
UNIT 1 INDIA: MULTIPLE IMAGES*

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you should be able to:

- Explain the traditional facets of plurality of Indian society and the legacies of unity and diversity therein.
- Elucidate the eternal syncretic tradition in Hindu spiritualism
- Develop a critique of the colonial description of Indian society
- Underline Hegel's, Marx's Weber's and Twain's visions of India
- Elaborate Tagore's, Gandhi's, Nehru's and others' perspectives of India, and
- Examine the plural foundation of Indian society as enshrined in the Indian Constitution

1.1 INTRODUCTION

India as a society is founded on pluralism and traditions of accommodation and cultural liberalism. It has a long historical legacy of such a tradition. However

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the cultural ethos of Indian society has not been interpreted and imagined uniformly. While Indian leaders, philosophers, poets and writers have highlighted the essential plural and accommodative foundations of Indian society based on historical facts, the colonial rulers and many Westerners have portrayed Indian society in negative terms. This unit will provide glimpses of such images and will create the backdrop for the further discussion on Indian society. It begins with the essential facets of the culture of accommodation and pluralism, unity and diversity of Indian society. It also provides a historical glimpse of Indian society and presents a brief outline of colonial imagination of Indian society through Macaulay's Minutes, and James Mill's description of Indian civilisation. Furthermore the understandings of Indian society by Hegel, Marx, Engels, Max Weber and Mark Twain are also briefly given in this unit. This would be followed by the images and description of India by Edward Said, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Ambedkar and the cultural nationalist ideologues. The plural foundation of nationhood, the uniqueness of India and the constitutional foundation of Indian society are also discussed in this unit. Let us begin with a discussion of the plural foundation of Indian society.

1.2 TRADITION OF PLURALITY AND CULTURE OF ACCOMMODATION IN INDIAN SOCIETY

As we try to develop an image of India, we very often encounter varieties of ideals, images and realities of India. We have a huge landscape with long civilizational heritage, rich religious and philosophical traditions, profound cultural frameworks and economic foundations to describe the socio-political and geographical dynamics of India. Significantly all these ideals, images and realities have always remained plural in Indian society.

1.2.1 Facets of Pluralism and Unity in India

Society consists of people. In India we find people of distinctive physical features. Herbert Risley had classified the people of India into seven racial types. These are (i) Turko-Iranian, (ii) Indo-Aryan, (iii) Scytho-Dravidian, (iv) Aryo-Dravidian, (v) Mongolo-Dravidian, (vi) Mongoloid, and (vii) Dravidian.

According to the 1971 census there are 1652 languages in India which are spoken as mother tongue. The famous linguist Grierson noted 179 languages and 544 dialects. India is a land of 22 official languages, 13 different scripts and over 720 dialects. India is a land of multiple religions. Though India is the birth place of Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and varieties of tribal religions, every major religion like Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Bahaism have their strong followers in India. According to census 2011, followers of Hinduism form 72.8% of the total population, Islam 14.2%, Christianity 2.3%, Sikhism 1.7%, Buddhism 0.7%, Jainism 0.4% and other religious groups forms 0.7% followers. There are also caste or caste like diversities within most of these religious groups.

However despite these diversities there are strong bonds of unity in India which are reflected in the geopolitical unity marked by the Himalayas in the north end and the oceans on the other sides. Politically India is a sovereign, secular and democratic state. The same Constitution and same Parliament cover every part of it. We share the same political culture marked by the norms of democracy, secularism and social justice. The ideal of geo-political unity of India is culturally

and historically inherited as reflected in the concepts of *Bharatvarsha* (the ancient classic name for India). The other important source of unity of India is marked by the institution of pilgrimage which is reflected in the network of shrines and sacred places in different parts of India.

1.2.2 The Eternal Syncretic Tradition in Hindu Spiritualism

The syncretic tradition of Indian culture provides the space for accommodation and tolerance and the bondage which creates the mosaic of unity in diversity. Though Hinduism is the majority religion of India, The tradition of accommodation is eternal to Hinduism as it is practised as the way of life in India. Philosophically it has upheld the tradition that has conceived the whole world to be part of a single family: **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam** (“*vasudha*”, the earth; “*iva*”, is ; and “*kutumbakam*”, family). The concept originates in the Vedic scripture *Maha Upanishad* (Chapter 6, Verse 72): It goes further to say that *ayam/nijah Paroveti ganana laghuchetasam udaracharitanam tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam* which means: "Only small minded man discriminate saying: One is a relative; the other is a stranger. For those who live magnanimously the entire world constitutes but a family. It is considered an integral part of the Hindu philosophy.

Hinduism is founded on the spirit of universality. As **Vivekananda** has aptly pointed out in his famous Chicago speech in 1893, Hinduism as a religion has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance that believes not only in universal toleration, but accepts all religions as true. He further pointed out that India as a nation has sheltered the persecuted and refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. On that occasion he quoted a few lines from a Vedic hymn that depicts the essence of Indian society and Hinduism:

“As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which people take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee”.

1.2.3 The Historical Trajectories of India

Hinduism has traditionally been defined as a way of life rather than a monolithic religion. As way of life it has remained linked to varieties of societal practices and its civilizational trajectories. India possesses the 5,000 years old heritage of the Indus Valley Civilization, known as the Harappan Civilization (c. 3300-c.1500BCE). While tracing the trajectory of Indian history, we trace it roots to the Vedic society (c.1500-c. 200BCE), and also note its encounters and the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism, medieval dynastic rules, Persian, and Greek attacks (c. 200 BCE-c.1200 CE); repeated Muslim attacks and formation of Muslim Sultanate, spread of Bhakti movements, emergence of Sikhism, strengthening of Vijayanagar Empire in the south India (c.1200-1526 CE), formation and expansion of Mughal, Maratha, Sikh and other empires; the arrival of British colonial power and end of Mughal power (c.1526-1857CE), consolidation of British colonial power and India’s struggle for freedom (1857-1947). All through these phases of historical changes, challenges and encounters with outside forces, India has retained the culture of pluralism and accommodation.

However the response of Indian society to the changing historical trajectory in general and to the outside forces in particular has been portrayed differently by

various scholars. In the following section of this unit we will provide a glimpse of such portrayal and imagination of India by Macaulay, Hegel, Marx and Engels, Weber, Mark Twain and others

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Identify the main features of unity and diversity in India

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1.3 COLONIAL AND WESTERN IMAGINATION OF INDIA

The colonial power had made a negative portial of Indian society, its people and culture, language and education. This perspective was widely depicted in the infamous Macaulay’s Minute on Education, February 2, 1835, James Mill’s account of India etc.

1.3.1 Macaulay’s Minute

The document reads:

“...that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are moreover so poor and rude I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works.

I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is indeed fully admitted and I certainly never met with any orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanscrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. ... It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy, the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same.....”

Hence Macaulay suggested that “we ought to employ them in teaching what is best worth knowing, that English is better worth knowing than Sanscrit or Arabic, We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, -a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population”(http://home.iitk.ac.in/~hcverma/Article/Macaulay-Minutes.pdf).

1.3.2 James Mill's Description of Indian Civilisation

Many colonial historians have described Indian civilization with various negative attributes. For instance, an English historian James Mill, compared the Hindus with the “savages of America”; the Indian architectural and sculptural creations were termed “arts of the barbarian”; and India was, in these writings, a “half-civilised nation”. The colonial scholars also considered the Indian way of life abominable and believed that it needed to be metamorphosed and given a western orientation. This perception was behind the “civilising mission” that the British had embarked upon. It is to be mentioned here that their description of India was not only impressionistic, but also biased. They were unable to take cognizance of several noble ethos of Indian society, both in their imagination and writings.

Mill's low estimate of the state of civilisation attained by the Hindus provided a justification for continued British rule, and supported the view that India should be governed according to civilised European standards, rather than those of the native population. Mill believed that ‘the English government in India with all its vices is a blessing of unspeakable magnitude to the population of Hindustan’ (<https://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/james-mill-and-india>).

1.3.3 India as Imagined by Hegel, Marx and Engels

In the imagination of Hegel, Marx and Engels, India appeared to be a static identity. They figured India as distinctive specimen. For Hegel, the dawn of history was in the East. But China and India remained unchanged for millennia. In Hegel's own words: “India like China is a phenomenon antique as well as modern; one which has remained unchanged and fixed”.

Marx used Indian material to elaborate his materialistic theories of the social history of Europe. He described very early stages of human society in which all men were both owners and workers. Marx believed that a society of this nature had actually existed in India from the most ancient times until the British conquest. In the *Communist Manifesto* central concern was the societies which were his based on class differentiation. Here no reference was made to the nature of society in India, China, or other countries of Asia. In his “Principles of Communism”, Engels in 1847 referred to India and China as countries which for thousands of years have made no progress. In the same place he refers to semi-barbarian countries which previously had more or less remained outside of the line of historical development. These are now doomed to be taken over by civilization, personified above all by English industry and trade (cf. Thorner 1980).

The most distinctive character of India according to Marx is its age-old village system. The great mass of the population are dispersed over the surface of the country in tiny agglomerations. Situated on its own tract of arable and waste lands, each village forms a little world unto itself with an independent organization and a distinct life. The dominant feature of the village is the “domestic union of agricultural and manufacturing pursuits”. The “peculiar combination of hand-weaving, hand-spinning and hand-tilling agriculture” gives the villages self-sufficiency (Marx 1853)

Since the Indian villages had preserved their ancient structure, Marx described Indian villages to have “stereotyped primitive forms”. Another label he applied to them was “family communities, implying that they were held together by ties

of consanguinity”. Caste and slavery are mentioned as village features, but only in passing and not much is made of them. There is an isolated reference to differences in rank (Thorner 1980). For Marx self-sufficing communities i.e. Village communities had some specific characters:

“These idyllic village communities had always been the solid foundation of oriental despotism... they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies.that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjected man to external circumstances instead of elevating man to sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never-changing natural destiny”

1.3.4 Max Weber

Max Weber viewed the evolution and transformation of the world in terms of rationalization of thoughts, ethics and actions. For him the society in India that is founded on the traditional spirit of Hinduism, is devoid of the rational spirit to develop rational capitalism in society. The predominance of “otherworldly” mysticism – in which salvation can only be achieved through a process of detachment from material wellbeing, has made the people remain grounded on traditional thoughts and actions.

However Max Weber's thesis has been contested by many scholars on the ground that many traditional business communities have contributed to the growth of capitalism; that many have compartmentalised their religion from economic activities and have contributed to the growth of capitalism. It has also been mentioned that the process of capital accumulation in India is to be understood in terms of specific nature of Indian culture and economy; and not by aping the west.

Moreover there is no dearth of scholars who have effectively shown India, its people and culture with a positive connotation and spirit. Here we may cite the example of Mark Twain:

1.3.5 Mark Twain

America's beloved humorist and one of its best known writers, Samuel Langhorne Clemens, better known to the world as Mark Twain came to India in January, 1896. Based on his extensive visit to India, Mark Twain wrote that “India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grandmother of tradition.” Twain records in his autobiography, “an imaginary land - a fairy land, dreamland, a land made out of poetry and moonlight for the Arabian Nights to their gorgeous Miracles in. . .” . He found the people “pleasant and accommodating.” He added “They are kindly people. . . . The face and the bearing that indicate a surly spirit and a bad heart seemed . . . rare among Indians.

Commenting on the Indian heritage, Twain said: “India had the start of the whole world in the beginning of things. She had the first civilization; she had the first accumulation of material wealth; she was populous with deep thinkers and subtle intellects; she had mines and woods and a fruitful soil. ...”. He was intrigued by the diversities in the Indian way of life. “Their character and their history, their

customs and their religion confront you with riddles at every turn - riddles which are a trifle more perplexing after they are explained than they were before," he wrote.

Twain said repeatedly that India was his favorite land on the whole 'Equator journey'. He loved the color and variety of Indian life. Take the famous passage in "Following the Equator" : This is indeed India - the land of dreams and romance, of fabulous wealth and fabulous poetry, of splendour and rags, of palaces and hovels, of tigers and elephants, the cobra and the jungle, the . . . cradle of the human race, birthplace of human speech, mother of history, grandmother of legend, great-grandmother of tradition . . . the one land that all men desire to see, and having once seen, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for all the shows of all the rest of the globe combined (cf.Sharma 1968)

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What was the objective of British education in India according to Macaulay?

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- 2) What were the features of Indian villages according to Marx?

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1.4 CULTURAL ENCOUNTER: EAST AND WEST

It is important to note that for centuries the British kept on describing India in terms of their own understanding and imagination of Indian society and its history. These descriptions tried precisely to justify the continuity and expansion of the colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent. However from the later part of the 19th and early 20th century with the gradual spread of English education and emergence of a thin section of middle class the public awareness among Indians about the colonial perception of India and its culture, society and civilization started growing. They started to react and object to the colonial assumptions of Indians, which were biased and derogatory in many ways. The arrival of the printing press, both vernacular and English, and increased connectivity widely contributed to such articulations.

Indian scholars and leaders developed a critical view not only western culture, but also of their own culture. The cultural contacts made the scholars see the

strengths and weaknesses of both the cultures. Consequently, there have been descriptions of both the Oriental and of the West by scholars.

It is to mention here that India has got unique spiritual tradition and has experienced several movements to regenerate this tradition. Bhakti movement in 15th century was a popular movement which treated all sections of society equally and it developed two traditions of Saguna and Nirguna. The first one believes in the form of God Vishnu or Shiv relating to the Vaishnavite or Shaivaite traditions. It advocated equality among all the castes. The followers of Nirguna believed in formless universal God. Ravidas and Kabir were the major figures of this tradition. It became more popular among the dalits in urban areas in the early 20th century as it provided the possibility of salvation for all. It promised social equality.

1.5 THE ASSIMILATIVE, LIBERAL AND CULTURAL NATIONALIST IMAGINATION OF INDIA

Although there were substantial differences among the social thinkers, and nationalist scholars on the necessity and outcome of these cultural contacts, they were agreed that the pre-colonial era was neither “dark” nor “bereft of glory”. The Indian freedom fighters, scholars, poets and philosophers widely highlighted the underlying facets of unity in Indian society that was a precursor in attaining ‘nationhood’.

The writings of of R.G. Bhandarkar, Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru Ambedkar and many others, widely contributed to lay the foundation of nationalist discourse of Indian unity. Some scholars highlighted the aspects of civilizational unity of Indian society to strengthen the foundation of Indian nationhood

1.5.1 Rabindranath Tagore

Tagore has imagined India as assimilative, cosmopolitan, compassionate, liberal and quintessentially secular philosophically. This is most comprehensively expounded in his classic poem 'Bharat Tirtha' (Indian Pilgrimage), where Tagore writes:

“Oh! Mother, let my mind awake slowly on this sacred shore of the sea, where great souls of the world have come together to pay reverence. Here with outstretched hands we bow down to the Divine in human form.Adore here your reverential Mother Earth where great souls have come together on the seashore to pay reverence”.

With regard to the arrival of outsiders in India he writes: “Nobody knows whose invitation invoked so many souls who have gathered here like a turbulent current of river that has come and dissolved itself in the Divine Ocean. In this sacred place the Aryans, non-Aryans, Dravidians, Afghans and Moghals have come and detached their individuality in One Supreme Body. Nobody will go empty handed from this seashore where great souls come together to pay reverence. Those crossed the great mountains and deserts singing the song of your glory from their hearts like martial music and got their seats in your Own Self. By throwing away Prophecies the bonds of difference, they have emerged into universal

brotherhood”.

He also invites everyone to come to this country with a purpose and he writes:

“Come, Oh! Aryans, come non-Aryans, come Hindus and Muslims. Come, come, Oh! Englishmen, come Christians, come Brahmins, purify your heart; hold the hands of downtrodden and out-castes. Remove all ills and disrespect. Come quickly for the coronation of Mother; where the “Mangal Ghat” has to be filled with sacred water which become consecrated by the touch of the great souls who have come together on the seashore to pay reverence”. (<http://www.scotlandyoga.com/sahaja-yoga-news/2007/07/06/bharat-tirtha/>)

Tagore was a universalist and a humanist. He was against all orthodoxy as practised in Indian society. He was looking for an ideal image of India, while critiquing the social ills and orthodoxy in society. In many poem and through many characters in his novels he raised this concern. Perhaps the most complex novel to explore this theme was 'Gora', the story of an adopted child of a Brahmin family who turns ultra-orthodox only to realise the reality of his birth and the futility of orthodoxy.

Tagore was for a free India, and strong by condemned voice against the merciless killing of freedom fighters by the British forces. He returned his Knighthood in the wake of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. He wrote “My voice is choked, my flute has lost its strains, it’s like the inside of a prison on a moonless night. You have submerged my world under the burden of nightmares. That’s why I tearfully ask — have you forgiven, have you loved those that poisoned the environ you created, those that stamped out the light of your lamp” (Mitra, 2017).

In Tagore’s view, Indian civilisation was ‘syncretic’ in nature. It is founded in unity in diversity, without diminishing the significance of the uniqueness of all social and religious groups that has provided the plural and composite foundation of Indian society. In direct opposition to this was the aggressiveness of western civilisation, which tried to forcibly homogenise different cultures — a feature Tagore vehemently opposed.

1.5.2 Gandhi

Gandhi has furthered the idea of the assimilative nature of Indian civilization. He even suggested that the objective of the freedom movement need not be to expel the British from India. For him the English would get assimilated in Indian society as the thousands of other migrants have got assimilated in it. Gandhiji recognised that India was a land of diversity and so he never substituted ‘Indian civilisation’ with ‘Hindu culture’ or ‘Hindu civilisation’.

Gandhi had a wide and inclusive understanding of India as a nation: To him "By the Indian nation Gandhi means ordinary Indians, irrespective of their religious, linguistic, regional or caste differences, as well as the new emerging middle class"..(Gandhi: xiv). He further writes: India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it. In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals, but those who are conscious of the spirit of nationality do not interfere with one another’s religion. If they do, they are not fit to be considered a nation’

He always said: "If the Hindus believe that India should be peopled only by Hindus, they are living in dreamland. The Hindus, the Mahomedans, the Parsees and the Christians who have made India their country are fellow countrymen, and they will have to live in unity if only for their own interest" (Gandhi 52-53).

Gandhi's view on the village is unique. Gandhi believed in the autonomy of the villages founded on agriculture, supplemented by village and cottage industries. He was not in favour of industrialization. He wrote: "India does not need to be industrialized in the modern sense of the term... Agriculture does not need revolutionary changes. The Indian peasant requires a supplementary industry. The most natural is the introduction of the spinning-wheel, not the handloom. The latter cannot be introduced in every home, whereas the former can, and it used to be so even a century ago" (Gandhi 115). Gandhi was for self sufficiency, dignity and autonomy of each individual.

Gandhi has written about political power and the state. He writes "To me political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their condition in every department of life. Political power means the capacity to regulate national life through national representatives. If national life becomes so perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation becomes necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a State everyone is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbour. In the ideal State, therefore, there is no political power because there is no State. But the ideal is never fully realized in life. Hence the classical statement of Thoreau that, 'government is best which governs the least. (Young India, 2-7-'31)

1.5.3 Nehru

India appears in Pandit Nehru's imagination as a plural country of various sorts. He writes that the 'heart of Hindustan as it has so long been considered, the seat and centre of both ancient and medieval civilization, the melting pot of so many races and cultures'. He further writes: When I think of India, I think of many things: of broad fields dotted with innumerable small villages; of towns and cities I have visited; of the magic of the rainy season which pours life into the dry parched-up land and converts it suddenly into a glistening expanse of beauty and greenery, of great rivers and flowing water; of the Khyber Pass in all its bleak surroundings; of the southern tip of India; of people, individually and in the mass; and, above all, of the Himalayas, snow-capped, or some mountain valley in Kashmir in the spring, covered with new flowers, and with a brook of our choice, and so I have chosen this mountain background rather than the more normal picture of a hot, subtropical country. Both pictures would be correct, for India stretches from the tropics right up to the temperate regions, from near the equator to the cold heart of Asia (1946:49-50, 54).

Regarding diversity and unity among the people of India he says that the diversity of India is tremendous; it is obvious; it lies on the surface and anybody can see it. It concerns itself with physical appearances as well as with certain mental habits and traits. Their racial stocks are not the same, though there may be common strands running through them; they differ in face and figure, food and clothing, and, of course, language. He however finds that though outwardly there was diversity and infinite variety among our people, everywhere there was that tremendous impress of oneness, which had held all of us together for ages past,

whatever political fate or misfortune had befallen us. ... That essential unity had been so powerful that no political division, no disaster or catastrophe, had been able to overcome it.... I was also fully aware of the diversities and divisions of Indian life, of classes, castes, religions, races, different degrees of cultural development. Yet I think that a country with a long cultural background and a common outlook on life develops a spirit that is peculiar to it and that is impressed on all its children, however much they may differ among themselves.....But if we were going to build the house of India's future, strong and secure and beautiful, we would have to dig deep for the foundations (Ibid. 52—53).

What is Bharat Mata and who is Bharat Mata? On this question he clarifies: Bharat Mata, Mother India, was essentially these millions of people, and victory to her meant victory to these people. You are parts of this Bharat Mata, I told them, you are in a manner yourselves Bharat Mata, and as this idea slowly soaked into their brains, their eyes would light up as if they had made a great discovery (Ibid 54)

Some kind of a dream of unity has occupied the mind of India since the dawn of civilization. That unity was not conceived as something imposed from outside, a standardization of externals or even of beliefs. It was something deeper and, within its fold, the widest tolerance of belief and custom was practised and every variety acknowledged and even encouraged.

He also writes regarding the differences. "Differences, big or small, can always be noticed even within a national group, however closely bound together it may be. The essential unity of that group becomes apparent when it is compared to another national group, though often the differences between two adjoining groups fade out or intermingle near the frontiers, and modern developments are tending to produce certain uniformity everywhere. In ancient and medieval times, the idea of the modern nation was non-existent, and feudal, religious, racial, or cultural bonds had more importance. Yet I think that at almost any time in recorded history an Indian would have felt more or less at home in any part of India"(Nehru. 55).

1.5.4 Ambedkar

Ambedkar was deeply concerned about establishing a social order in India founded on equality and justice for all. However he was deeply disturbed with social division in Indian society. As nationalism became a concern, Ambedkar pointed out that "philosophically, it may be possible to consider a nation as a unit, but sociologically, it cannot be regarded as consisting of many classes and freedom of the nation, if it is to be a reality, must vouchsafe the freedom of the different classes comprised in it, particularly of those who are treated as the servile classes". He further writes that nationality is ' a feeling of consciousness of kind which on the one hand binds together those who have it , so strongly that it overrides all differences arising out of economic conflicts or social gradations and on the other hand , severs them from those who are not their kind . It is a feeling not to belong to any other group. This is the essence of what is called a nationality and national feeling'

For him a serious and ideological commitment for ensuring equality for all sections is a prerequisite to actualize nationhood. Nationalism in India emerged not only as a protest against the domination of the colonial forces but also as a protest against the internal domination of the lower castes by the upper caste. Within the persisting system of inequality and caste based social segregation according to

him, the untouchables would be underprivileged; rather they would remain in a situation of slavery. He writes: “Turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path.” Ambedkar was for a casteless society to be founded on the constitutional principle of equality, fraternity and justice for all citizens. (We will discuss more about Ambedkar’s ideas of India in the following unit of this course).

1.5.5 Cultural Nationalist Imagination

The cultural nationalists have seen India in terms of a traditional cultural unit founded on the spiritual ethos of Hinduism. This view perceives India as a unique manifestation of a historic, geographic, cultural, linguistic unity. The writings of Savarkar(1923) locate the roots of Indian nationalism on the claim of inherited common race, land, history, language, culture and common ‘others’. Savarkar elaborates that Sindusthan/Hindusthan is founded on ‘one nation and one race— of a common fatherland and therefore of a common blood’... Hindus are the decedents of the ‘Aryans who made their home ‘on the banks of the Sindhu ... developed a sense of nationality ... and actually brought the whole land from the Himalayas to the Seas under one sovereign sway; that Hindusthan is a land of Hindus who had to face the attack of Arabs, Persians, Pathans, Baluchis, Tartars, Turks, Moguls invaders for centuries. It was through this prolonged furious conflict that people of India became intensely conscious of themselves as Hindus and were welded into a nation. To him the Hindus are one because they own a common Sanskriti (civilization) of Hindu culture and Sanskrit has been the chosen means of expression and preservation of that culture and the history of this race’.: (Savarkar 1923: 4-12, 43, 92, 115).

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Write a note in about 50 words on Gandhi’s idea of the village in India

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- 2) Who is Bharat Mata according to Pandit Nehru?

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1.6 NATIONHOOD AND UNIQUENESS OF INDIA

India has acquired independent nation statehood through a prolonged struggle. The society in India is founded on the idea of cultural *syncretism*. It is founded on the sustained culture of dialogue, accommodation, synthesis, reciprocity, tolerance and mutual respect for each other. The liberal ethos of all religious groups has been part of the national symbol of independent. Brenad S. Cohn wrote: India established as a secular state at independence, carefully chose several

non-Hindu symbols for its flag. It has the Buddhist Wheel of Law on it. The new government selected the Ashok Chakra and Lions for the national seal, Ashoka was a Buddhist ruler. For the national anthem, they accepted the poem by Tagore, *Jana Gana Mana*, which has a listing of the regions and peoples of India as the national anthem. (Cohn 54). It depicts the legacy of tolerance and accommodation of Indian society and polity.

Constitutionally India is founded on one state and one citizenship. It has imagined each citizen to be equal in the eyes of law. Equality, fraternity and justice for the citizen has been the cornerstone of the Indian Constitution. However to pave the foundation of a plural society, along with individual rights, the Constitution of India has also given every religious group the freedom to promote and protect its cultural activities as per law. It has provided the space of individual rights through Article 19-22 of the Constitution. Article 19 ensures the individual right to freedom (freedom of speech and expression; to assemble peaceably and without arms; to form associations or unions; to move freely throughout the territory of India; to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business). Article 20 provides protection to the individual in respect of conviction for offences. Article 21 provides protection to individual of life and personal liberty. Article 22 provides protection to individual against arrest and detention in certain cases.

The Constitution of India also provides the space for collective rights through Article 15 and 26. Article 15(4) permits the State to make special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizen or for the Scheduled Castes the Scheduled Tribes. Article 26 gives 'every religious group a right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes, manage its affairs, properties as per the law'

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Write a note on religious pluralism in India's national symbol.

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- 2) What is the place of group rights in the Indian Constitution?

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1.7 LET US SUM UP

India is essentially a plural society founded on multiculturalism. It has a long historical past that encountered a host of outside forces including those of Islam, Christianity, and colonialism etc. These have in many ways contributed to the fabric of the composite culture of Indian society. However the foundation of Indian society has been diversely depicted by scholars. This unit has provided you a glimpse of the views of the colonial administrators, of Hegel, Marx, Engels, Weber etc on Indian society. It has also highlighted the imagination of Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and others. The ideal image of India is enshrined in the Constitution of India; we have also touched upon some aspects of this image. This unit is a precursor of the units to be discussed at length in the following units of this course.

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GLOSSARY

Cultural Ethos: The cultural world-view of a specific people.

Civilization: An advanced stage of social and cultural development

Orientalists: refers to scholars who study Asian societies, their culture, languages, history, literature and their politics.

FURTHER READING

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