



Understanding Diversity

What is diversity? When you look around, you notice that nature offers variety in our surroundings. You see several types of plants, trees, flowers, birds, animals as well as human beings. You see different colours and hear different sounds. Nature behaves differently at different times. The season changes, sometimes it rains, the oceans, rivers and lakes look different at different times, and so on. It is this variety in nature that makes our world such an interesting place. The presence of a wide range of qualities or features is called diversity.

Social Groups

Like in nature, diversity can be seen in the way people live in this world. Human beings cannot fulfil all their needs on their own. They have to depend on others for the fulfilment of their needs. That is why, although everyone is born unique and grows up as different from everyone else, each of us is brought up to live together in groups. In other words, we are social beings.

The immediate group in which you live is your family. It consists of you and your parents, siblings and relatives. A group of families either living in the same area or having some common links is known as a community. The large group of people living together within the geographical area of a country, under a common government, is known as a nation. Family, community and nation are different types of social groups. Social groups are diverse, although the members of every social group may have many things in common.

Can people who are different be 'friends'? If you look around in your classroom, you will see that no one looks exactly like anyone else. It is likely that there would also be differences in your classmates' food habits, the languages they speak and their religions. However, despite these differences, some of them may be close friends. This is because they may have common interests, like playing or watching some sport, listening to music or reading books. Therefore, even if people are different from one another, they can still find reasons to be friends. Do you not enjoy sharing food from your friend's lunch box? And, is it not fun to pick up some of the words from the different languages that your friends speak at home? In fact, diversity in language, food habits, etc., shows that *we do many things that are similar; only, we do them in different ways.* It brings variety into our lives.

How many of you know the story of Krishna and Sudama? It is a story of two boys who were very different from each other. While Krishna was a rich boy, Sudama was very poor. Krishna dressed in fine clothes, brought tasty sweets to eat and was the leader of the group. Sudama wore a plain dhoti, ate *sattu* (ground gram) and was a quiet boy. Yet, the two were very good friends and remained so forever.

Diversity and Interdependence

Within a social group, people perform different types of activities, depending on their interests, abilities, skills and education. This divides the work needed to fulfil the needs of everyone in the

group. For example, in a village community, the farmer produces food not only for his family but also for the rest of the community. He in turn depends on other members of the community for his other needs like clothing, health services, and so on.

In your family, too, different members do different jobs, like cooking, cleaning, shopping, etc., to take care of each other. Some members also work outside to earn a living for the family. With the money that they earn, they pay for food, clothes, education, medical care, etc., for the whole family. Again, each of these goods and services is provided by a specific person, like a trader, a teacher, a doctor, and so on. These people are not members of your family, but they help your family live comfortably.

Communities also depend on other communities. The village community, which supplies food to communities in towns and cities, depends on the towns and cities for things such as garments, cooking stoves, pumps, tractors, and so on. If you live in Kanpur or in Delhi, have you ever wondered from where you get the fresh coconuts in summer? These are transported from faraway places like Kerala or such other coastal areas. This shows that there is interdependence among communities throughout India. Interdependence exists even across international borders, resulting in the free flow of goods and services between nations. This is called *globalisation*.

Diversity in India

India is a big country, with a variety of geographical and climatic conditions. People in different regions of India have their own food, dress, language and ways of life. Since ancient times, people from various parts of the world have been coming to India and even settling here. The languages, customs and religions brought in by them have added to the diversity in our country.

Social Institutions

In our country, diversity can be seen in almost every social institution, including the family. For instance, we have *nuclear families*, in which only parents and their children live together. These are common in cities. We also have *joint families*, in which parents, children, grandparents and other close relatives live under a common roof and share the same kitchen. These are common in villages. Generally in India, whether the family is nuclear or joint, it is headed by a male member. However, in parts of north-eastern India and Kerala, there are families in which a woman is the head and in which property passes from mother to daughter. Such families are known as *matrilinal families*.

Language

In India, we have 22 major languages, and about 1,625 dialects (regional forms) of various languages are spoken within the country. The languages most commonly spoken in India can be broadly divided into two groups on the basis of their origin. The languages spoken in southern



Fig. 1.1 The landscape of Ladakh (left) is very different from that of Kerala (right). This is an example of diversity.

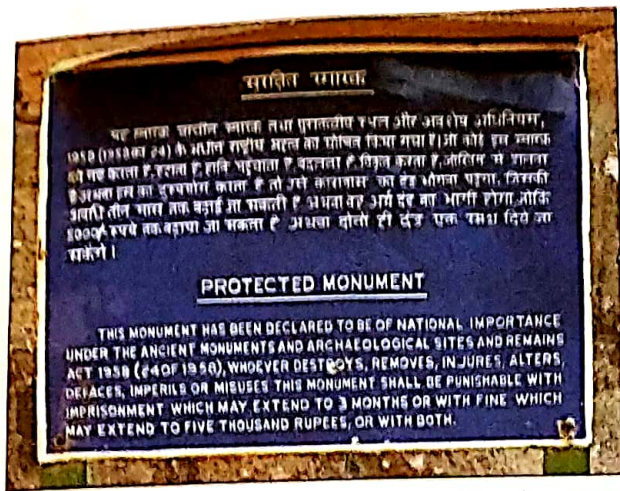


Fig. 1.2 In India notices are generally written in several languages. Hindi is often used, as it is our official language. English is used because it is widely understood.

India belong to the Dravidian group, while those spoken in northern India are derived from Sanskrit. Besides, there are other languages, like those spoken by the tribal people, that do not belong either to the Dravidian group or to the Sanskritic group. Each language has a rich treasure of written literature, some of which has been translated into other languages. This has added great variety to Indian literature. Interestingly, English, though a foreign language, is understood in all corners of the country, especially among those who are educated in that medium. Many people, especially in the cities, speak more than one language. How many languages do you speak?

Religion

In India there are people of different religious communities. Though most Indians are Hindus, there are also followers of other religions like Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, etc. Each religion has its own festivals, rituals and place of worship.

Some religious customs are observed by followers of various religions. For example, the Hindu festivals Holi and Diwali are celebrated by many who are not Hindus. Similarly, people of all religions seek blessings at *dargas* (shrines at the tombs of Sufi saints).

You might know that a Muslim goes to a mosque to offer prayers, while a Hindu goes to a temple, a Christian, to a church and a Sikh, to a

gurudwara. It is interesting to note that all these different places, namely, the mosque, the temple, the church and the gurudwara, have the same function—to provide a place for worship. And, people of different religions do the same thing, that is pray, in these different places. We can, thus, say that the diversity in religion is about doing things differently, and not doing different things.

Ways of Life

Living in different environments brings diversity into people's ways of life. Not only does it make people dress differently but it also determines what they eat, what they do for a living and what customs they follow.

Dress People in different regions dress differently. For example, those who live in Kashmir, a cold and mountainous area, wear a loose robe called *pheran*. Inside this loose dress, they carry a *kangri* (a small basket containing an earthen pot in which live charcoals are placed). This protects them from the cold. The large turbans worn by Rajasthani men are suitable for the extreme heat of the Thar Desert. Rajasthanis like to wear colourful clothes, which are a contrast to the dull desert around. The sari and the dhoti are examples of clothes worn in several Indian communities. But, you must have noticed that they are worn differently in different communities.

Economic activities Geographical and climatic conditions generally determine the economic activities of a region. In India, most regions have flat land and a warm and rainy climate. People in such regions are mainly engaged in growing crops.



Fig. 1.3 Holi is a festival celebrated by people of different religions.

Different regions grow different crops. Thus, while Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Odisha and West Bengal grow mainly rice, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh grow mainly wheat. Kerala is noted for spice cultivation. In coastal states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Maharashtra, etc., fishing is an important economic activity. Again, in cold, mountainous regions like Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir, rearing sheep and yaks is the chief occupation, as hardly any crops can be grown.

Every region has its own handicrafts, too. You may have seen a pashmina shawl from Kashmir or a cane basket from Tripura or blue-and-white pottery from Rajasthan.

Food Indians have diverse food habits. In southern India, which has a long coastline, coconuts and fish are an important part of the diet, as they are found in abundance there. Similarly, in that part of the country, food is cooked with a lot of spices, as spices are grown there. In cold places such as Kashmir and Darjiling, people eat a lot of nonvegetarian food and milk products, especially in the winters, as few crops can be grown. The people of rice-growing states are generally rice eaters, while those of wheat-growing states are wheat eaters.

Festivals and dances The environment and history of a region influence the culture (beliefs and ways of life) of its people. This is often reflected in festivals, customs and dances. For example, Kerala's snake-boat race shows the coastal people's strong bond with water. And, the yak dance of Ladakh

shows the people's love for the yak, which is such a useful animal in that region.

Almost every Indian state celebrates the harvest festival in its own unique style. It is called Baisakhi in Punjab, Onam in Kerala, Bihu in Assam and Makar Sankranti in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. This is a good example of doing the same thing differently.

India also has various dance forms, belonging to different parts of the country. (For example, bharatanatyam belongs to Tamil Nadu, odissi to Odisha, kathakali to Kerala, bhangra to Punjab, garba to Gujarat, and chhau to Jharkhand.)

What Does Diversity Add to Our Lives?

Can you imagine how dull it would be if there was only one colour, only one type of tree or flower or animal and if all human beings looked alike? India is full of regional variations in food, dress, custom and religion. This diversity makes India a truly amazing place to live in. It is even more amazing that in spite of all our differences, we Indians have some strong similarities, which make us recognisable as Indians. We are also bound by common historical experiences, which gives us a feeling of oneness. For example, during our struggle for freedom from British rule, Indians of all regions, religions and castes fought together to achieve a common goal.



Fig. 1.4 Snake-boat race of Kerala

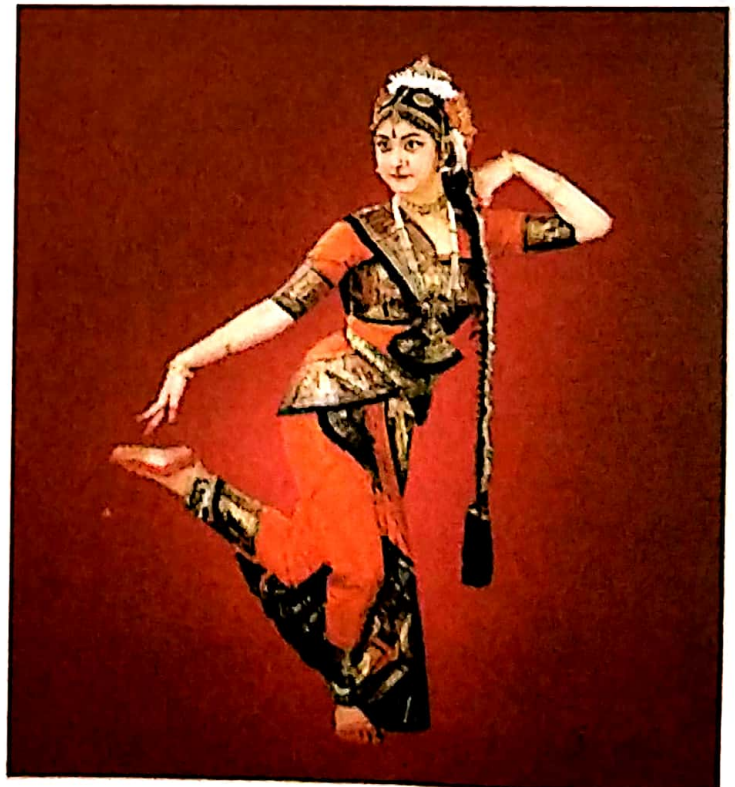


Fig. 1.5 Bharatanatyam

Do you watch the Republic Day parade on 26 January every year? Which is your favourite part? It

must be the part where the tableaux of various states pass by. It truly makes us feel proud to be Indians.



Fig. 1.6 Republic Day parade

Things to Remember

- The presence of a wide range of qualities or features is called diversity.
- Human beings depend on others for the fulfilment of their needs. Every human being, though unique, is brought up to live in social groups.
- The smallest social group is the family. Families living in the same area or having some common links make up a community. The group of people living in a country, under a common government, is called a nation.
- There is interdependence within and between social groups. Even people who are very different from each other can find reasons to be friends.
- India shows diversity in geographical and climatic conditions, social institutions, languages, religions and ways of life (dress, occupation, food, dances and festivals, etc.). Such diversity causes different people to do the same thing differently. This brings variety into our lives.