UNIT 1  THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

India emerged as a free nation on 15th August, 1947. India is one of the oldest civilisations with a divergent variety of ethnic stock and a rich cultural heritage. The history of India goes back to more than five thousand years. India has a recorded history of 2500 years. It has achieved multifaced socio-economic progress during the last 55 years of its Independence. India has become self-sufficient in agricultural production and is now the tenth industrialised country in the world and the sixth nation to have gone to outer space to conquer nature for the benefits of the people. On the threshold of the new millennium, India is emerging as one of the biggest democracies in the world.

India is indeed a unique country. For 5000 years, it has been a main centre of civilization, it has enriched other societies and has in turn been enriched from other societies. About 4500 years ago, human civilization reached its unique peak in Indus Valley cities of Harappa, Mohanjodaro and Kalibanga. India has been the cradle of three major religions viz. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Followers of as many as nine religions live in India and are part of its rich and harmonious culture. India represents a mix of three racial stocks — the Aryan, the Dravidian and the proto-Australoid. It represents speakers of two major language families - the Aryan and Dravidian; it has 14 official languages and 1652 mother tongues!

India has been a major cultural melting pot in human history. It represents the confluence of native Indian culture including the Aryan, the Muslim culture and the British Culture. As such, one finds that each of these culture has struggled here for ascending as well as survival. Besides, Indians represent one of the most wide spread and successful group of migrants. Another note worthy feature of India is that it emerged as a nation
first under the Moryans and then after its independence in 1947. At the dawn of the 21st Century, India is trying to emerge as a world power by harnessing economic reforms, industrial base, skilled power and information technology expertise.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you’ll be able to:

1. describe the topography and major regions of India;
2. list climatic features of India;
3. briefly describe demographic aspects of India including male-female ratio;
4. describe various socio-cultural as well as ethnic groups of India;
5. justify why India is a “pluralistic multicultural society;
6. explain India’s composite culture and her ‘Unity in diversity’;
7. describe the highlights of our cultural heritage and its future trends;

1.3 TOPOGRAPHY AND MAJOR REGIONS

India is a vast country. It covers an area of 32,87,263 sq.km. extending from the snow-covered Himalayan heights to the southern tip of Kanyakumari. As the seventh largest country in the world, India stands apart from the rest of Asia, marked off as it is by mountains and the sea which gives this country a distinct geographical entity. Bounded by the Great Himalayas in the north, it stretches southwards and the Tropic of Cancer tapers off into Indian Ocean between the Bay of Bengal on the east and the Arabian Sea in west ... Lying entirely in the northern hemisphere, the mainland extends between latitudes 8°4 and 37°6 north longitudes 68°7 and 97°2 east and measure about 3,214 km from east to west between the extreme latitude and about 2,933 km’s from east to west between its extreme longitudes. It has a land frontier of about 15,200 km. The total length of the coastline of the mainland, lakshadweep Islands and Andaman and Nicobar Islands is 7516.6 km.

Countries having a common border with India are Afghanistan and Pakistan to northwest, China, Bhutan and Nepal to northeast, Sri Lanka is separated from India by a narrow channel of sea, the Palk strait and the Gulf of Mannar.

India comprises of four regions, namely (i) the great mountain zone of the Himalayas (ii) The plains of the Ganga and the Indus (iii) the desert region and (iv) the Southern Peninsula.

1. The Himalayas comprise three parallel ranges inter spersed with large plateaus and valleys, some of which, like the Kashmir and Kullu Valleys, are fertile, and of great scenic beauty. Some of the highest peaks of the world are found in these ranges. The high altitudes limit travel only to a few passes, notably the Jelap La and Nathu La on the main Indo-Tibetan trade route through Chumbi Velley, northeast of Darjilang and Shipki La in the Sutluj Valley, northeast of Kalpa (Kinnaur). The mountain wall extends over a distance of 2,400 km with a varying depth of 240 to 320 km. In the east, between India and Myannar and India and Bangladesh, the hill
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ranges are much lower, Garo, Khasi, Jainthia and Naga Hills running almost east-west join the chain of Mizo and Rikhine Hills running north-south.

2. The plains of the Ganga and the Indus, about 2,400 km long and 240 to 320 km broad, are formed by three distinct river systems — The Indus, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. They are one of the worlds greatest stretches of flat alluvium and also one of the most densely populated areas on the earth. Between the Yamuna at Delhi and the Bay of Bengal, nearly 1600 km away, there is a drop of only 200 meters in elevation.

3. The desert region can be divided into two parts — the great desert and the little desert. The great desert extends from the Runn of Kachch beyond the Luni river northward, The whole of Rajasthan and Sind frontier runs through this. The little desert extends from the Luni river between Jaisalmer and Jodhpur, upto the northern wastes, Between the great and the little desert lies a zone of absolutely sterile land which consists of rocky land and is cut up by lime stone ridges.

4. The peninsular Plateau is marked off from the plains of the Ganga and the Indus by a mass of mountains and hill ranges varying from 460 to 1220 meters in height. Prominent among them are the Aravallis, Vindhyas, Satpuras, Maikala and Ajanta. The peninsula is flanked on the one side by the Eastern Ghats, where average elevation is about 610 meters and the other by the Western Ghats where it is generally from 915 to 1220 meters, rising in places to 2400 meters. Between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea lies a narrow coastal strip, while between Eastern Ghats and the Bay of Bengal there is a broader coastal area. The southern point of the plateau is formed by the Nilgiri Hills where the Eastern and Western Ghats meet. The Cardamom Hills lying beyond may be regarded as the continuation of the Western Ghats.

1.4 CLIMATIC FEATURES

The climate of India may be broadly described as tropical monsoon type. There are four seasons (i) Winter (January-February) (ii) Hot weather summer (March-May) (iii) Rainy Sub-western monsoon (June to September) and (iv) Post monsoon, also known as north-east monsoon in the Southern peninsula (October-December). India’s climate is affected by two seasonal winds the north-east monsoon and the south-west monsoon the north-east monsoon commonly known as winter monsoon blows from land to sea whereas south-west monsoon known as summer-monsoon blows from sea to land after crossing the Indian Ocean, the Arabian sea and the Bay of Bengal. The north-west monsoon brings most of the rainfall during a year to the country. It is now possible to make forecast about the monsoon rains successfully with sophisticated prediction models.

1.5 THE PEOPLE

India’s population represents a mix of three racial stocks viz., the Aryan, the Dravidian and the Proto-Australoid. The apparent harmony and homogeneity of Indian people has to be seen to be believed. Due to geographical and ethnic factors the people in the north-west are relatively light-skinned, taller and heavily built, in the north-east, the people have rounder faces and high-check bones; and in the south, the people tend to be darker in complexion and more slightly built.
As already described the Indian people follow nine of the twelve living religions of the world, chief among these are Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Parsis. They are further divided into innumerable subgroups and sects. Religion influences not only the place and mode of worship but also one’s name, dress, diet, role of the sexes, festivals as well as modes of group behaviour.

Caste is a major factor in Indian Society. The ancient ‘Varna’, class-system still prevails among the Hindus. Even the Indian constitution has recognised the Schedule Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. The constitution provides for positive discrimination in favour of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. The Scheduled Tribes are often peripheral groups of Indian society with distinctive life-styles.

In India, people belong to and identify themselves with castes, tribes and other groups and also have large-group identities based on geographical locations. In India, regional environment and social customs produce regional cultural patterns. Eight geographical locations have given rise to their peculiar regional cultural patterns viz., the northern India, particularly the Ganga-Yamuna Doab, the eastern plains, the north-east frontier; the Himalayans borders; the north-west; the western region; the tribal belt, and South India. People from these geographical locations identify themselves with their regional culture.

1.6 DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

India is the second largest country in terms of the size of its population in the world, which crossed the one billion mark on 12th October 1999. The UNEP Report (1999) highlights that global population quadrupled during this century. At the beginning of the 20th century, the world population was 1.5 billion, which reached 2 billion in 1927, 3 billion in 1960, 4 billion in 1974, 5 billion in 1987 and the last billion was added in just 12 years. The population of India has multiplied four times since 1901 and has almost triple since 1941. During the 90 years since 1901, almost 80 percent of the increase in population has come after 1951. According to the 1991 census the population of India was 84,63,02688, (Males 439,230,458; Females 407,072,230). At present every seventh person in the world is an Indian. In terms of growth rate, though there has been a slight decline in the rate during the 1981-91 decade as compared to the previous decade, it has been much less than expected in the context of prolonged family planning campaign and substantial investment of financial and other resources in this regard.

Indian states can be classified into three groups on the basis of their demographic transition: Group A, comprising states of Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Kerala and Tamil Nadu which have already achieved or are expected to reach the replacement level of fertility; Group B, where the pace of decline in fertility in the past decade has been substantial, but is not fast enough to make significant dents in growth rate, and Group C consisting of other states viz., Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Where no substantial decline in fertility rate has been recorded.

Recent Planning Commission’s Projections for the country as a whole show that close to 330 million people are expected to be added to our population during the next 20 years. This is more than the total population added during the previous two decades and almost equal to the population of India at the time of Independence. This huge expected rise in the population of the country will take place in spite of substantial reductions in fertility in future years, where many states would have reached the replacement levels of fertility. This continued increase in population will be due to the population momentum factor i.e.
The number of women in the reproductive years i.e. age group of 15 to 49 years, who are already in the high fertility stage of their life. Indian population grew at the rate of 2.12 percent per annum during 1981-91, and during the next twenty years it is expected to grow at the rate of 1.5 percent per annum.

The sex (female to male) ratio has been declining almost steadily in India from 1901 to 1991, except for a small rise seen in the 1981 census. The decline has taken place in all the states except Kerala, where the number of females exceed that of males. This decline is largely attributed to women’s lower status in Indian Society which has contributed to their higher mortality rate in all age groups particularly the age of 45. In the 1991 census, the number of females was 407 million, nearly 32 millions less than the number of males (see fig. 1.1).

![Sex Ratio Chart](image)

Fig. 1.1: Declining Sex (Female to Male) Ratio i.e. No. of Female per 1000 Males.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Write your answers in the space given below.
b) Compare your answers with the one given at the end of this unit.

1. Describe the location, length and breadth as well as coastline of India.
   a) Location – Latitude :
      Longitude :
   b) Length (North to South) ..............kms
   c) Breadth (East to West) ..............kms
   d) Total Coast Line ..............kms

2. List the names of the four major regions of India.
   a) .......................................................... .......................................................... 
   b) .......................................................... .......................................................... 
   c) .......................................................... .......................................................... 
   d) .......................................................... ..........................................................
3. Indian States are classified into three groups on the basis of their demographic transition viz., A, B & C. Describe each group in one sentence and give the names of any two states under each.

Group A:

Group B:

Group C:

1.7 SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS

Indian culture is a synthesis of diverse social and cultural elements. It is a synthesis of the Aryan and the Dravidian cultures. The unity between the village, the family and the legal system was the outcome of a synthesis. This synthesis has resulted in continuity from the ancient period till today. Indian culture has been modified continuously, by foreign contacts, but it remains essentially Indian, based on doctrines and ideas developed indigenously. This form and substance of Indian culture is reflected in literature, art and architecture. India has a long tradition of religious and social tolerance which has contributed to the richness and variety of its social and cultural life.

The cultural history of India can be divided into three periods: the ancient, the medieval and the modern. The ancient period in India begins about 5000 B.C. and continues till the end of the tenth century A.D.; the medieval period continues up to the eighteenth century and the modern period is about three centuries old. About a thousand years after the beginning of the ancient period, a national culture was established in India for the first time. This was the Vedic Hindu Culture which came into being as a result of the interplay between Vedic Aryan and the Pre-Aryan cultures. After some time there was a reaction against certain aspects of this culture and Buddhism formed the basis of the new Indian Culture.

Although Buddhism had a deep influence on Indian Life and the Indian mind, the culture based on it did not last long. Its decay was followed by the rise of the new Hindu culture which again was a harmonious synthesis of many conflicting tendencies in the cultural life of India.
At the end of the ancient period, long before the advent of Muslims, the cultural life of India once again became disorganised. But after the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, the process of assimilation and fusion started afresh and by the time the Mughal period commenced the great synthesis of Hindu-Muslim Culture, the Hindustani culture, had evolved. The Bhakti and Sufi movements created a general atmosphere of religious harmony between the Hindus and Muslims. Architecture was the main field in which the influence of both Hindu and Muslim could be seen. It was during the Mughal rule particularly Akbar’s reign (1555 to 1605) that a happy relationship between Hindu and Muslim cultures was achieved.

During the British Rule, the influence of western culture was evident on the Indian culture. The year of 1857 saw the culmination of the long drawn freedom struggle. The British Government, the Christian Missions and the English language were three main sources of the British impact on Indian society. M.N. Srinivas defines Westernisation in terms of the change in Indian society due to the impact of British rule in India: The area of change include technology, dress, food and change in the habits and life-styles of our people.

India became a free country on 15th August, 1947. India was partitioned, and a new nation, Pakistan, was created. India adopted a new Constitution which was implemented on 26th January, 1950. The constitution guarantees fundamental rights to the citizen of India, ensuring equality, freedom and justice to one and all. Besides the fundamental rights, the constitution also outlines directives for state policy with a view to give a secular, socialistic direction in social and economic change in India.

Ethnicity is a cultural phenomena and as such no culture is “Superior, or Inferior” to another. Culture belongs to its people, and they cherish it and identify themselves with it like any people. Culture is the man-made part of our environment. Therefore, all ethnic entities are essentially culture groupings, and therefore, they enjoy the same position in terms of the shared cultural roots of different sets of people. The constitution of India declares that India is secular state in which distinctions and discriminations based on caste creed, language, religion etc. are not allowed. The people have been given fundamental rights according to which primordial consideration i.e. those related to the beginning of history, do not find any place in modern India.

1.8 PLURALISTIC MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

India is a plural society both in letter and spirit. A grand synthesis of cultures, religions and languages of the people belonging to different castes and communities has upheld its unity and cohesiveness despite numerous foreign invasions, and the Mughal and the British rule. It is this synthesis which has made India a unique mosaic of cultures. India fought against the British Raj as one unified entity. India is in fact, a panorama of its own type, without a parallel in other continents. Foreign invasions, immigration from other parts of the world, and the existence of diverse languages, cultures and religions have made India’s culture composite on the one hand, and a unique continuing one, with its own specificity and historicity, on the other.

Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity are the major religions each with not only its linguistic distinctions but also in patterns of living, life-styles, land tenure systems, occupational pursuits, inheritance and succession laws, and practices and rites related to birth, marriage, death etc.
Post independence India is a nation united against several odds and obstacles. The idea of unity of India is inherent in all its historical and socio-cultural facts. India is a secular state. It has one constitution providing guarantees for people belonging to various socio-economics strata. In short, India is one of the oldest civilization with kaleidoscopic variety and a pluralistic multicultural society.

1.9 COMPOSITE CULTURE: UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Unity in diversity is the cornerstone of Indian culture. In spite of its derivation from many sources and the consequent variety of forms and types, we find a remarkable unity of spirit in Indian culture. Unity in diversity and compositeness serve as the very basis of the continuity of the Indian tradition. It is only in India, and to some extent in China, that the old civilization and culture have grown and changed but never grown or changed at the expense of an underlying unity. This has been possible only through the capacity of re-adjustment and assimilation exhibited by the Indian society. One reason for this assimilation is found in the spirit of tolerance that has characterised Indian History throughout the ages “Live and Let Live” has been the policy of Indian in all spheres of life.

Prof M.N. Srinivas writes, “The concept of unity is inherent in Hinduism. There are sacred centres of Hindu Pilgrimage in every corner of the land. Certain salient aspects of Sanskrit culture are to be found all over the country. India is the sacred land not only of the Hindus but also of the Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists. The Muslims and Christians, too have several sacred centres of pilgrimage in India. The institution of caste cuts across diverse religious groups and gives all a common social idiom”.

Srinivas further writes that India, is a secular state that tolerates diversity. The five-year plans, the spread of egalitarian ideals, a single government and a common body of civil and criminal laws are enough evidence for India’s plural character and oneness.

The Constitution of India has established ‘Rule of Law’ throughout the country, having now a population of more than one billion people. All citizens are equal and subject to the same authority. Birth-based privileges have been abolished. Religion, language, region, caste or community are no longer the basis of special powers and privileges. The weaker sections of society, the scheduled castes, the schedules tribes, and the other backward classes have been given special concession to bridge the gap between them and the upper castes and classes. Today no caste or social group suffers any kind of social disability. Women enjoy equal rights with men in almost all respects.

1.10 OUR HERITAGE AND FUTURE TRENDS

A power of assimilation and synthesis throughout the ages has characterised the Indian spirit. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the modern age is man’s increasing use of science to control the forces of nature. Modern India is thus inevitably the focus of many forces. During the last 52 years of its independence, ‘India has become self-sufficient in agricultural production and ranks now as the most tenth industrialized country of the world and the sixth nation that has gone in the outerspace.

Our heritage is cherished by us because of its long history and its unique composite nature. Various cultural tributaries, native as well as foreign, have contributed to it and
have been assimilated by it. Our heritage illustrates the rich interplay between its high cultures and its still alive and vitally strong folk cultures.

Our common heritage is made up of half a dozen major religions, the Indo Aryan languages, the Dravidian group of languages and their vernacular literature. To the Europeans and others, the Indian writers in English are its unique communicators. In their writings, one finds a unique experimentation of the English language to best express Indian life and culture.

Our common heritage is a beautiful mosaic; if any one of its parts is taken away, it will become poorer. In spite of the diversity, in terms of language, dress and food, there exists a grand unity and people are now identifying themselves more and more with it. Increased travel, widespread education, a rich networking of electronic mass media, especially Door Darshan and a growing awareness of our Indianness have integrated us as never before.

The preamble to the constitution of India solemnly envisaged the future goals of our country: “We the people of India having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign Democratic Republic and to secure to all its citizens: Justice social, economic, and political, liberty of thought expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity and to promote among them all: For ratemity assuring the dignity of the and of opportunity and to promote among them all: fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation; in our constituent assembly, the twenty-sixth day of November, 1949 do hereby Adopt, Enact and give to ourselves this constitution”.

Education for all is the cherished goal of our constitution and it includes universal elementary education up to 14 years of age. We want a free prosperous, strong and self-reliant India during the new millennium.

Check Your Progress

Notes:  
a) Write your answers in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with the one given at the end of this unit.

4. When did India’s national culture evolve for the first time? Describe the evolution of this national culture (about 50 words).

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5. In what respects is India a pluralistic, multicultural society? (about 50 words).

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1.11 LET US SUM UP

India is one of the oldest civilisations with a kaleidoscopic variety and rich cultural heritage. India’s population has already crossed one billion mark last year. Recent projections of the Planning Commission for the country show that close to 330 million people are expected to be added to our population in the next 20 years. India is a vast country. It covers an area of 32,87,263 sq. km. The climate of India may be broadly described as tropical monsoon type. India’s culture is a synthesis of diverse social and cultural elements. The cultural history of India began about 5000 B.C. The constitutions of India declares that India is a secular state in which distinctions and discriminations based on cast, creed religion, language etc. are not allowed. India is pluralistic, multicultural society. Unity in diversity is the cornerstone of Indian culture. The constitution of India solemnly envisages it future goals, to build India into a Sovereign, Socialist and Democratic Republic and secure to all its citizens; justice, social economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, faith, belief and worship; equality of status and opportunity and to promote among them all fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the integrity of the nation.

1.12 UNIT-END EXERCISES

1. Briefly describe the goals of Indian Constitution as described in its Preamble (about 30 words).

2. List four factors of compositeness and unity in diversity of India.

3. Describe the three main factors of sex ratio (female to male ratio) decline in India during the 20th century.

4. Describe the salient features of the pluralistic multicultural society of India.
1.13 SUGGESTED READINGS


Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India (1999) : “India 1999”, Publication Division, Govt. of India, New Delhi.


ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. a) Latitude : 8°4 to 37°6 north; Longitude : 68°7 and 97°2 east.
   b) 3,214 km.   c) 2,933 km.   d) 7,516.6 km.

2. a) Great Mountain zone of the Himalayans
   b) The plains of the Ganga and the Indus
   c) The desert region
   d) The Southern Peninsula

3. Classification on demographic transition:
   Group A : has reached the replacement level of fertility e.g. Andhra Pradesh, Goa.
   Group B : growth rate is decline but has not made significant dent e.g. Maharashtra, Gujarat.
   Group C : no substantial decline in fertility rate e.g. Uttar Pradesh & Bihar.

4. India’s national culture evolved for the first time at about thousand’s year after the beginning of ancient period. This was ‘Vedic Hindu culture’ which came into being as a result of interplay between ‘Vedic Aryan’ and the ‘Pre-Aryan culture’.
5. Indian society is comprised of a grand synthesis of culture, religion and languages of the people belonging to different castes and communities.

6. India is a secular state that tolerates diversity. The five year plans, the spread of egalitarian ideals, a single government and a common body of civil and criminal laws are enough evidence for India’s plural character and oneness.

7. Indian culture is a synthesis of diverse social and cultural elements. A synthesis which is continuing from ancient period till today. In spite of its repeatedly changing facets due to outside and inside pressures. The essence remains essentially Indian based on doctorines and ideas developed indigenously. In spite of its derivation from many sources and consequent variety of forms and type there is a remarkable unity of spirit in our culture. The reason for this resislience and power of assimilation lies in our spirit of tolerance ‘Live and Let Live’.