variety of nature can be united.

**B. Religious Unity:** Although the various groups in India present elements of external difference, it is not impossible to trace elements of external difference, it is not impossible to trace elements common to all. Each religious group exhibits one single feeling; each accepts the truth of immortality of soul, temporary nature of world, rebirth, the law of karma, manism, salvation, nirvana, contemplation and all the other things that go to make up the religious paraphernalia. Each religion preaches fundamentally single religious faith, and shares a belief in the purity and value of life, faith in a invisible power, benevolence, piety, honesty and liberality, with every form of religion in the country.

Religious unity in India finds its expression through the place of worship scattered all over the country. Such religious places of Hindus as Badrinarayan in the North, Dwarika in the west and Rameshwaram in the south and Puri in the east represent the religious unity of this vast country. It has been considered obligatory for every Indian to visit each of these holy places. But this pilgrimage comprehends the feeling of patriotism and a feeling for the unity his country also. The Hinduism being the major religion of people in India provides the basis of unity. People have worshipped god and goddesses in temples everywhere in India. The great epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are devotionally read by people throughout the country. The legends of Rama and Krishna are sung and repeated with equal fervour among people despite their differences in languages.

**C. Political Unity:** India is a plural society both in letter and spirit. It is rightly characterized by its unity and diversity. National unity and integrity have been maintained even though sharp economic and social inequalities have obstructed the emergence of egalitarianism from other parts of the world and the existence of diverse language, cultures and religions have made India's culture tolerance. Past independent India is a nation united against several adversities and obstacles'. The country is inhabited by people belonging to all socio-economic strata. The five year plans and several other developmental schemes are geared to the upliftment of the poor and weaker sections of society.

India's political unity is an offshoot of the religious and cultural unity. The very name 'chakravarti' clearly revealed political unification of India under one central authority. They also released horses to gain the title. The main motive behind such was the desire to unite the country under one central authority. The Indian ruler did not even attack any external power, with any expansionist ambition. The important marked tendencies of the rulers within the country had always been to acquire the largest tract of land to establish as large a political unity as possible. Even after

achieving her political freedom, India has shown her oneness at the attack of china and three attack of Pakistan.

Political unity is an outcome of the religious and cultural unity. In history many kings rebelled against the central authority. No single instance is there to show that any Indian king ever tries to annex the territory of foreign ruler but they wanted to expand kingdom in Indian territory to become a sole monarch under a single control which is good for the people. Aswamedha yaga was performed by many kings like Chandragupta, Ashoka and Samudragupta to become universal lord or chakravarty.

Our political unity is no gift of british. Its origin falls far beyond the apparent. We ignored the political idea of the Indus valley people, though the extent of their civilization is highly impressive. The main motive behind wars was the desire to unite the country under the central authority. The Indian ruler did not even attach any external power, with any expansionist ambitions. The important marked tendencies of the all rulers with in the country have always been to acquire the largest tract of land and to established as large a political unit as possible. The traditional political culture which cherishes the value of self sacrifices and social service is also a part of the political culture of India. Even after achieving her political freedom, India has shown her oneness at the attack of China and three attacks of Pakistan and the recently concluded Kargil war.

All the rulers in the past tried their best to ensure India under their domination and control.

There have been many dynasties and kingdoms which were in rule, which had made many cultural impositions on the society. India has never been a single political unity. The British India consisted of six hundred states. India in the past and even today is a land of political diversity is found even today. The typical feature of Indian democracy is the existence of multi-party system. Different states may have different government. But all the states are controlled by central government. Fundamental rights granted to all the citizens of India. Universal adult franchise is a typical feature which promotes a strong sense of unity.

**Forces of unity in modern India:** M.N. Srinivas noted that India, as a secular state, tolerate diversity. The five year plans the spread of egalitarian ideals, a single government and a common body of civil and criminal laws are enough evidence of India's plural character and oneness. The constitution of independent India has established the "rule of law" throughout the entire country. All citizens are equal and subject to the same authority. Religion, language, region, caste or community is no longer the basis of special powers and privileges. The weaker sections of society the scheduled castes the scheduled tribes and the other backward classes have been given special concessions to bridge the gap between them and the upper castes and classes. Today no caste or social group suffers from any kind of social disability. Women enjoy equal rights with men in all respects. The policy of divide and rule adopted by the British to rule this country is no more in operation. Colonial exploitation has been replaced by processes of development and egalitarian ideology. The political thinkers, the state makers and the kings had always show the all India picture of unity in their mind.

**Pluralism:** In context of Indian society, pluralism can be seen in various aspects. It could be religious pluralism, cultural pluralism, linguistic pluralism or ethnic pluralism or could be a combination of more than one kind. Pluralism recognizes diverse groups and seeks to provide a mechanism in which no one group dominates the state and in which interests of all groups are reasonably taken care of. Thus pluralism can be said to be a diffusion of power among many special-interest groups, prevents any one group from gaining control of the government and using it to oppress the people. Our pluralist society has many groups such as women, men, racial, ethnic

groups as well as broad categories as the rich, middle class and poor. In such a scenario domination of political power by one group could lead to neglect of the others resulting in social tensions which may be harmful to society as well as the state and for the co-existence in the society where people may have different beliefs, practices, norms and values.

Autocratic regimes did not have much scope for political pluralism though good rulers tried to maintain a balance among various social groups. In a democratic form of Government, political power depends on the number of votes. In such a case, biggest group could usurp political power and use it to much disadvantage against minority groups. Such a situation exists in countries where domination is based on religion. In such countries, minorities have been suffering from various disabilities. Pluralism, due to being inclusive, is capable of avoiding such situations. When pluralism prevails in a society, no group dominates. Rather as each group pursues its own interests, other groups that are pursuing theirs, balances it. To attain their goals, groups must negotiate with one another and make compromises. This minimizes conflict. These groups have political muscle to flex at the polls; politicians try to design policies that please as many groups as they can. This makes the political system responsive to the people and no one-group rules.

Thus unity and diversity are the two states of the society and pluralism is the mechanism through which unity amidst diversity is achieved.

**Unity amidst Diversity:** Unity implies oneness or a sense of we-ness, it holds tightly together the various relationships of ethnic groups or institutions in a detailed manner through the bonds of contrived structures, norms and values. The sources of diversity in India may be traced through a variety of ways, the most obvious being the ethnic origins, religions, castes, tribes, languages, social customs, cultural and sub cultural beliefs, political philosophies and ideologies, geographical variations etc.

In spite 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).

**Sense of unity:** Despite the differences, there is also a sense of unity. Most Hindu traditions revere a body of religious or sacred literature, the Vedas, although there are exceptions. These texts are a reminder of the ancient cultural heritage and point of pride for Hindus, with Louis Renou stating that "even in the most orthodox domains, the reverence to the Vedas has come to be a simple raising of the hat". Halbfass states that, although Shaivism and Vaishnavism may be regarded as "self-contained religious constellations", there is a degree of interaction and reference between the "theoreticians and literary representatives" of each tradition which indicates the presence of "a wider sense of identity, a sense of coherence in a shared context and of inclusion in a common framework and horizon".

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.

**Conclusion:** 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 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.

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, Mahatma Gandhi laid extreme emphasis on Hindu Muslim unity which was instrumental in India becoming a secular state and moving on the path of progress.

All these factors have helped in developing a composite culture in the country which provided a model for the preservation and growth of plurality of cultures within the framework of an integrated nation. The unity of India should not be taken to mean that we have always had a smooth sailing in matters of national unity, with no incidents of caste, communal or linguistic riots. Nor should it be taken to mean that the divisive and secessionist tendencies have been altogether absent. These tendencies were at full force at time of independence when the partition took place. There have been occasional riots, at times serious riots like those after Babri Masjid demolition and in Gujarat in 2002. Incidents of oppression and violence against members of scheduled castes take place from time to time and regionalism has expressed itself in extreme in separatist movements in the North East and in a little less extreme form in the violence against north Indians in Mumbai. The redeeming feature, however, is that the bonds of unity have always emerged stronger than the forces of disintegration.

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