

Foundation Course
Semester 1
1 : The Indian Constitution

Unit structure

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1.1 Introduction:

India is a land of diversities and contrasts. In order to Understand the nature of Indian society it is necessary tounderstand the multi-cultural and pluralistic characteristics of its inhabitants. The multiplicity is reflected in its language, religion ,caste, race, ethnicity, climatic conditions, geographical features,historical legacies, dress and food habits etc. There are several other additional factors and variables that further divide the society into smaller fragments. There is a vast difference in the socio-economic and political developments in rural, urban and tribal areas. India, unlike many other nations in the world is not just a ‘melting pot’ of various cultures where people come together and turn in to one uniform category for E.g. American culture envelopes all its inhabitants in to one uniform identity. But Indian diversity can be identified as a ‘salad bowl’ where in each of its citizen has a distinct identity at various levels of caste, language, religion, region etc.

Culture, Multiculturalism and India:

Demographic composition of India:

Demographic data refers to the characteristics of a human population in a particular geographical region. It can be defined asa study of size, growth, age and geographical distribution of human population with respect to birth, death, marriage and migrant population.India being the second most populous country, after China with a population of more than 102 billion, and the seventh largest in terms of area, has a great diversity in its demographic attributes,may it be birth rate and death rate, fertility and mortality rate,literacy, sex ratio and child sex ratio, poverty, per capita income,employment levels, gender disparity and so on.

India as a multi-Lingual Society:

Language is not merely a tool of communication but a means through which culture are transmitted and spread for generations together. Indian society has been a birth place to many languages. In fact the major ground on which India was divided in 25 states (now there are 28 states) was language and linguistic diversity. According to the Linguistic survey of India there are nearly 179 languages and more than 1652 dialects in India. However after the 1961 census, for a smooth data collection purpose only those languages or dialects which are spoken by a population of more than 10,000 were recognized and noted after which the number has now come down to 115 languages.

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In the eighth schedule of Indian Constitution, 22 languages are listed. Post-independence Indian Constitution had listed 15 languages. However after the 71st Amendment of 1992 and 92nd Amendment of 2003, seven more languages were added bringing the total to 22. India has adapted a bi-lingual policy at the Centre with Hindi as the primary official language and English as the secondary official language. According to census records of 2001, 41.03% of the population speaks Hindi. Similarly at the state level the language of the respective state and English is accepted as means of communication.

However this decision was never an easy task taking into consideration the diversity in the languages in different geographical belts. Since there is no language defined as official language in Indian Constitution, in 1960s there were attempts to replace Hindi for English as the sole official language of India. However it witnessed several protests from southern states of Tamilnadu, Kerala, Karnataka and others resulting in amendment of Official Languages Act of 1963. It was later known as Official Languages Act (use for official purpose of the Union) Rules act 1976. Several state languages are decided as official based on the demography of that state.

India society as a Multi-religious Society:

India is a cradle of world religions. Its ancestors have preached and practiced almost all major religions of the world giving rise to worldly beliefs, practices, rites, rituals, ceremonies and institutions. The co-existence of all the religions and variety of faiths has been a shining example of religious pluralism and tolerance. The principle of secularism in spite of several conflicts and riots has been upheld by our citizens time and again. Indian Constitution has rightly reflected the idea of multi religions. It states that “every citizen has a right to freely practice, preach, profess and propagate any religion or faith”. Secular state has been defined as a “state in which all religions and citizens irrespective of their faith would be treated impartially”. Unlike its neighbouring nations India does not uphold any one religion as the state religion. Apart from the major religions there are several tribal religions co-existing in Indian society.

Hinduism- Hinduism is one of the most ancient religions of India. Although followed by majority of population, its origin is not owed to any prophet or founder. Major Hindu scriptures include Vedas and the holy book is Bhagwad -Gita, Ramayana, Puranas etc. Idol-worship, theory of Purushartha, theory of Karma, doctrine of rebirth are some of the major principle of Hinduism. They believe in trinity of Brahma (creator), Vishnu(sustained) and Mahesh or Shiva (destroyer). The theory of Purushartha includes four principle of Dharma (Duty), Artha(material gain), Kama (physical pleasure) and Moksha(Salvation). Hindus are further divided in to two sects i.e. shivas' and vaishism and four castes i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras which are discussed later in the section on caste system in India.

Islam : Originated in Arabia in around 7th century A.D.The term Islam in Arabic means surrender to God. Prophet Mohammad is the founder of this religion. It is a religion meaning believes only in one god and that is Allah.

Quran is the holy book of Islam. The religion is based on five pillars, they are Allah (believe in only one god), Ramzan (fast in the auspicious month), Hajj (Pilgrimage at least once in a life-time), Namaz (praying five times a day) and Zakkat (Charity). The major two sects of Islam are Shiyahs and Sunnis.

Christianity: Bible is the holy book of Christianity. They are further divided into Roman Catholics and Protestants. The major principles of the religion are described in the Ten Commandments. Bible includes the values of humanity, charity, mercy, repentance etc.

Sikhism: Guru Nanak is the founder of Sikhism. Guru Granth Sahib is the holy book of Sikhs which includes all the hymns and the songs composed by all the ten Gurus of Sikhism. Sikhs believe in Satnaam, God as the almighty. A Sect in Sikhs who follow Khalsa Panth are known as Singh meaning lion or the protector of religion. They are expected to follow the 5 K's. i.e. Kesh, Kara, Kanga, Kachha and Kirpaan.

Jainism: Jainism is a religion based on ethical conduct alone.The twenty-fourth tirthankara was Vardhaman Mahavira who is said to be the founder of Jainism. It is further divided into two sects, Shwetambara and Digambara. Jainism believes in Karma but do not believe in Caste inequalities. Ahimsa (Non-violence), non-stealing, truth, non-possessiveness are some of the values preached by Jainism. Majority of the followers of this religion are found in India.

Buddhism: Buddhism is termed as a universal religion.Though found in India, its followers are found all over the further divided into Hinayanas and Mahayanas. They believe in eight fold path as the solution to sorrow in life.

Caste system in Indian Society:

The social stratification (division of society) in India ispeculiar in its nature. Unlike many other civilizations in the worldwhere the society was divided in to race, ethnicity or clans Indiansociety is broadly divided into a hierarchy of caste. The word caste has come from the Portuguese word 'Caste' which means breed and intended to use for classification

based on purity of blood.

As defined by E.A.G. Blunt "Caste is an endogamous group, bearing a common name, membership of which is hereditary, imposing on its members certain restrictions in the matter of social intercourse".

Caste is unique to India and especially to Hindu traditional society and its customs. It is imposed as a divine and had an extensive sanction in the society. The Sanskrit word for caste is 'Varna' which means colour. The caste stratification of the Indian society has its origin in the chaturvarna system. During the Vedic period (about 1500 B.C. to 100 B.C.) there were four Varna or castes namely Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vishay's and Shards. This division was based on division of labour and occupation. Along with occupation it was also denoting the endogamy (marriage within one's own caste) and the notion of purity and pollution related to food restrictions, clothing and language. Further these groups were subdivided in to number of jatis or sub castes based on diversity of occupation. Each group was like a water tight compartment moving out from which was impossible for any member of the society.

The notion of purity and pollution resulted in several atrocities in the hierarchy against the lowest strata. The shudras (untouchables) faced tremendous injustice and atrocities at the hands of the higher castes especially Brahmins. It was termed as the black period of Indian history where several inhuman and heinous practices were prevalent in the society denying the basic human rights of these suppressed classes. However after independence, under the great leadership of Dr. Baba Sahib Ambedkar they got a special status in the Constitution of India as Scheduled castes. The term used for them was dalit (the depressed) or harijan (as coined by Mahatma Gandhi). Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar was a pioneer to initiate the Dalit movement in India to bring up the status of untouchables by converting to Buddhism which does not believe in caste hierarchy.

Gender: Girls and women constitute one half of the world's population as well as of India. Even a decade after the turn of the millennium questions are raised with regard to gender and its relationship with issues of development in India It is believed that until and unless the engagement empowerment and contribution of women are not tapped properly we cannot hope to achieve a rapid economic recovery nor effectively tackle global challenges such as climate change, food security and conflict.

Regional variations of Rural-Urban Population and their characteristics :

A region can be defined as a territory, the inhabitant of which are emotionally attached to it, due to a number of forces and factors such as common language, beliefs, practices and common socio-economic-political stages of development. India with its castgeographical area and socio-cultural diversity has been divided into 28 states and 7 union territories. The formation largely has been taken place on the basis of language, however the physical features, socio-economic conditions and cultural aspects also gives distinct identity to each region of India.

Characteristics and problems of tribal areas: Isolated and nomadic settlements- They are away from the civilized areas and keep moving in search of occupation and Livelihood. Distinct dialects- The tribal have their own language as well a dialect for communication very different from the neighbouring areas.

They believe that free spirits regulate their lives for which they also engage in white (non-violent) and black (violent) forms of magic.

Geographical distribution- Tribal are spread all over India with maximum concentration in North East and Central India. The states with predominant tribal population are Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand.

Low literacy- With a distinct dialect and nomadic in nature tribal have very low levels of literacy or complete illiteracy in some areas.

Low per capita income and uneconomic land holding- With primitive ways of earning livelihood and traditional agricultural practices like zoom cultivation large number of them are below poverty line.

Impact of industrialization and commercial agriculture- With increasing industrialization and encroachment of forests and hilly areas for commercial purposes resulting in loss of land and livelihood there is unrest and protests from tribal areas.

2 Characteristics and problems of rural areas: Caste system and joint family system- The rigidity of the caste system and restrictions based on purity and pollution are the basic rules of rural social milieu. The status of an individual is decided by his/her birth in a particular caste and under no circumstance that individual can climb the social ladder. Similarly the joint family system reinforces the patriarchal and patrilocal social structure.

Literacy- Rural literacy rate has always been lower than 50% in most of the regions owing to the traditional mind set and stronghold of customs and blind faith. This often results in unemployment and poverty.

Occupation- Agriculture is backbone for rural economy. However dependence on monsoon and primitive technology restricts the growth and per hectare yield in rural areas.

Unemployment- Owing to the seasonal nature of agriculture and uneconomical land holdings, there is seasonal and disguised unemployment.

Low media exposure- Due to high levels of poverty and illiteracy the exposure to print and audio visual media is very low.