

1. Details of Module and its structure

Module Detail	
Subject Name	Sociology
Course Name	Sociology 03 (Class XII, Semester - 1)
Module Name/Title	Challenges of Cultural Diversity – Part 2
Module Id	lesy_10602
Pre-requisites	Concept of Cultural Diversity
Objectives	After going through this lesson, the learners will be able to understand the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The meaning of regionalism• The federal structure of India• The relation between communalism and secularism• The relation between majority and minority• The sociological meaning of minority
Keywords	Regionalism, Secularism, Minority, Constitution, Nationalism, Federal structure, Exclusion, Tagore, Linguistic states

2. Development Team

Role	Name	Affiliation
National MOOC Coordinator (NMC)	Prof. Amarendra P. Behera	CIET, NCERT, New Delhi
Program Coordinator	Dr. Mohd. Mamur Ali	CIET, NCERT, New Delhi
Course Coordinator (CC) / PI	Dr. Sheetal Sharma	Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
Subject Matter Expert (SME)	Ms. Mamta Saha	Sanskriti School, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi
Review Team	Ms. Abha Seth	DAV Public School, Sec B-1, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi

Ordinarily diversity means differences. For our purposes, however, it means something more than mere differences. It means collective differences, that is, differences which mark off one group of people from another. These differences may be of any sort: biological, religious, linguistic etc. On the basis of biological differences, for example, we have racial diversity. On the basis of religious differences, similarly, we have religious diversity. **The point to note is that diversity refers to collective differences.**

The term **diversity is opposite of uniformity**. Uniformity means similarity of some sort that characterises a people. ‘Uni’ refers to one; ‘form’ refers to the common ways. So when there is something common to all the people, we say they show uniformity. When students of a school, members of the police or the army wear the same type of dress, we say they are in ‘uniform’. Like diversity, thus, uniformity is also a collective concept. When a group of people share a similar characteristic, be it language or religion or anything else, it shows uniformity in that respect. But when we have groups of people hailing from different races, religions and cultures, they represent diversity.

REGIONALISM

Regionalism in India is rooted in India’s diversity of languages, cultures, tribes, and religions. It is also encouraged by the geographical concentration of these identity markers in particular regions, and fuelled by a sense of regional deprivation. Indian federalism has been a means of accommodating these regional sentiments. (Bhattacharyya 2005). After Independence, initially the Indian state continued with the British-Indian arrangement dividing India into large provinces, also called ‘**presidencies**’. (Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta were the three major presidencies; incidentally, all three cities after which the presidencies were named have changed their names recently). These were large multi-ethnic and multilingual provincial states constituting the major political-administrative units of a semi-federal state called the Union of India. For example, the old Bombay State (continuation of the Bombay Presidency) was a multilingual state of Marathi, Gujarati, Kannada and Konkani speaking people. Similarly, the Madras State was constituted by Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam speaking people. In addition to the presidencies and provinces directly administered by the British Indian government, there were also a large number of princely states and principalities all over India. The larger princely states included Mysore, Kashmir, and Baroda. But soon after the adoption of the Constitution, all these units of the colonial era had to be reorganised into ethno-linguistic States within the Indian union in response to strong popular agitations.

Linguistic States Helped Strengthen Indian Unity

The Report of the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) which was implemented on November 1, 1956, has helped transform the political and institutional life of the nation. The background to the SRC is as follows. In the 1920s, the Indian National Congress was reconstituted on linguistic lines. Its provincial units now followed the logic of language – one for Marathi speakers, another for Oriya speakers, etc. At the same time, Gandhi and other leaders promised their followers that when freedom came, the new nation would be based on a new set of provinces based on the principle of language. However, when India was finally freed in 1947, it was also divided. Now, when the proponents of linguistic states asked for this promise to be redeemed, the Congress hesitated. Partition was the consequence of intense attachment to one's faith; how many more partitions would that other intense loyalty, language, lead to? So ran the thinking of the top Congress bosses including Nehru, Patel and Rajaji. On the other side, the rank and file Congressmen were all for the redrawing of the map of India on the lines of language. Vigorous movements arose among Marathi and Kannada speakers, who were then spread across several different political regimes – the erstwhile Bombay and Madras presidencies, and former princely states such as Mysore and Hyderabad. However, the most militant protests ensued from the very large community of Telugu speakers. In October 1953, Potti Sriramulu, a former Gandhian, died seven weeks after beginning a fast unto death. Potti Sriramulu's martyrdom provoked violent protests and led to the creation of the state of Andhra Pradesh. It also led to the formation of the SRC, which in 1956 put the formal, final seal of approval on the principle of linguistic states. In the early 1950s, many including Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru feared that states based on language might hasten a further subdivision of India. In fact, something like the reverse has happened. Far from undermining Indian unity, linguistic states have helped strengthen it. It has proved to be perfectly consistent to be Kannadiga and Indian, Bengali and Indian, Tamil and Indian, Gujarati and Indian... To be sure, these states based on language sometimes quarrel with each other. While these disputes are not pretty, they could in fact have been far worse. In the same year, 1956, that the SRC mandated the redrawing of the map of India on linguistic lines, the Parliament of Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was then known) proclaimed Sinhala the country's sole official language despite protests from the Tamils of the north. One left-wing Sinhala MP issued a prophetic warning to the chauvinists. "One language, two nations", he said, adding: "Two languages, one nation". The civil war that has raged in Sri Lanka since 1983 is partly based on the denial by the majority linguistic group of the rights of the

minority. Another of India's neighbours, Pakistan, was divided in 1971 because the Punjabi and Urdu speakers of its western wing would not respect the sentiments of the Bengalis in the east. It is the formation of linguistic states that has allowed India to escape an even worse fate. If the aspirations of the Indian language communities had been ignored, what we might have had here was – “One language, fourteen or fifteen nations.” (Adapted from an article by Ramachandra Guha in the Times of India, 1 November 2006)

Language coupled with regional and tribal identity – and not religion – has therefore provided the most powerful instrument for the formation of ethno-national identity in India. However, this does not mean that all linguistic communities have got statehood. For instance, in the creation of three new states in 2000, namely Chhatisgarh, Uttaranchal and Jharkhand, language did not play a prominent role. Rather, a combination of ethnicity based on tribal identity, language, regional deprivation and ecology provided the basis for intense regionalism resulting in statehood.

FEDERAL STRUCTURE OF INDIA

Respecting regional sentiments is not just a matter of creating States: this has to be backed up with an institutional structure that ensures their viability as relatively autonomous units within a larger federal structure.

In India this is done by Constitutional provisions defining the powers of the States and the Centre. There are lists of ‘subjects’ or areas of governance which are the exclusive responsibility of either State or Centre, along with a ‘Concurrent List’ of areas where both are allowed to operate.

The State legislatures determine the composition of the upper house of Parliament, the Rajya Sabha.

In addition there are periodic committees and commissions that decide on Centre-State relations. An example is the Finance Commission which is set up every ten years to decide on sharing of tax revenues between Centre and States.

Each Five Year Plan also involves detailed State Plans prepared by the State Planning Commissions of each state.

On the whole the federal system has worked fairly well, though there remain **many contentious issues**.

- Since the era of liberalisation (i.e., since the 1990s) there is concern among policy makers, politicians and scholars about increasing inter-regional economic and infrastructural inequalities.

-
- As private investment (both foreign and Indian) is given a greater role in economic development, considerations of regional equity get diluted. This happens because private investors generally want to invest in already developed States where the infrastructure and other facilities are better.
 - Unlike private industry, the government can give some consideration to regional equity (and other social goals) rather than just seek to maximise profits.
 - So left to itself, the market economy tends to increase the gap between developed and backward regions. Fresh public initiatives will be needed to reverse current trends.

Perhaps the most contentious of all aspects of cultural diversity are issues relating to religious communities and religion-based identities. These issues may be broadly divided into two related groups – **the secularism–communalism set** and the **minority–majority set**.

MINORITY–MAJORITY SET

In Indian nationalism, the dominant trend was marked by an inclusive and democratic vision. Inclusive – because it recognised diversity and plurality. Democratic because it sought to do away with discrimination and exclusion and bring forth a just and equitable society. The term ‘people’ has not been seen in exclusive terms, as referring to any specific group defined by religion, ethnicity, race or caste. Ideas of humanism influenced Indian nationalists and the ugly aspects of exclusive nationalism were extensively commented upon by leading figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore.

Tagore states that when a whole people is being taught from boyhood to foster hatreds and ambitions by all kinds of means -- by the manufacture of half-truths and untruths in history, by persistent misrepresentation of other races and the culture of unfavourable sentiments towards them, this hurt that is inflicted will be reciprocated and will infect all those who do so. Thus, teaching young minds to take pride in their ill-begotten wealth, to perpetuate humiliation of defeated nations by exhibiting trophies won from war, and using these schools in order to breed in children’s minds contempt for others will create hierarchies and bitterness.

There is a very strong tendency for the dominant group to assume that their culture or language or religion is synonymous with the nation state. However, for a strong and democratic nation, special constitutional provisions are required to ensure the rights of all groups and those of minority groups in particular.

Who are minority in the sociological sense?

The sociological sense of minority also implies that the members of the minority form a collectivity – that is, they have a strong sense of group solidarity, a feeling of togetherness and belonging. This is linked to disadvantage because the experience of being subjected to prejudice and discrimination usually heightens feelings of intra-group loyalty and interests (Giddens 2001:248). Thus, groups that may be minorities in a statistical sense, such as people who are left-handed or people born on 29th February, are not minorities in the sociological sense because they do not form a collectivity.

Jagnath Pathy (1988) has also listed out the defining properties of minority group. In his opinion, the minorities are:

- subordinate in some way to the majority,
- distinguishable from the majority on the basis of physical or cultural features,
- collectively being regarded and treated as different and inferior on the basis of these features, and
- excluded from the full participation in the life of the society.

He further says, discrimination, prejudice and exclusion by the dominant group and self segregation by the subordinate or minority constitute the basis for minority identification (Pathy, 1988: 28).

However, it is possible to have anomalous instances where a minority group is disadvantaged in one sense but not in another. Thus, for example, religious minorities like the Parsis or Sikhs may be relatively well-off economically. But they may still be disadvantaged in a cultural sense because of their small numbers relative to the overwhelming majority of Hindus. Religious or cultural minorities need special protection because of the demographic dominance of the majority. In democratic politics, it is always possible to convert a numerical majority into political power through elections. This means that religious or cultural minorities – regardless of their economic or social position – are politically vulnerable. They must face the risk that the majority community will capture political power and use the state machinery to suppress their religious or cultural institutions, ultimately forcing them to abandon their distinctive identity.

The makers of the Indian Constitution were aware that a strong and united nation could be built only when all sections of people had the freedom to practice their religion, and to

develop their culture and language. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Constitution, made this point clear in the Constituent Assembly, where he stated that-

- “minorities are an explosive force which, if it erupts, can blow up the whole fabric of the state. The history of Europe bears ample and appalling testimony to this fact.”
- “minorities in India have agreed to place their existence in the hands of the majority.”

The Indian Constitution on minorities and cultural diversity

Article 29:

(1) Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.

(2) No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or received out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.

Article 30:

(1) All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

(2) The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.

THE SECULARISM–COMMUNALISM SET

COMMUNALISM

In everyday language, the word ‘communalism’ refers to aggressive chauvinism based on religious identity. Chauvinism itself is an attitude that sees one’s own group as the only legitimate or worthy group, with other groups being seen – by definition – as inferior, illegitimate and opposed. Thus, to simplify further, communalism is an aggressive political ideology linked to religion. This is a peculiarly Indian, or perhaps South Asian, meaning that is different from the sense of the ordinary English word. In the English language, “communal” means something related to a community or collectivity as different from an

individual. The English meaning is neutral, whereas the South Asian meaning is strongly charged. The charge may be seen as positive – if one is sympathetic to communalism – or negative, if one is opposed to it.

It is important to emphasise that communalism is about politics, not about religion.

Although communalists are intensely involved with religion, there is in fact no necessary relationship between personal faith and communalism. A communalist may or may not be a devout person, and devout believers may or may not be communalists. However, all communalists do believe in a political identity based on religion. The key factor is the attitude towards those who believe in other kinds of identities, including other religion-based identities. Communalists cultivate an aggressive political identity, and are prepared to condemn or attack everyone who does not share their identity. One of the characteristic features of communalism is its claim that religious identity overrides everything else. Whether one is poor or rich, whatever one's occupation, caste or political beliefs, it is religion alone that counts. All Hindus are the same as are all Muslims, Sikhs and so on. This has the effect of constructing large and diverse groups as singular and homogenous. It is noteworthy that this is done for one's own group as well as for others. This would obviously rule out the possibility that Hindus, Muslims and Christians who belong to Kerala, for example, may have as much or more in common with each other than with their co-religionists from Kashmir, Gujarat or Nagaland. It also denies the possibility that, for instance, landless agricultural labourers (or industrialists) may have a lot in common even if they belong to different religions and regions. Communalism is an especially important issue in India because it has been a recurrent source of tension and violence. During communal riots, people become faceless members of their respective communities. They are willing to kill, rape, and loot members of other communities in order to redeem their pride, to protect their home turf. A commonly cited justification is to avenge the deaths or dishonour suffered by their co-religionists elsewhere or even in the distant past. No region has been wholly exempt from communal violence of one kind or another. Every religious community has faced this violence in greater or lesser degree, although the proportionate impact is far more traumatic for minority communities. To the extent that governments can be held responsible for communal riots, no government or ruling party can claim to be blameless in this regard. In fact, the two most traumatic contemporary instances of communal violence occurred under each of the major political parties. The anti-Sikh riots of Delhi in 1984 took place under a

Congress regime. The unprecedented scale and spread of anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002 took place under a BJP government. India has had a history of communal riots from pre-Independence times, often as a result of the divide-and-rule policy adopted by the colonial rulers. But colonialism did not invent inter-community conflicts – there is also a long history of pre-colonial conflicts – and it certainly cannot be blamed for post independence riots and killings. Indeed, if we wish to look for instances of religious, cultural, regional or ethnic conflict they can be found in almost every phase of our history. But we should not forget that we also have a long tradition of religious pluralism, ranging from peaceful co-existence to actual inter-mixing or syncretism. This syncretic heritage is clearly evident in the devotional songs and poetry of the Bhakti and Sufi movements.

SECULARISM

Secularism is among the most complex terms in social and political theory. In the western context the main sense of these terms has to do with the separation of church and state. The separation of religious and political authority marked a major turning point in the social history of the west. This separation was related to the process of “secularisation”, or the progressive retreat of religion from public life, as it was converted from a mandatory obligation to a voluntary personal practice. Secularisation in turn was related to the arrival of modernity and the rise of science and rationality as alternatives to religious ways of understanding the world.

The Indian meanings of secular and secularism include the western sense but also involve others. The most common use of secular in everyday language is as the opposite of communal. So, a secular person or state is one that does not favour any particular religion over others. Secularism in this sense is the opposite of religious chauvinism and it need not necessarily imply hostility to religion as such. In terms of the state-religion relationship, this sense of secularism implies equal respect for all religions, rather than separation or distancing. For example, the secular Indian state declares public holidays to mark the festivals of all religions.

One kind of difficulty is created by the tension between the western sense of the state maintaining a distance from all religions and the Indian sense of the state giving equal respect to all religions. Supporters of each sense are upset by whatever the state does to uphold the other sense.

Should a secular state provide subsidies for the Haj pilgrimage, or manage the Tirupati-Tirumala temple complex, or support pilgrimages to Himalayan holy places? Should all religious holidays be abolished, leaving only Independence Day, Republic Day, Gandhi Jayanti and Ambedkar Jayanti for example? Should a secular state ban cow slaughter because cows are holy for a particular religion? If it does so, should it also ban pig slaughter because another religion prohibits the eating of pork? If Sikh soldiers in the army are allowed to have long hair and wear turbans, should Hindu soldiers also be allowed to shave their heads or Muslim soldiers allowed to have long beards? Questions of this sort lead to passionate disagreements that are hard to settle.

Another set of complications is created by the tension between the Indian state's simultaneous commitment to secularism as well as the protection of minorities. The protection of minorities requires that they be given special consideration in a context where the normal working of the political system places them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the majority community. But providing such protection immediately invites the accusation of favouritism or 'appeasement' of minorities. Opponents argue that secularism of this sort is only an excuse to favour the minorities in return for their votes or other kinds of support. Supporters argue that without such special protection, secularism can turn into an excuse for imposing the majority community's values and norms on the minorities.

These kinds of controversies become harder to solve when political parties and social movements develop a vested interest in keeping them alive. In recent times, communalists of all religions have contributed to the deadlock. The resurgence and newly acquired political power of the Hindu communalists has added a further dimension of complexity. Clearly a lot needs to be done to improve our understanding of secularism as a principle and our practice of it as a policy. But despite everything, it is still true that India's Constitution and legal structure has proved to be reasonably effective in handling the problems created by various kinds of communalism. The first generation of leaders of independent India (who happened to be overwhelmingly Hindu and upper caste) chose to have a liberal, secular state governed by a democratic constitution. Accordingly, the 'state' was conceived in culturally neutral terms, and the 'nation' was also conceived as an inclusive territorial-political community of all citizens. Nation building was viewed mainly as a state-driven process of economic development and social transformation.

The expectation was that the universalisation of citizenship rights and the induction of cultural pluralities into the democratic process of open and competitive politics would evolve new, civic equations among ethnic communities, and between them and the state (Sheth:1999). These expectations may not have materialised in the manner expected. But ever since Independence, the people of India, through their direct political participation and election verdicts have repeatedly asserted their support for a secular Constitution and state. Their voices should count.