

## **INDIA AS A LAND OF DIVERSITIES**

India is a land of unity in diversity and it is not only true about its people, languages, religions, customs and occupations but it holds true about its geographical features also. The Indian peninsula has all the variety of relief features which makes India a remarkable country. The Himalayas in the North act like sentinels and separate us from Tibet and China. The Karakoram Range, Vindhya Range in the Central Indian region and the Satpura Range in the eastern Gujrat, The Aravali Range in Rajasthan and the Western Ghats are known as Sahyadris make these regions different from the Plains which are found in the northern plains and are called Indo-Gangetic Plains. On the basis of the soil, texture, vegetation and the regions these are broadly divided into the Bhabhar Belt, The Terai Belt, the Bangar Belt and the Khadar belt. The Thar desert stretches in the west and covers almost 6 percent area of the state of Rajasthan. Malwa plateau in the west, Deccan plateau in the south and Chota Nagpur plateau in the east make the Central Highlands of India. Coastal areas in the west and extreme south and in the east make India a peninsula. Also, there are islands of Lakshadweep, Andaman, and Nicobar make union territories.

India is a vast country with numerous variations in races, cultures, languages and even geographical features. In many countries of the world, major geographical features become the dividing international borders, e.g. Nepal and China separated by Himalayas. However in India, we have learned to live in diversity and our geographical features further solidify this bond. The Punjab region, known for its 5 rivers and one of the most potent agriculture lands on earth, the area is home to Punjabi people and Punjabi language and yet within this region millions of Hindus also live. The Northern Mountainous region has come across different people, a different language, though all of them are closely related to India. In the Rajasthan desert, we come across Bhojpuri and Rajasthani languages and culture, all part of India, yet distinct their culture and language. To the further south come across the people of Tamil Nadu, Telugana, Kerala, Karanataka, all of them distinctively Dravidian languages, known for their local food based on coconut oil and a variation on the Hindu religion.

All in all, India's vast diversity is matched by its geographical features and shows the strength of the country. India is a vast country and is considered as a Sub-Continent for its vastness. This sub-continent extending from the Himalayas to the sea is called Bharata-Varsha or the land of Bharata, a famous king of the Puranic tradition. Bharata was the son of king Dushyanta and Sakuntala. The Persians of ancient time called the river Indus as Hindu. The ancient Greeks referred the river Indus as Sindhu. They named this land as India and called its people as Indians. During the Medieval age the writers called this land as Hindustan or the land of the Hindus. The extra ordinary characteristic of this land is that in spite of all diversity in different fields-physical, social, linguistic, cultural and religious; there is a fundamental thread of unity in the history of India. The following features or phenomena make India a land of diversity:

## 1. Geographical Diversity:

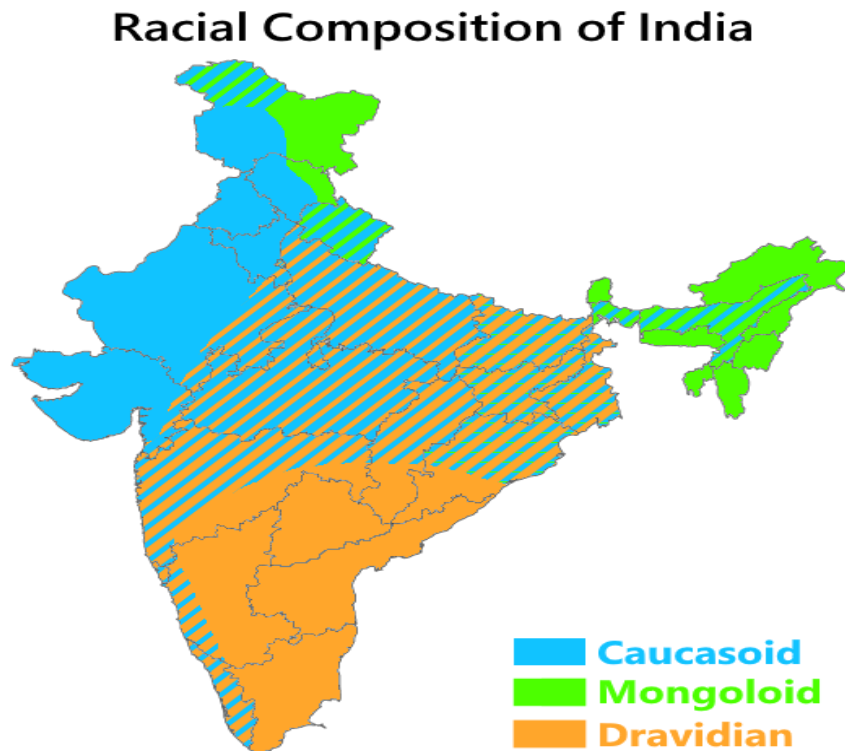


*Fig. 1: Physiographic region of India*

Geographically India can be divided into four regions. The first is the Himalayan region or the Northern Mountain wall that extends from Kashmir in the West to Assam in the East. This region includes Kashmir, Kangra, Tehri, Kumaun, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. The second region is the great and big Northern Plains which are provided with water by the rivers like Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra and their tributaries. Due to this the region is most fertile and productive. The third region comprised of the plateau of the Central India and the Deccan. The Western Ghats and the Eastern Ghats are stretched on the two sides of the Deccan which meets at the Nilgiris. The Coromandel Coast stands between the Eastern Ghats and the Bay of Bengal. The region between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats is known as the Konkan up to Goa beyond which it is known as Kanara or Karnataka while the Southern most part is known as the Malabar Coast or Kerala. The ancient names of Western Ghats was Sahyadri while that of Eastern Ghats, Mahindra. Undivided India is as large as Europe without Russia. India contains about one fifth of the total population of the whole world.

Thus the physical features of the country with its numerous rivers and lofty mountains favour a speculative bent of mind among the people living in these geographical regions. This geographical feature promoted the growth of composite culture of the country.

## 2. Racial Diversity:



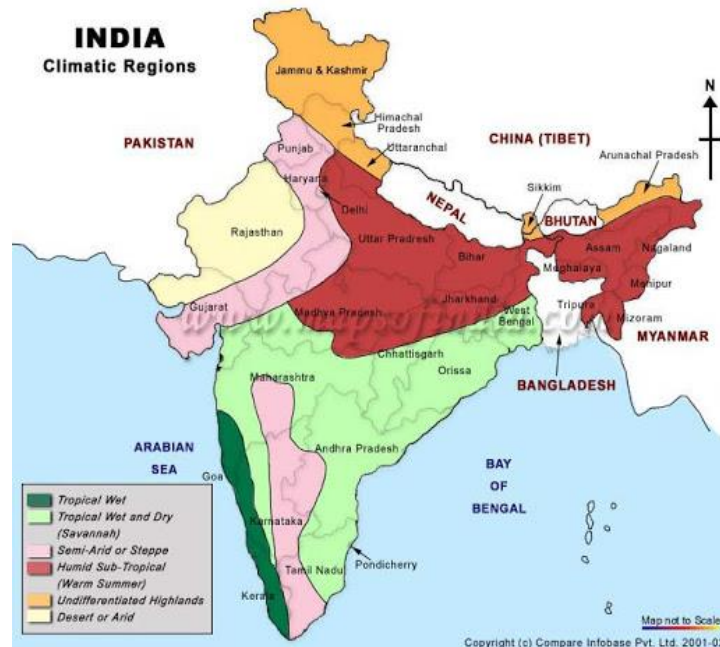
*Fig. 2: Racial diversity in India*

Along with the physical variety the most remarkable feature of India is the presence of the variety of human beings which she presents through her teeming millions. The people of India can be divided into four major groups on ethnic and linguistic grounds. The first group include the Neolithic and Paleolithic men who inhabited in this country since the remote past. The second group of people belong to the Mongoloid type and they are found in Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal. The third group is identified as Dravidians living in the Southern part of the country. The fourth group include the tall and fair complexioned Indo-Aryans living in the North-Western part of India. Gradually they brought the whole Gangetic Valley under their settlement. With the passage of time the Dravidians and the Aryans came closer to each other. Other races like Persians, Greeks, Kushanas and Huns came to India at different periods and permanently settled in the country. From the Seventh century onwards Muslim invaders made India their hunting ground. The Arabs, Turks and the Mughals came to India and settled here. Thus the racial diversities play a vital role in Indian society and culture.

## 3. Diversity in Climate:

The extreme diversity of physical features presents different kinds of climatic conditions for the inhabitants. India has high mountains, and deserts, plateaus, fertile plains, rivers, valleys and vast sea coasts. Cherrapunji in Assam is the place which records the highest rainfall in the World and on the other hand there is no rainfall in the deserts of Rajasthan.

There are also varieties of temperature and climate in this country. When pinching winter is felt in the Kashmir region for more than six months the people of the extreme South like Kerala never experience such cold at any time. One can find varieties of temperature and climate in India.



*Fig. 3: Climatic diversity in India*

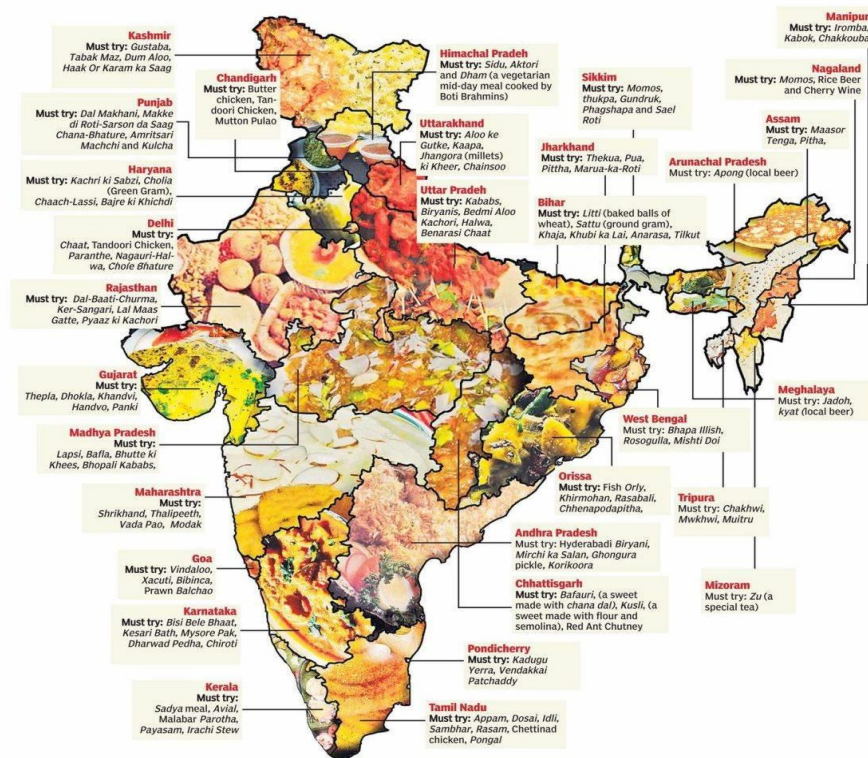
#### 4. Social Diversity:

**Social diversity** is a feature of a society which is determined by caste, class, religion, occupational pattern in a given territory. In the social sphere, the general customs and manners of the people greatly differ. People of different regions use different types of dresses, their eating habits and customs differ. Certain people are quite civilized while others are very backward in their customs. In short, **“India is a museum of cults and customs, creeds and cultures, faiths and tongues, racial types and social systems”**.

The people differ considerably in the social habits. They differ in their dresses, customs, food habits and manners. Different kinds of festivals are observed in different parts of the country by different categories of people.

India possesses a rich variety of races. The Indian sub-continent received a large number of migratory races mostly from the Western and Eastern directions. Majority of the people in India are descendants of immigrants from across the Himalayas. Their dispersal into sub-continent has resulted in the consequent regional concentration of a variety of ethnic elements. In the religious sphere, India possesses a great diversity. India is a multi-religious country. Religion is both a factor of unity and diversity in Indian society. But, all are differentiated internally. Traditionally, different religious groups have lived in India in more

or less peaceful coexistence. India is not religiously a homogenous state even though nearly 80 percent of the population is Hindus. There are six major religions in India, namely Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism. There are also other religions like Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Bahaism. Then there are sects within each religion. Hinduism has sects like Shaivas and Vaishnavas. Similarly, in Islam the Shias and the Sunnis, Sikhs as Namdharis and Niirankaris, Jainism into Digambar and Shwetambar and Buddhism into Hinayana and Mahayana.



**Fig. 4: Food diversity in India**

India is a country of castes. The term caste is generally used in two senses: sometimes in the sense of Varna and sometimes in the sense of Jati. **Varna** refers to a segment of the four-fold division of Hindu society based on functional criterion. The four varnas are Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra with their specialized functions as learning, defense, trade and manual service. The Varna hierarchy is accepted all over India. **Jati** refers to a hereditary endogamous status group practicing a specific traditional occupation. There are more than 3,000 jatis in India. These are hierarchically graded in different ways in different religions.

The practice of caste system is not confined to Hindus alone. One can find castes among the Muslims, Christians, Sikhs as well as other communities. There is the hierarchy of Shaik, Saiyed, Mughal and Pathan among the Muslims. Furthermore, there are castes like teli (oil presser), dhobi (washerman), etc among the Muslims. Similarly, caste consciousness among the Christians in India is not unknown. Since a vast majority of Christians in India



were converted from Hindu fold, the converts carried the caste system into Christianity. In this view, one can imagine the extent of caste diversity in India.

In addition to the above described major forms of diversity, we have diversity of many other sorts like settlement patterns – tribal, rural, urban; marriage and kinship pattern along religious and regional lines and so on. In this way diversity pervades on the whole of Indian subcontinent. And such diversities are not the hallmarks of Indian culture. The main theme of Indian culture is unity which absorbs all these diversities.

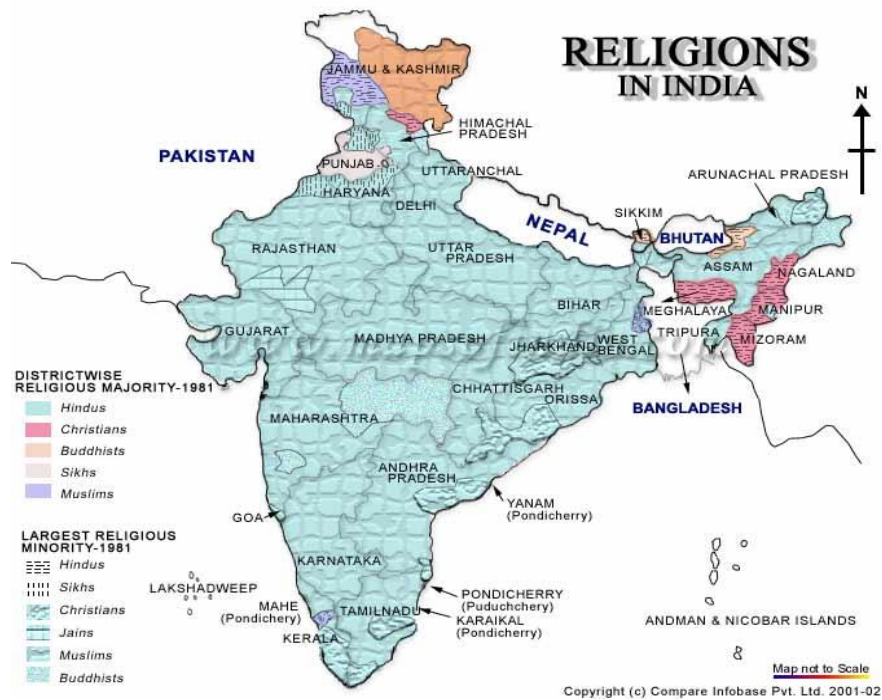
## 5. Diversities in Language:



*Fig. 5: Language diversity in India*

The people of India speak different languages. There are in India separate group of people with their own language. Each of these people's has its own literature. More than 200 different dialects and languages are used in this vast sub-continent. The principal languages of India are Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, Oriya, Assamese, Gujarati, Marathi, Sindhi, Urdu, Punjabi, Tamil, Telgu, Malayalam, Kashmiri and Kannada. The hill tribes of Central India speak Austric type of languages. The people of the South who belong to the Dravidian group speak Telgu, Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada. On the other hand the languages like Hindi, Bengali, Oriya, Marathi, Gujarati and Punjabi are used by the Indo-Aryans.

## 6. Religious Diversities:



*Fig. 6: Religious diversity in India*

There is also to be found an equal variety of religions. All the world religions are found here — Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam and Christianity. All have their sects and sub-divisions. The Hindu religion itself is split up in countless creeds, the Vedic religion, the Puranic Hinduism, the Sanatan Dharma, the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj. Originally Brahmanical Hinduism was the religion of the people. But the sixth century gave birth two new religions namely Buddhism and Jainism. During the medieval period Sikhism emerged as a new religion. Gradually, Persian, Zoroastrianism, Islam and Christianity also spread in India. Thus India is a land of many religions. The people therefore differ considerably in the social habits and cultural differences vary from State to State which has become the fabric of Indian culture composite in nature. Conflicting and varying shades of blood strains of culture and modes of life all-together build up rich and complex diversity in India. There is no wonder that “India is a museum of cults and customs, creeds and culture, faiths and tongues, racial types and social systems” yet India is a land of unity. There is deep underlying fundamental unity in India. An observer fails to discover the one in many, the individual in aggregate, and the simple in the composite. The sense of geographical unity of the country was always present in the minds of the founders of the Indian Civilization. This unity has undoubtedly nurtured in recent times by the uniform system of administration and the spread of modern education. **Dr B.S.Guha** identifies the population of India into **six main ethnic groups** based on 1931 census operations, namely (1) the Negritos (2) the Proto-Australoids, (3) the Mongoloids, (4) the Mediterranean or Dravidian, (5) the Western Brachycephals, (6) the Nordic. People belonging to these different racial stocks have little in common either in physical appearance or food habits. The racial diversity is very perplexing.

**Herbert Risley** had classified the people of India into **seven racial types**. These are – (1) Turko – Iranian, (2) Indo-Aryan, (3) Scytho – Dravidian, (4) Aryo – Dravidina, (5) Mongo Dravidian, (6) Mongoloid and (7) Dravidians. These seven racial types can be reduced to three basic types – the Indo-Aryan, the Mongolian the Dravidian. The vast population of India consists of the jungle tribes like the Bhils, the Konds, the Santhals, the Jarawas etc.

Extremes and diversities of the physical features, climatic conditions, socio – cultural composition, economic conditions have thus produced cultured heterogeneity of high order in India.

### **INDIA AS A LAND OF UNITY IN DIVERSITY**

The extra ordinary characteristic of this land is that in-spite of all diversity in different fields-physical, social, linguistic, cultural and religious; there is a fundamental thread of unity in the history of India. India has been able to project itself as a single territorial unit in the face of physical, political, social and economic contrasts. The unifying role of the Great Plains between the Himalayan ranges on one hand and the Peninsular India on the other can hardly be ignored. Climatically, the monsoonal rhythm of seasons provides a strong element of uniformity. The concentration of monsoonal rainfall to a few months in a year and the associated agricultural activities are an all India phenomena. Many of our cultural traditions are strongly tied to the monsoons. Our saints have spread the message of universal brotherhood which has helped a great deal in uniting different sections of society in India and making the country a unified nation.



***Fig. 7: India as country of unity in diversity***



The Ramayana and the Mahabharata have produced themes even for tribal dances and music for thousands of years and still continue to do so. Although Hinduism is the way of life for majority of Indians, Hinduism and Islam are intertwined into a composite matrix that integration of India is strongly rooted. In fact there are almost as many Muslims in India as in Pakistan. Centuries of foreign rule failed to disrupt our cultural ties. On economic front, the development of inter-regional linkage and the emergence of a national home market have played a significant role in uniting the country. For example, tea from Assam, wheat from Punjab and Haryana, minerals from Chotanagpur plateau and spices from the hill areas of the southern states are used all over the country and in turn these areas obtain items required by them from other areas. This process has been accelerated by rapid development of transportation and communication. The following are some of the features or phenomena make India as a land of unity in diversity:

### **1. Geographical Unity:**

From the very ancient part the whole of India as a geographical unit has been described as Bharata Varsha or the land of Bharat. This very name is given to the whole country in the Epics and Puranas. The country that lies north of the ocean and South of the snowy mountains is called Bharat for their dwell the descendants of Bharata. Its people are designated as Bharata santati. The term Bharata varsha stands for fundamental unity, the term was not only associated with the geographical boundaries but with the idea of universal monarchy. The theologians, political philosophers and poets have always referred to India as one and have highly praised the rulers who attempted to extend their political supremacy from Himalaya in the North to Cape Camorin in the South, from the river Brahmaputra in the East to Indus in the West. The rulers of the medieval period also considered India as one geographical unit and sought to extend their supremacy over this whole land. Even now this Geographical unity is reinforced by the conception of common motherland “Bharatmata”. The song Vandemataram characteristically embodies this sentiment of unity.

### **2. Political Unity:**

The sense of the unity of the whole country was promoted by politics also. The rulers of India established their sway over the whole country and consequently contemplated over it as a unit. The rulers of India from ancient times aimed to rule over the entire country and to become Chakravarti. Chandragupta, Asoka and Samudragupta had established their suzerainty over the whole of India and became Chakravarti. The institution of paramount sovereignty was a familiar political idea of the Hindus in ancient ages. The frequent use of the terms Rajadhiraj, Samraj, Eka-raja, Adhiraja, Virat, and Sarvabhauma etc. in the ancient Sanskrit literature and the repeated performance of such rites and sacrifices as the Rajasuya, Vajapeya, Punaraviseka, Mahabhisekha etc. show that the idea of universal conquest and an all India overlord-ship was well-known to the ancient Hindus. In the Medieval period Ala-ud-din Khilji, Akbar and Aurangzeb sought to establish their political supremacy over the whole of the country. The Mughals established an imperial system which deepened the conception of oneness of rule and sameness of political experience. The British also achieved the

political and administrative unity of India. After the political emancipation of India the incorporation of the Princely States in the Indian Union has completed this political unity of the country.

### **3. Religious Unity:**

There is an undercurrent of religious unity among the various religious sects in the country. The worship of Vishnu and Siva under different names is as widespread in the North as in the South. The temples of Vishnu and Siva have been constructed all over the country. They raise their spires not only in the snow covered Himalayas and Indo-Gangetic plains but in the deltas of the Tungabhadra, Kaveri and Krishna also. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata have been studied in the far South as well as in the Punjab, Kashmir and the Doab. The stories of Ram and Krishna are sung with much devotion and respect in the South, North, East and West. The Cow, the Vedas, the Gita, the Puranas and other scriptures are respected equally throughout the country. Monotheism, immortality of the soul, reincarnation. Karma, Moksha, Nirvana etc. are the doctrines believed in and followed by all the sects of the country. The most sacred places of Hindu pilgrimage such as Badrinarayan in the North, Dwaraka in the West, Rameswaram in the south and Jagannath Puri in the East embrace the whole of the country and they speak of India being one land. The daily prayer of the Hindus include the names of all the main rivers of the north and the south like the Indus (Sindhu), the Ganga, the Jamuna, the Godavari, the Saraswati, the Narmada and the Kaveri. This speaks of the fundamental unity of the people of India. These religious beliefs lay emphasis in the fact that India is one land.

### **4. Cultural Unity:**

Indian culture and civilization is unique in its features. No doubt people follow different languages and customs but one can find a basic unity of literary ideas, philosophy, literature, and conventions throughout the country. The festivals like Diwali, Dashera, Rakshabandhan and Holi are celebrated in every part of the country. The cultural unity and the homogeneity is also reflected in the social ceremonies and the religious rites, festivals and modes of life which are the same in north, south, east and west. The sanctity of the family, the rules of the castes, the Sanskars, the rite of cremating a dead body, the cleanliness of the kitchen etc. are common to all the communities and sects of India.

### **5. Unity of Language:**

India enjoyed unity of language. Before the Christian era Prakrit was a common language of the people. The message of the missionaries of Asoka was successfully carried in this language to the doors of his subjects. Subsequently Pali and Sanskrit replaced Prakrit language. Sanskrit has been acknowledged as one sacred language by all sections of the people irrespective of their race, rank and creed. Different sects and creeds have adopted Sanskrit as the sacred language of their scripture. Sanskrit has become the original source of different languages of the country like Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Oriya and Bengali etc.

Sanskrit has always been the medium of philosophy, theology and mythology. During the time of the British rule English language achieved success in uniting the people of India when it was declared as the medium of instruction in all educational institutions and used as the official language. At present Hindi has been doing the same work. At different periods the Arayans, the Sakas, Scythians, Parthians and the Hunas have come to India. In course of time they had lost their separate individuality and were completely absorbed in the Hindu fold. Even large number of Muslims and Christians who have been living in India are the descendants of the Hindus who were converted to Islam and Christianity. All the races and tribes living in India have acquired the physical uniformity.

Indian culture is an organic and harmonious synthesis of a large number of human cultural trends. Thus in spite of the appalling diversity India is herself the great example of the doctrine of one in many. There is unity in diversity — a unity for more profound than that produced either by geographical isolation or by political suzerainty. In India there is unity that transcends the innumerable diversities of blood, colour, language, dress, manners and sects. The unique feature of Indian culture, civilization and its history lies in the continuity of religious practices and the spirit of tolerance by its people in all ages.