UNIT 1   NATURE OF INDIAN SOCIETY

Structure

1.1   INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, you will study about the nature of Indian society with detailed references to caste, class, religion, family, community and pluralism. Caste system is an obstacle in the social progress. Class consciousness also hinders the growth of democratic values. There has also been a close relationship among religion, home, community and education. This Unit will focus on the forces which are responsible for bringing changes in the society. You will understand unity in diversity along with the pluralistic approach. The relationship between different structures has become a challenge, therefore it is essential to understand it. Problems of national development in India need to be seen against diversification. One of the objectives of this Unit is to enable you to analyse the problems of gender inequality. This will help to understand that all languages, religions and cultures should be respected in order to respect our Constitution and make India a great nation. At the end, the Unit suggests that the values of democracy and world citizenship and fratenity should be developed by education.

1.2   OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit you will be able to:

- describe the structure of Indian society;

- define the characteristics of Indian society;

- identify and explain the relationship between various social structures;

- discuss the lingual, regional diversities and marginalisation;

- analyse the problems of Indian society;

- identify the changing social fabric; and

- explain the role of education for national development.

1.3   INDIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE: ITS NATURE

The Indian society is composite of different races, cultures, religions and faiths. Seemingly, it is a society with many-sided diversities. But unity is integral. There is some underlying power which keeps us as a whole and binds us in continuity. It has its own conflicts, dissensions and differences. Yet it remains combined as a unit. What are the problems and obstacles which weaken it? Professor Kabir has mentioned, "Throughout Indian history, we find on the one hand a tendency towards unification on the basis of religion and culture and on the other fragmentation due to differences in language, customs, economic and political interests." (Mathur, 1992, P5)

In modern Indian society, the Indian Constitution upholds the democratic principles of social organisation. Education is the weapon of democracy to bring social justice by emphasising equality of opportunities, accepting the social changes and to create a society above the basis of caste, colour and creed. Each individual should be respected irrespective of their caste, class, colour, religion, region and faith.

1.3.1   The Caste System

Caste can be defined as a hierarchy of intermarrying group which determines the individual's status in the social stratification of his/her occupations etc. In defining caste, it is necessary to highlight its characteristic features. Intermarriage is an essential feature, for its members cannot marry outside their group. There are similar, though less rigid limitations and restrictions on the dietary habits of the members of a caste. The occupations of most of the castes are determined, and it is not possible to move from one caste to another. The Brahmin has the highest place in the social stratification of castes. Membership of the caste is determined by birth. Members of the caste do not necessarily have any caste consciousness. Caste system is like a hurdle in democracy.

In the medieval period, the caste played an important role in the organisation of Hindu society. It maintained social and political stability, looked after social and mental security of the members, functioned as a trade union, determined laws about education, provided technical training maintained and transmitted hereditary knowledge of mechanical and technical processes, maintained the religious life etc. The caste system continued to exist due to

certain factors like religious influence, static society, rural social structure, geographic division, differences among tribes, absence of education etc. But this is being weakened in the present society by many factors like: education, social reform movements, political movements, industrialisation, modernisation means of communication and transport, monetary influence, emergence of new social classes, new law system etc. Caste system is harmful for society. It brings social disorganisation which results into many fragmented groups. It brings inequality in the distribution of wealth. Caste system is an obstacle in the social progress too.

1.3.2 The Class System

In a class, stratification is free, not rigid. Membership of the class is based on status, standard of living and other objective factors. Members of a class have a class consciousness. Class is more flexible than caste. In the words of Maciver, "A social class is any portion of community marked off from the rest by social status" (Chandra and Sharma, 2008, p. 199). Class consciousness also hinders the growth of democratic values. For this, schools should encourage the sense of equality and brotherhood. But class consciousness cannot be eliminated without putting an end to economic disparity and other inequalities. For this, social and economic reforms are essential.

1.3.3 The Family and the Community

The Family

In the education of a child, the family plays the most important role. The family is the primary social group. Whatever, social experiences the child gets in the family, lays the foundation of his/her personality. In the ancient times, family was the most vital unit of social structure but in present times, the structure of the society has undergone a change and its way of life in the economic sense has been revolutionized. There are two systems of family (i) Extended family and (ii) Nuclear family. The **Extended family** unit is that in which the adults and children of more than two generations live together. The **Nuclear family** is a small unit consisting of parents and children. The nuclear family has more geographical and social mobility.

Basically family nurtures help the child for their grooming practicing healthy habits, exhibit love and affection among the members of the family and spread it for a wider social living. It also helps the child to understand the economic, educational, and recreational, responsibilities of the family .

The Community

Community has got its own role in the education of the child. Commnity is a group of families settled in a village or town and bound together with common practices, ideals, values and culture. Each such community is a part of a larger community called the State or Nation.

According to Bogardus, "A community is a social group with some degree of "We" feeling and living in a given area" (Inder Dev Singh Nandra, 2010, p. 52). According to Maciver and Page, "Whenever the members of any group, small or large live together in such a way that they share, not this or that particular interest, but the basis and conditions of a common life, we

call the group a community" (Inder Dev Singh Nandra, 2010, p. 52). Characteristics of a community are:

a) The sense of belongingness or loyalties of the residents.

b) Common social heritage.

c) Relative economic self-sufficiency.

Community as an agency of education:

–   Potentially, community as an active agency of education. It functions as a formal or informal agency for education for the members of the community. The School, media, library, etc. in the community acts as formal or informal agencies of education. The community has a rich tradition and culture which are spread in order to educate its members.

–   The educational role of the community is in many folds. It finances for educating the members, keeps control of formal education, helps in the process of selecting school personnel, motivates for using informal sources of educating the members and also spreads the morals and values for better living in the society.

–   Specifically, community works cooperatively with the educational institutions like the Schools and the Colleges. They involve themselves in the human and material development of educational institutions as well as their academic activities.

Functions of Indian Community

The relationship between Community and Education is very significant. Since every community wants that the coming generation should grow into competent citizens who can shoulder the burden of society, so it makes the arrangement for that. If people are educated, they are able to solve the problems of the society. Through Education, the community is able to make the future generation conscious of its cultural heritage. Thus community must undertake the responsibility of educating its citizens.

One of the striking features in the Indian society has been an almost universal demand for education. The influence of community in the development of primary and pre-primary education has been tremendous. Community has also an influence on the development of secondary education.

Education should be in accordance with the objectives, ideals and values of the society. Social changes must be reflected in the educational changes. Preservation of cultural heritage is also one of the important functions of the community.

It can be said that the community is a potential educational force along with the administrators and teachers. They should not work in subordination to it, but should understand and work with it. Some disagreement may arise on certain points, but the same can be minimized or resolved through the cooperation and sincere efforts at both the ends.

1.3.4   The Religion

There has always been a close relationship between religion and education. The religious viewpoint at a particular time and age has always influenced the educational thoughts.

All religions say that God is omnipotent, omnipresent and all mighty. Through religious practice, the human soul makes effort to attain such experiences which may bring it nearer to the Almighty. The religious practices are considered to be in keeping with the supreme will so they bind all those who are believers. So it can be said that "Religion points towards the spiritual experience in human life through religious practice and of the relationship between individual personality and the God."

Religion and education are related deeply, but in imparting education we keep this broad view point about religion before us and do not give any importance to the narrow outlook towards religion or provide the norms of conduct. Education seeks the path and teaches the new generation that how the path can be traversed. Religion tells us that why we are born and what we have to do to attain everlasting peace.

India is a secular Country. Here, the followers of all the faiths or religions have equal rights to worship, preach for their faith and establish their own institutions or places of worship without any interference from the government. The religious freedom is to respect the freedom of all the individuals.

The religious freedom is to encourage people to give more emphasis on truth, beauty and goodness. Radha Krishnan Commission emphasized on the importance of the need of religion in secular India. The Commission was of the opinion that the State should not give undue patronage to anyone's religion.

1.3.5 Changing Social Fabric

It can be defined as the composite demographics of a defined area, which consists of its ethnic composition, wealth, educational level, employment and regional values.

Change is the law of nature. This is true about the education as well. Change is the result of the progress and dynamism. Sometimes the change takes place on a vast scope and other times, it becomes slow. According to Ogborn and Nimkoff, "There are forces which work in every community leading to the breakdown of the established organisation and to the disruption of their functions what are known as social problems". (Rai, 1990, p. 67)

By **social fabric** we mean variation in or movement of any aspect of social process, social interaction or social organization.

It is a change in social structure, e.g. the size of society, the composition or balance of its parts or the type of its organisation.

On the basis of the modification in the status and role of the individuals, there comes the change in the social fabric. Sometimes, the individuals are not able to adjust to changing roles which results in a process of disorganization.

Human being by its action and interaction on the environment has accumulated through ages a rich heritage which goes by the name of culture. Thus, culture consists of the knowledge and experiences and which have moulded human's life and is manifested in ways of life of the people.

The needs of the society are ever changing. Every successive generation aims at making improvements in the existing pattern. Education helps in reconstructing and reorganizing the experiences of the needs of the society and thus eliminates the unworthy features of the society and builds up a happier and better world.

1.3.6 Pluralism

Pluralism refers to a society, system of government or organisation that has different groups which keep their identities while existing with other groups or a more dominant group. Pluralism serves as a model of democracy where different groups can voice their opinions and ideas.

It denotes a diversity of views and stands rather than a single approach or method of interpretation. Cultural pluralism means when small groups within a large society maintain their unique cultural identities. It is a situation in which people of different social classes, religions, races, etc. live together in a society, but continue to have different traditions while living together.

For more clarity, it can be said that pluralism is the value of adjustment to the reality.

In India, Hindus and Hindi speaking people are in majority, but the people of other religions and languages also live here.

For example, Indonesia is a pluralistic society where people of different background (religion, caste, culture, language, ethnicity) live side by side.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Write your answers in the space given below:
      b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1. Define the term 'class system'.

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2. What are the main aspects of the social structure of Indian society?

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3. What is the role of community?

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4. Define the concept of Pluralism.

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1.4 INTERRELATIONSHIP AMONG THE STRUCTURES

In a country like India where different languages are spoken, variations in geographical conditions and climate also exist. People have an emotional attachment to their region, caste, class, religion, community and language. Different terms related to social structure such as caste, class, family, village community and kinship are defined as segmentary entities. The relationship between these structures has become a challenge, day by day the thread of unity is being weakened as several fissiparous tendencies have begun to raise their heads. Diversity enriches national culture and economic prosperity, but when it stop down, the very existence of the country is endangered. At the time of independence, we took pledge to build India into a secular democratic republic, based on the principles of social and economic justice. In spite of our best efforts made in this sphere, India is facing many problems of narrow loyalties which pose threat to National Unity.

Changes are taking place, but we have to put in more efforts as social and national integration is crucial to the creation of a strong and united society. People are moving from a rigid caste system to an occupational class system.

The emerging pattern of people polity presents a heterogeneous way of integration. The peasants who have acquired land and property and better means of productions are united with the upper strata of regional society through the capitalist market, money, education and competitive politics. Another group belonging to landless peasantry or wage owners has united with the lower strata of the wider society. The national model remains the ideal of both the stratas of the society.

Lastly, it has to be realized by all that material riches without tolerance, compassion and wisdom may turn to dust and ashes.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Write your answers in the space given below:
   b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

5. How the population of India is stratified?

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6. Why the inter-relationship among social structures is important?

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7. Why the relationship among the social structures is being weakened in India?

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1.5 PROBLEMS OF INDIAN SOCIETY IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Indian society is very old with strong social, cultural traditions marked by immense diversities and disparities and a history of gross discrimination based on caste, class and gender. There is diversity in language, customs and habits. Though this makes India culturally rich but at the same time, this diversity brings problems in the national development. People fight on the basis of castes, class, language and religion. It becomes difficult to maintain the social fabric. The world has become a global village. Western culture has influenced Indian culture. Connotations of different concepts have changed. Some of the issues which were not accepted in ancient time have become normal like inter caste marriage, multilingualism, pluralism and women's participation in different areas. Therefore, the problem of national development in India needs to be seen against this diversification. Let us now study some of these problems in details.

1.5.1 Gender Inequality

Gender inequality refers to unequal treatment or perception of individuals based on their gender. It arises from differences in gender roles constructed socially as well as biologically through chromosomes, brain structure, and hormonal differences.

Gender inequality consists of inferior views, discrimination and prejudices about girls and women. For several centuries, women in India have been occupying a status inferior to men in all walks of life. The situation has slowly but surely changed. It has to be seen in reference to health, education, economic and political inequalities between men and women in India.

Gender inequality and its social causes; impact India's sex ratio, women's health over their lifetimes, their educational attainment and economic conditions. Gender inequality in India is multifaceted. Some argue that some gender equality measures place men at a disadvantage. However, India's population is examined as a whole; women are at a disadvantage in several ways.

This kind of discrimination between genders is against our democratic system of Indian society. Various reasons include patriarchal society, preference for sons, dowry system, marriage laws, etc.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report released by the World Economic Forum in 2011, India was ranked 113 on the Gender Gap Index among 135 countries polled. Since then India has improved its ranking on World Economic Forum. The Gender Gap Index has come down to 105/136 in 2013. The efforts of government are appreciable. Women are given many constitutional rights and government is trying its best to lift their status in the society.

Different States and Union Territories, in cooperation with the Central Government, have initiated number of region-specific programmes targeted at reducing gender inequality during the last few decades. Some of these programmes are: *Swarnjayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojna, Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojna*, and *Awarneess Generation Projects* for rural and poor women, *Kishori Shakti Yojna, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, Balika Samridhi Yojna, Serva Shiksha Abhiyan,* and *Ladli Laxami Yojna*.

1.5.2   Problem of Maintaining Secular Status of the Country

As you are aware that India is a land of diversities in caste, colour, religion, customs, faith and so on. After independence, India was given the name of democratic secular republic. The concept of democracy and secularism was introduced in order to strengthen the unity amidst variations and differences and to uphold the solidarity of the nation. Secularism means independent from any religion. A secular country treats all religion on equal footing, from neither interfering with nor promoting any religion.

Basic ideals of democratic pluralism upheld by the Indian Constitution are Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. In other words, intercultural education in India has to be based upon five basic principles.

1)   Every individual in India has a worth and dignity of its own.

2)   Society exists for the individual and not the individual for the society.

3)   Equality and majority rule ought to work in a mutually supplementary, not supplanting manner.

4)   Discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or language is intolerable in societal living.

5)   Every group in India has a right to protect, conserve and promote its own culture.

The secular nature of our Country has to be maintained. Secular based education is needed to bring pluralistic outlook of the individuals. Betterment of the society and the world also depends upon secular based education. Secularism is needed for the development of democratic qualities like justice, liberty, equality, fraternity and cooperative living.

Our educational system today promotes secular attitudes and values through its broad based aims, curricula, enlightened teachers and appropriate activities, all emphasizing open-mindedness and equal respect for all religions.

At the end, it is the duty of all to have healthy approach in order to maintain secularism.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: a) Write your answers in the space given below:
  b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

8. Define gender inequality.

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9. What are the basic principles on which the intercultural education in India should be based?

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1.5.3 Upholding Democratic Principles

Our Constitution has some vital provisions. It is the duty of each and every citizen to understand those and to abide by those provissions. After the declaration of our country as a "Sovereign Democratic Republic" we are bound by all the provisions of our Constitution.

Article 46 of the Indian Constitution lays down the following Directive Principle with regard to social justice: "The State shall promote, special care, the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people particularly Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and shall provide them social justice and protect them from all forms of exploitation." The concept of social justice as enunciated by the above Directive Principle has led to the formation of many voluntary organisations to safeguard the interests of the members of these backward castes. Under the context of democracy these organisations assume a strong political power in the Indian society.

The adoption of the fourfold ideal of Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity in our Constitution has been incorporated for the elimination of social inequalities, economic disparities and political privileges. These ideals were needed to purge our disparity, diversity and a division on the basis of some artificially created social hierarchy. Our Constitution lays down that in the eyes of law everyone should have an equal status, to no one should justice be denied, everyone should have liberty of thought, expression and to practice his own faith and belief, and the dignity of each individual should be assumed.

The greatest force of Indian democracy is the spirit and provisions of the Indian Constitution. These provisions mean that in imparting education, we have to create an atmosphere in the educational institutions, in which there will no social stratification.

The dignity of the individual and unity of the nation can only be assured when recognition is equally accorded to the preservation of the fundamental

rights of a citizen on one hand and the needs of the socialistic pattern of the society on the other. The Directives of the State policy indicate a positive approach, which is necessary for helping the citizens to secure for themselves the highest standard of living economically, socially, culturally and politically.

A study of contemporary events in Indian social and political life indicates a strong trend towards the theme of democracy percolating down to the bases of Indian culture and, therefore, it has to be a great unifying force in the country today.

1.5.4 Linguistic Diversities

Another feature of the Indian society is the presence of more than a dozen languages and an almost impossible number of dialects. Different languages are spoken in different parts of the country in India. These are Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati, Marathi, Assamese, Kashmiri, Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam, Kannada, etc. There is no harm in each linguistic group trying to improve its own language, but when the difference is made the basis of conflict, tension and many difficulties arise. Linguism is the tendency which encourages a linguistically united group to extol the virtues of its own language to the denigration of all other languages and linguistic groups. This tendency is as harmful for the nation as any other -ism. This linguism is the root of the language problem in India and it is steadily becoming more and more virulent and intense. This diversity in language sometimes becomes the cause of demonstrations, conflicts violence and consequent tensions.

Linguism obscures all clear thinking on the language problem and makes it impossible to adopt an objective attitude to it. Certain fundamental problems are in the root of linguism – which language should be the link language in the country? which language should be considered the national language? what status should English language have in the pattern of education? etc. Because of regional affinities, people advocate the case of their own language as the national language. Thus, the varieties of Indian language pose situations of difference in the Indian social life.

1.5.5 Regional and Cultural Diversities

Before we discuss regional and cultural diversities, we should be clear about the meaning of cultural diversities. First of all, culture is not synonymous with society. Culture includes both material and non-material elements, all of which are products of human society.

What is regional diversity?

A region may be defined as a territory, the habitants of which have an emotional attachment to it because of commonality of caste, customs, and common way of life, tradition, language, religion and socioeconomic and political stages of development. By regionalism we mean the existence of a variety of regional groups within a society. There are many causes at the root of this regionalism like: geographical, psychological, cultural, lingual, historical, political and economic. There is regional imbalance which means disparity in the standard of living of the people residing in different regions of the country.

Regional imbalance occurs due to many reasons like non-availability or non-utilization of natural resources, lack of educational facilities, lack of economic opportunities and lack of strong will among the people for development, neglect of region by the government, etc.

ltural Diversities

In India, we know that people belong to different cultures. Their ideologies vary. It can be described as the existence, acceptance or promotion of multiple cultural traditions within a single jurisdiction, usually considered in terms of the culture associated with an ethnic group. Due to the influence of mobility, the people of different cultures come across. Cultural diversity is the existence of a variety of cultural or ethnic groups within a society. The phrase, "cultural diversity" is also used sometimes to mean the variety of human societies or cultures in a specific region or in the world as a whole.

It is imperative for all to understand that valuing our diverse cultures is all about understanding and respecting the beliefs of others and their way of life, as we would expect someone to respect ours. It should be realized by all that appreciating and respecting cultural diversities is essential. In this way we can make our nation strong.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: a) Write your answers in the space given below:

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

10. What is the greatest force of modern Indian democracy?

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11. Which Article of Indian Constitution lays down the Directive Principle with regard to social justice?

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12. What is Linguism?

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13. What is regional imbalance?

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1.6 ROLE OF EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Change is inevitable. Society is dynamic; it is in a constant flux. Education must adjust itself to changing situations. Education has assumed a great responsibility with the march of civilization. Education is a vital investment for human and economic development and is influenced by the environment within which it exists. It is no longer concerned with imparting civilization. It is concerned with the right type of development in human. Education is concerned with preparing the mind of the pupils for the right type of thinking in society so that the problems of stratification and disintegration which the society faces can be solved amicably and peacefully. Education can play an important role for national development. Education should enable an individual to sublimate the basic instincts and develop healthy attitude towards life. The concept of democracy and world citizenship should be fostered through education.

1.7 ADDRESSING MARGINALIZATION IN EDUCATION

There is no agreed definition of marginalisation and what that entails in education: The Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report 2010: *'Reaching the marginalized'*, however, defines marginalization as a form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities. Some examples of the most disadvantaged sections of society are girls and women, hard to reach groups such as indigenous and ethnic minorities, poor households, people living in informal settlements, differently abled persons, rural populations, nomadic populations, those affected by armed conflict, HIV and AIDS, and street and working children."

It has to be seen, the factors for the exclusion of such group and lack of educational opportunity for them. In fact, poverty, gender, ethnicity, geographical location, disability, race and language are the reasons that create cycles of disadvantage in education. This carries a high price for societies as well as for individuals. Addressing marginalisation is a matter of urgency on several counts.

Good policies backed by a commitment to equality can make a difference. Education must ensure that the children at a disadvantage get access to good quality learning environment, counseling of well trained teachers. Child labour should be eradicated, though the government's efforts are appreciable in this

regard. Still much is to be done. We accept the diversity but this should not become an obstacle in the growth and development of an individual and society as well. More over we consider diversities as our strengths but not weaknesses.

Check Your Progress 5

Note: a) Write your answers in the space given below:
      b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

14. Discuss the main role of education in national development.

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15. In what way are researches and studies based on inter-cultural understanding a prime necessity for national development in India.

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16. Define marginalization in education.

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1.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, you have studied the concept of Indian social structure and its nature. What are the problems of Indian society? The various obstacles in the progress of Indian society and maintaining its secular status like caste, class, religion, language, and region have been explained to you. You have also acquainted with the changing social fabric and pluralism. You come to know the concept of marginalization and gender equality. You have learnt the role of education in national development and improvement of human relationship. You have learnt the necessity of tolerance, adjustment and national as well as international understanding.

1.9 UNIT END ACTIVITIES

1. As a teacher, how can you deal with caste, class and language disparities in your class?

2. As a teacher, how can you seek the help of family and community, in teaching child the development principles?

3. How can a teacher play active role in the national development?

4. As a teacher, what activities can you organize in the classroom to exhibit the facilities reaching to marginalized group?

5. As a teacher, how can you motivate your students to dramatize the importance of brotherhood?

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1.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Class system is based on status, standard of living and other objective factors.

2. The main aspects of social structure of Indian society are the caste and class system.

3. It inculcates sense of 'we' feeling among the community members.

4. Pluralism denotes derversity of views and standards rather than a single approach or method of interpertation. .

5. India's population is stratified economically and socially.

6. Strong relationship among the structure makes the nation strong.

7. Narrow loyalties of the people towards their language, caste, region and religion weaken the social structures.

8. It refers to unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender.

9. Five basic principles:

   • Every individual in India has a worth and dignity of its own.

   • Society exists for the individual and not the individual for the society.

   • Equality and majority rule ought to work in a mutually supplementary and not in supplanting manner.

   • Discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or language is repugnant to societal living.

   • Every group in India has a right to protect, conserve and promote its own culture.

10. It is the spirit and provision of Indian Constitution.

11. Article 46.

12. Linguism is the tendency which encourages a linguistically united group to extol the virtues of its own language to the denigration of all other languages and linguistic groups.

13. It is disparity in the standard of the people residing in different regions of the country.

14. Education should help the individual to develop healthy attitude towards life and the nation.

15. For cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

16. A form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities.