

UNIT 6: THE CHALLENGES OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

- **Cultural Diversity**
- Importance of Community Identity
- Communities, Nation and Nation-state
- **Assimilationist and Integrationist Policies**
- Cultural Diversity and the Indian Nation state
- **Regionalism in the Indian context**
- The **nation-state** and religion related issues
- Minority rights and Nation building
- **Communalism**
- **Secularism**
- **State and civil Society**

'Diversity'

- differences rather than inequalities
- India is a nation of great cultural diversity
- Many different types of social groups and communities living here.
- These are communities defined by cultural markers such as language, religion, sect, race or caste.
- These difficulties may be created by competition or conflict between them.



Cultural diversity can present tough challenges.

- The difficulties arise from the fact that cultural identities are very powerful
 - They can arouse intense passions and are often able to mobilise large numbers of people.
 - Sometimes cultural differences are accompanied by economic and social inequalities, and this further complicates things.
 - Measures to address the inequalities or injustices suffered by one community can provoke opposition from other communities.
- Almost all the major 'divisive' problems of today have been there ever since Independence, or even earlier.

What is Community?

- A **community** is commonly considered a social unit (a group of three or more people) who share something in common, such as norms, values, **identity**, and often a sense of place that is situated in a given geographical area (e.g. a village, town, or neighborhood).

Importance of Community Identity

- Community Identity develop through **Socialisation**
- Our community provides us the language (our mother tongue) and the cultural values through which we comprehend the world.
- It also anchors our self-identity.
- Community identity is **based on birth and 'belonging'**
- It is '**ascriptive**' – determined by the accidents of birth
- It is **Accidental, unconditional** and yet almost **inescapable belonging**
 - that we can often be so emotionally attached to our community identity.
- **Universal.**
 - Everyone has a motherland, a mother tongue, a family, a faith...

COMMUNITIES, NATIONS AND NATION-STATES

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- Nation is a sort of large-scale community
 - It is a community of communities.
- Members of a nation share the desire to be part of the same political collectivity.
- This desire for political unity usually expresses itself as the aspiration to form a *state*.
- The term **State** refers to an abstract entity consisting of a **set of political-legal institutions** claiming **control** over a particular **geographical territory** and the **people** living in it.
- According to **Max weber**
 - a **state** is a *“body that successfully claims a monopoly of legitimate force in a particular territory”*
- A **nation** is a peculiar sort of community that is easy to describe but **hard to define**.
- There are many languages, religions or ethnicities that are shared across nations.
- Any of the other types of community can one day form a nation.
- No particular kind of community can be guaranteed to form a nation.
- In short, today it is hard to define a **nation** in any way other than to say that it is a **community that has succeeded in acquiring a state of its own**.

‘Assimilationist’ and ‘Integrationist’ policies.

- Historically, states have tried to establish and enhance their political legitimacy through nation-building strategies.
- The loyalty and obedience of their citizens through policies of assimilation or integration.
- Most states feared that the recognition of Cultural difference would lead to social fragmentation and prevent the creation of a harmonious society.
- Identity politics was considered a threat to state unity.

‘Assimilationist’ and ‘Integrationist’ policies. Both sets of policies assume a singular national identity.	
Assimilationist	Integrationist
<input type="checkbox"/> Aimed at encouraging or forcing all citizens to adopt a uniform set of cultural values and norms. <input type="checkbox"/> Try to erode the cultural differences between groups. <input type="checkbox"/> Values and norms are largely those of the dominant social group. - Example: Saudi Arabia	<input type="checkbox"/> They insist that the public culture be restricted to a common national pattern <input type="checkbox"/> assert a single national identity by attempting to eliminate ethno-national and cultural differences from the public and political arena -Example: Uniform Civil code

Assimilationist and integrationist strategies try to establish singular national identities

- Centralising all power to forums where the dominant group constitutes a majority,
- Imposing a unified legal and judicial system based on the dominant group’s traditions
- Adopting the dominant group’s language as the only official ‘national’ language

- Promotion of the dominant group's language and culture through national institutions
- Adoption of state symbols celebrating the dominant group's history, heroes and culture
- Seizure of lands, forests and fisheries from minority groups and indigenous people and declaring them 'national resources'.

There is the danger of the dominant group's culture being treated as 'national' culture.

Cultural Diversity and the India in Nation-State – An Overview

The Indian nation-state is

- Second Largest Populated Country
- Socially and culturally one of the most diverse countries of the world.
- about 1.21 billion people (2011 Census)
- Speak about 1,632 different languages and dialects.
- 18+4 Official Languages ([Dogri](#), [Maithili](#), [Santali](#) and [Bodo](#) – were added to the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution.)
- 80.5% of the population are Hindus, About 13.4% Muslims, Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.9%), Buddhists (0.8%) and Jains (0.4%).
- The Constitution declares the state to be a secular state, but religion, language and other such factors are not banished from the public sphere.
- Very strong constitutional protection is offered to minority religions.
- India can be considered a good example of a 'state-nation' though it is not entirely free from the problems common to nation-states.



REGIONALISM IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

- Regionalism in India is emerged from diversity of languages, cultures, tribes, and religions.
- **After Independence**, initially the Indian state continued with the British-Indian arrangement dividing India into large provinces, also called '**presidencies**'.
 - (**Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta were the three major presidencies**)
- These were **large multi-ethnic and multilingual provincial states** constituting the major political-administrative units of a semi-federal state called **the Union of India**.
 - For example,
 - **The old Bombay State**—(*Marathi, Gujarati, Kannada and Konkani* speaking people).
 - Similarly, **the Madras State** -(*Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam*)
- For instance, in the creation of three new states in 2000, namely Chhattisgarh, Uttaranchal and Jharkhand, **language** did not **play a prominent role**.
- Currently there are 28 States (federal units) and 7 Union territories (centrally administered) within the Indian nation-state.
- Regional sentiments are not just a matter of creating States: this has to be backed up with an institutional structure that ensures their viability as relatively autonomous units within a larger federal structure.

- In India this is done by Constitutional provisions defining the powers of the States and the Centre.

Federalism in India

- Indian constitution defines the power distribution between the federal government (the Centre or union) and the States in India.
- This part is divided between legislative, administrative and executive powers.
- The legislative section is divided into three lists: **Union list, States list and Concurrent list.**

Union List	State List	Concurrent List
consists of 100 items	61 items	52 items
Responsibility of Central Govt.	Responsibility of State Govt.	Responsibility of Central and State Govt.
Including: defence, citizenship, railways, currency, insurance, Supreme Court, income tax, custom duties and export duties, etc.	Maintaining law and order, police forces, healthcare, transport, etc.	Marriage and divorce, transfer of property other than agricultural land, Education etc.

- The State legislatures determine the composition of the **upper house of Parliament, the Rajya Sabha**. In addition there are periodic committees and commissions that decide on Centre-State relations.
- Each Five Year Plan also involves detailed State Plans prepared by the State Planning Commissions of each state.
- On the whole the federal system has worked fairly well, though there remain many contentious issues.

THE NATION-STATE AND RELIGION-RELATED ISSUES AND IDENTITIES

Two sets of Issues

- Secularism–Communalism
- Minority–Majority

Minority Rights and Nation Building

- In Indian nationalism, the dominant trend was marked by an **inclusive and democratic vision**.
 - **Inclusive because** it recognised diversity and plurality.
 - **Democratic because** it sought to do away with discrimination and exclusion and bring forth a just and equitable society.
- The term ‘people’ has **not been seen in exclusive terms, as referring to any specific group** defined by religion, ethnicity, race or caste.
- There is a **very strong tendency** for the **dominant group** to assume that **their culture** or language or religion is **synonymous with the nation state**.
- However, for a strong and democratic nation, **special constitutional provisions are required** to ensure the rights of all groups and those of minority groups in particular.

- **Privileged minorities** such as extremely wealthy people **are not usually referred to as minorities**
- **Minority group** is a relatively small but also disadvantaged group.
- **Minorities** have a strong sense of group solidarity, a feeling of togetherness and belonging.
- The sociological sense of minority also implies that the members of the minority form a collectivity
 - People who are left-handed or people born on 29th February, **are not** minorities in the sociological sense because they do not form a collectivity.
- Religious or cultural minorities need special protection because of the demographic dominance of the majority.
- In democratic politics, it is always possible to convert a **numerical majority** into political power through elections.
- They must face the risk that the **majority community will capture political power and use the state machinery** to suppress their religious or cultural institutions, ultimately forcing them to abandon their distinctive identity.

Relative size and distribution of religious minorities

- Hindus constitute an overwhelming **majority in India**: they number about **828 million** and account for **80.5%** of the total population according to the **2001 Census**.
- Hindus are **not a homogenous group** and are divided by caste
- Muslims are by far the **largest religious minority in India** – they numbered **138 million** and were **13.4%** of the population in 2001.
 - They are scattered all over the country, constitute a majority in Jammu and Kashmir and have sizeable pockets in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Rajasthan.
- Christians constitute around **2.3%** of the population (**24 million**) and are scattered all over, with sizeable pockets in the north eastern and southern states.
 - The three Christian majority states are all in the North East – Nagaland (90%), Mizoram (87%) and Meghalaya (70%). Sizeable proportions of Christians are also found in Goa (27%) and Kerala (19%).
- Sikhs constitute **1.9% of the population (19 million)** and although they are found scattered across the country, they are concentrated in **Punjab** where they are in a majority (60%).
- The Buddhists (**8 million, 0.8%**), Jains (**4 million, 0.4%**), and 'Other Religions and Persuasions' (under 7 million, 0.7%). The **highest proportion of Buddhists is found in Sikkim (28%)** and Arunachal Pradesh (13%), while among the larger states Maharashtra has the highest share of Buddhists at 6%. The highest concentrations of Jains are found in Maharashtra (1.3%), Rajasthan (1.2%) and Gujarat (1%).
- Article 29, 30 related to minority people.
 - **Article 29:**
 - (1) Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.
 - (2) No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or received out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.
 - **Article 30:**

- (1) All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- (2) The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.
- Any forcible imposition of a language or religion on any group of people in India weakens national unity which is based upon a recognition of differences.
- **Minorities exist everywhere**, not just in India.
- Modern capitalism, colonialism and large scale migration have brought in a plurality of groups.
- Even the smallest state will have minorities, whether in religious, ethnic, linguistic or racial terms.

COMMUNALISM, SECULARISM AND THE NATION-STATE



Communalism

- The word '**communalism**' refers to aggressive chauvinism based on religious identity.
- It is an attitude that sees one's own group as the only legitimate or worthy group, with other groups being seen as inferior, illegitimate and opposed.
- It is an aggressive political ideology linked to religion.
- A communalist may or may not be a devout person, and devout believers may or may not be communalists.
- All communalists do believe in a *political identity* based on religion.
- Communalists cultivate an aggressive political identity, and are prepared to condemn or attack everyone who does not share their identity.
- One of the characteristic features of communalism is its claim that religious identity overrides everything else.
- Communalism is an especially important issue in India because it has been a recurrent source of tension and violence.
- They are willing to kill, rape, and loot members of other communities in order to redeem their pride, to protect their home turf.
- India has had a history of communal riots from pre-Independence times, often as a result of the divide-and-rule policy adopted by the colonial rulers.

Secularism

- The terms 'secular' and 'secularism' are very hard to define clearly, although they are also equally controversial.
- It is as the opposite of communal.
- A secular person or state is one that does not favour any particular religion over others.
- Secularism implies equal respect for all religions, rather than separation or distancing.
- Giving equal respect to all religions.
- **Opponents argue that** secularism of this sort is only an excuse to favour the minorities in return for their votes or other kinds of support.
- **Supporters argue that** without such special protection, secularism can turn into an excuse for imposing the majority community's values and norms on the minorities.

STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

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- An **authoritarian state** is the opposite of a democratic state.
 - It is a state in which the **people have no voice** and those in power are not accountable to anyone.
 - Authoritarian states often limit or abolish civil liberties.
 - Non-state actors and institutions become important in this context, for they can keep a watch on the state, protest against its injustices or supplement its efforts.
- Civil society is the non-state and non-market part of the public domain in which individuals get together voluntarily to create institutions and organisations.
- **It is the sphere of active citizenship:** here, individuals take up social issues, try to influence the state or make demands on it, pursue their collective interests or seek support for a variety of causes.
- It consists of **voluntary associations, organisations or institutions** formed by groups of citizens.
- It includes **political parties, media institutions, trade unions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), religious organisations**, and other kinds of collective entities.
- The main criteria for inclusion in civil society
 - **The organisations should not be state-controlled**
 - **It should not be a purely commercial profit-making entity.**
- **Doordarshan** is **not part of civil society** though private television channels are.
- **Acar manufacturing company** is **not part of** civil society but the **trade unions** to which its workers belong are.
- The Indian people had a brief experience of authoritarian rule during the 'Emergency' enforced between June 1975 and January 1977.
 - Parliament was suspended and new laws were made directly by the government.
 - Civil liberties were revoked and a large number of politically active people were arrested and jailed without trial.
 - Censorship was imposed on the media and government officials could be dismissed without normal procedures.
 - The government coerced lower level officials to implement its programmes and produce instant results.
 - The most notorious was the forced **sterilisation campaign** in which large numbers died due to surgical complications.
 - When elections were held unexpectedly in early 1977, the people voted overwhelmingly against the ruling Congress Party.
 - The Emergency shocked people into active participation and helped energise the many civil society initiatives that emerged in the 1970s.
 - This period saw the resurgence of a wide variety of social movements including the women's, environmental, human rights and dalit movements.
 - Today the activities of civil society organisations have an even wider range, including advocacy and lobbying activity with national and international agencies as well as active participation in various movements.
 - The issues taken up are diverse, ranging from tribal struggles for land rights, devolution in urban governance, campaigns against rape and violence against women, rehabilitation of those displaced by dams and other developmental projects, fishermen's struggles against mechanised fishing, rehabilitation of hawkers and pavement dwellers, campaigns against slum demolitions and for housing rights, primary education reform, distribution of land to dalits, and so on.



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- The media has taken an increasingly active role, specially its emergent visual and electronic segments.
 - Among the most significant recent initiatives is the campaign for the **Right to Information**.

The Right to Information Act 2005 (Act No. 22/ 2005)

- Is a law enacted by the Parliament of India giving Indians (except those in the State of Jammu and Kashmir who have their own special law) access to Government records.
- Under the terms of the Act, any person may request information from a “public authority” (a body of Government or instrumentality of State) which is expected to reply expeditiously or within **thirty days**.



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