

Chapter 1

Understanding Diversity

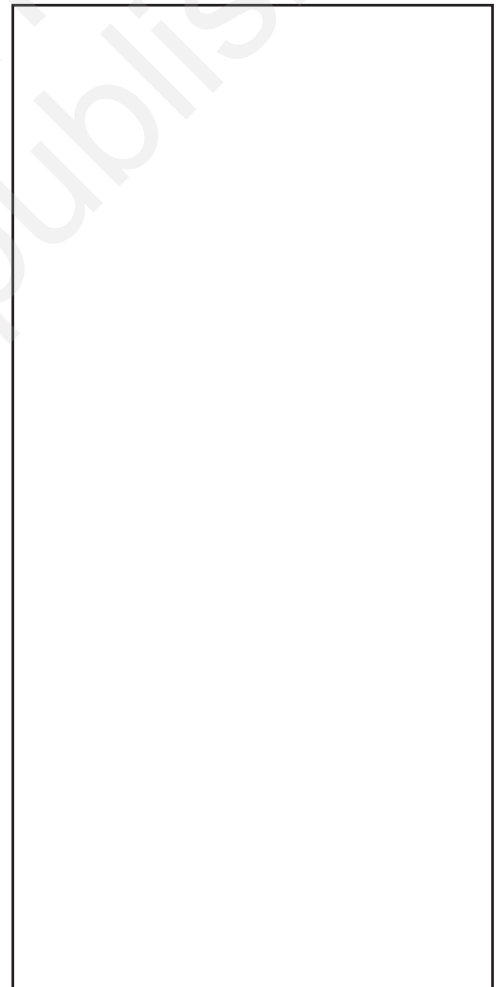


Look around you in the classroom: do you see anyone who looks exactly like you do? In this chapter you will learn that people are different from each other in many ways. Not only do they look different but they might also belong to different regional, cultural or religious backgrounds. These differences enrich our lives in many ways and also make them more fun!

All these different people, who come from all kinds of backgrounds, and belong to all kinds of religions and cultures help to make India so interesting and so diverse. What does diversity add to our lives? How did India become like this? Are all kinds of difference a part of diversity? Can diversity also be a part of unity? Read this chapter to find some answers.



Three children around your age have drawn the figures above. Use the empty box to draw your human figure. Is your drawing similar to any of the others? The chances are that your drawing is quite different from the other three, which you can see are quite different from each other. This is because each one of us has a unique drawing style. We not only don't look exactly like each other but also differ in terms of the language we speak, our cultural backgrounds, the religious rituals we observe and, of course the way we draw!



Fill out the following information about yourself

When I go out I like wearing

At home I speak in

My favourite sport is

I like reading books about

Now ask your teacher to help you check, how many of you have similar answers. Is there anyone whose list matches yours exactly? Probably not. But many of you may have similar answers. How many like reading the same kind of books? How many different languages are spoken by the students in your class?

By now you must have recognised the many ways in which you are quite like some of your classmates and other ways in which you are different from them.

Making friends

Do you think it would be easy for you to make friends with someone who was very different from you? Read the following story and think about this.

I had meant it as a joke. A joke made up for a small ragged boy who sold newspapers at the Janpat crossing at the busy intersection. Every time I cycled past he would run after me, holding out the English paper

and screaming out the evening's headlines in a mixture of Hindi and English words. This time, I stopped by the pavement and asked for the Hindi paper. His mouth fell open.

"You mean you know Hindi?" he asked.

"Of course," I said as I paid for the paper.

"Why? What did you think?"

He paused. "But you look so...so angrez," he said. "You mean you can even read Hindi?"

"Of course I can," I said, this time a little impatiently. "I can speak, read



and write Hindi. Hindi is one of the subjects I study in school."

"Subjects?" he asked. How could I explain what a subject was to someone who had never been to school? "Well, it is something..." I began, but the lights changed, and the honking behind me grew a hundredfold and I let myself be pushed along with the rest of the traffic.



The next day he was there again, smiling at me and holding out a Hindi paper. "Bhaiyya," he said, "aap ka akhbaar. Ab Bathaaiye yeh subject kya cheez hai?" the English word sounded strange on his tongue. It sounded like its other meaning in English – to be ruled by someone else.

"Oh, it's just something to study," I said. And then because the red light had come on, I asked him, "Have you ever been to school?" "Never," he answered. And he added proudly, "I began working when I was so high." He measured himself against my cycle-seat. "First my mother used to come with me but I can do it all alone."

"Where is your mother now?" I asked, but then the lights changed and I was off. I heard him yell from somewhere behind me, "She's in Meerut with..." The rest was drowned out.

"My name is Samir," he said the next day. And very shyly he asked, "What's yours?" It was incredible. My bicycle wobbled. "My name is Samir too," I said. "What?" His eyes lit up. "Yes," I grinned at him. "It's another name for Hanuman's father, you know." "So now you are Samir Ek and I'm Samir Do," he said triumphantly. "Something like that," I answered and then I held out my hand. "Haath milao, Samir Do!" His hand nestled in mine like a little bird. I could still feel its warmth as I cycled away.

The next day, he did not have his usual smile for me. "There is trouble in Meerut," he said. "Many people are being killed there in the riots." I looked at the headlines. Communal Riots, it blazed. "But Samir..." I began. "I'm a Muslim Samir," he said in answer. "And all my people are in Meerut." His eyes filled with tears and when I touched his shoulder, he would not look up.

He was not at the crossing the day after. Neither the day after nor ever again. And no newspaper, in English or Hindi, can tell me where my Samir Do has gone.

(The Lights Changed by Poile Sengupta)

Name three ways in which Samir Ek and Samir Do were different?

Did these differences prevent them from becoming friends?

While Samir Ek is more familiar with English, Samir Do speaks Hindi. Although they both are more at home in different languages they still communicated with each other. They made the effort to do so because this was what was important to them.

Samir Ek and Samir Do also come from different religious and cultural backgrounds. While Samir Ek is a Hindu, Samir Do is a Muslim. Different religious and cultural backgrounds such as these are an aspect of diversity.



Make a list of the festivals that might have been celebrated by the two boys.

Samir *Ek*:

Samir *Do*:

Can you think of a situation in which you made friends with someone who was very different from you? Write a story that describes this.



In addition to their diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, there are other ways in which Samir *Ek* and Samir *Do* are different from each other. For example, while Samir *Ek* goes to school, Samir *Do* sells newspapers.

Discuss

Why do you think Samir *Do* did not attend school? Do you think it would have been easy for him to attend school if he wanted to? In your opinion is it a fair situation that some children get to go to school and others don't?

Samir *Do* did not have the opportunity to attend school. Perhaps you've noticed that there are several people in the area where you live who are poor and who don't have enough to eat or wear and sometimes not even a place to live. This difference is not the same as the one we have seen

earlier. Here, we're talking not of difference but of inequality. Inequality comes about when a person does not have the resources and opportunities that are available to other persons.

The caste system is another example of inequality. According to this, society was divided into different groups depending upon the work that people did and they were supposed to remain in those groups. So if your parents were potters you could only become a potter, nothing else. This system was considered irreversible. And because you were not supposed to change your profession, it was not considered necessary for you to know anything more than what you needed in your profession. This created a situation of inequality. You will read more about this and other inequalities in the following chapters.

What does diversity add to our lives?

Just like Samir *Ek* and Samir *Do* became friends, you might have friends who are very different from you. You have probably eaten different kinds of food in their homes, celebrated different festivals with them, tried out the clothes they wear, and learnt some of their languages as well.

Make a list of the food that you have eaten from different parts of India.

Make a list of the languages besides your mother tongue that you can speak at least one or two words of.





You probably like reading and hearing stories and adventures about different animals, people and even ghosts. Perhaps you even enjoy making up stories yourself! Many young people feel happy when they read a good story because it gives them lots of ideas to make up more stories. People who write stories get their ideas from all sorts of different places – from books, and real life and from their imagination.

Some may have lived in forests close to animals and chosen to write of their fights and friendships. Others read real accounts of kings and queens and wrote stories about love and honour. Some dipped into their own childhood memories of school and friends and wrote stories of adventure.



Imagine if all the storytellers and writers that you have heard and read so

far were forced to live in a place where all people wore the same two colours red and white, ate the same food (maybe potatoes!), took care of the same two animals, for example, the deer and the cat, and to entertain themselves played snakes and ladders. What kind of stories do you think they would write?

Imagine that you are a writer or an artist who lives in the place described above. Either write a story or draw a picture of your life here.

Do you think you would enjoy living in a place like this? List five different things that you would miss the most if you lived here.

DIVERSITY IN INDIA

India is a country of many diversities. We speak different languages, have various types of food, celebrate different festivals, practise different religions. But actually, if you think about it, we do many things that are similar except that we do them in different ways.

How do we explain Diversity?

A little more than two hundred years ago or long before the train, aeroplane, bus or car became a part of our lives, people travelled from one part of the world to another, in ships, on horses, on camels or on foot.



List at least three different ways in which people in India do the following.
One of the possible answers has been provided for you already.

Different ways in which people pray	Through singing a hymn		
Different ways in which people get married		Through signing a register in the court	
Different ways in which people dress			In Manipur women wear a <i>fanek</i>
Different ways in which people greet each other		In Jharkhand many adivasis say " <i>johar</i> " to greet each other	
Different ways in which people cook rice	By making <i>Biriyani</i> with meat or vegetables		

Often, they went in search of new lands, or new places to settle in, or for people to trade with. And because it took so long to travel, once they got to a place, people stayed there, often for a long time. Many others left their homes because there were famines and drought and they could not get enough to eat. Some went in search of work while others left because there was a war.

Sometimes, as they began to make their homes in new places, people began to change a little and at other times they managed to do things in the old ways. So their languages, food,

music, religions became a mix of the old and the new, and out of this inter-mixing of cultures, came something new and different.

The history of many places shows us how many different cultural influences have helped to shape life and culture there. Thus regions became very diverse because of their unique histories.

Similarly diversity also comes about when people adapt their lives to the geographical area in which they live. For example living near the sea is quite different from living in a mountainous area.



Not only do people have different clothing and eating habits, but even the kinds of work they do are different. In cities it is often easy to forget how closely people's lives are tied to their physical surroundings. This is because in the city people seldom grow their own vegetables and grain. Instead they depend on the market to buy all the food and other goods that they need.

Let us try to understand what we mean when we say that historical and geographical factors influence the diversity of a region. We can do this by reading about life in two different parts of the country, Kerala and Ladakh.

Look at the map of India in an Atlas and locate Kerala and Ladakh. Can you list three ways in which the different geographical location of these two regions would influence the following?

1. The food people eat:
2. The clothes they wear:
3. The work they do:



The dry barren landscape of the mountainous desert of Ladakh.

Ladakh is a desert in the mountains in the eastern part of Jammu and Kashmir. Very little agriculture is possible here since this region does not receive any rain and is covered in snow for a large part of the year. There are very few trees that can grow in the region. For drinking water, people depend on the melting snow during the summer months.

People here keep sheep and the sheep in this region are special because they produce pashmina wool. This wool is prized and pashmina shawls cost a lot of money. The people in Ladakh carefully collect the wool of the sheep and sell this to traders from Kashmir. Pashmina shawls are chiefly woven in Kashmir.

The people eat meat and milk products like cheese and butter. Each family owns some goats, cows and dzos (yak-cows). Being a desert did not mean that Ladakh did not attract its share of traders. It was considered a good trade route as it had many passes through which caravans travelled to what is today called Tibet. These caravans carried textiles and spices, raw silk and carpets.



Buddhism reached Tibet via Ladakh. Ladakh is also called Little Tibet. Islam was introduced in this region more than four hundred years ago and there is a significant Muslim population here. Ladakh has a very rich oral tradition of songs and poems. Local versions of the Tibetan national epic the *Kesar Saga* are performed and sung by both Muslims and Buddhists.



Kerala is a state in the south-west corner of India. It is surrounded by the sea on one side and hills on the other. A number of spices like pepper, cloves and cardamoms are grown on the hills. It is spices that made this region



Chinese Fishing Nets

an attractive place for traders. Jewish and Arab traders were the first to come here. The Apostle of Christ, St. Thomas is believed to have come here nearly



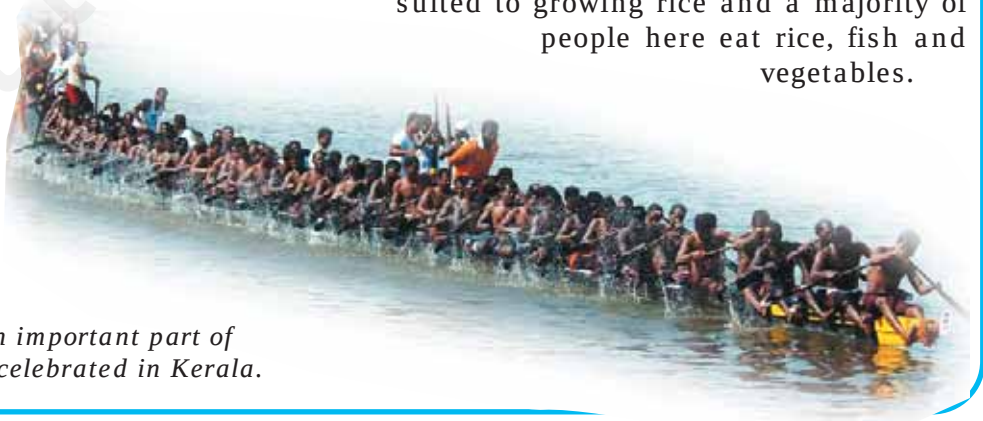
Woman weaving a pashmina shawl

2000 years ago and he is credited with bringing Christianity to India.

Many Arab traders also came and settled down here. Ibn Battuta, who travelled here a little less than seven hundred years ago, wrote a travelogue in which he describes the lives of Muslims and says that they were a highly respected community. The Portuguese discovered the sea route to India from Europe when Vasco da Gama landed with his ship here.

Because of all these various historical influences, people in Kerala practise different religions such as Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism.

The fishing nets used here look exactly like the Chinese fishing nets and are called *cheena-vala*. Even the utensil used for frying is called the *cheenachatti*, and it is believed that the word *cheen* could have come from China. The fertile land and climate are suited to growing rice and a majority of people here eat rice, fish and vegetables.



The boat race is an important part of the Onam festival celebrated in Kerala.

While Kerala and Ladakh are quite different in terms of their geographical features, the history of both regions has seen similar cultural influences. Both regions were influenced by Chinese and Arab traders. It was the geography of Kerala which allowed for the cultivation of spices and the special geographical location of Ladakh and its wool that drew traders to these regions. Thus history and geography are often tied in the cultural life of a region.

The influence of diverse cultures is not merely a thing of the past. Our present lives are all about moving from place to place for work and with each move our cultural traditions and way of life slowly become part of the new place we are in. Similarly in our own neighbourhoods we live close to people from several communities. Our daily lives are about the ways in which we do things together and hear stories about each other's lives, customs and traditions.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

India's diversity has always been recognised as a source of its strength. When the British ruled India, women and men from different cultural, religious and regional backgrounds came together to oppose them. India's freedom movement had thousands of people of different backgrounds in it. They worked together to decide joint actions, they went to jail together, and they found different ways to oppose the British. Interestingly the British

thought they could divide Indians because they were so different, and then continue to rule them. But the people showed how they could be different and yet be united in their battle against the British.

*Don't forget the days of blood, O friend
In the midst of your happiness remember
to shed a tear for us*

*The hunter has torn away every single
flower*

*Do plant a flower in the desert garden
dear friend*

*Having fallen to bullets we slept in
Jallianwala Bagh*

*Do light a lamp on this lonely grave
O friend*

*The blood of Hindus and Muslims flows
together today*

*Do soak your robe in this river of blood
dear friend*

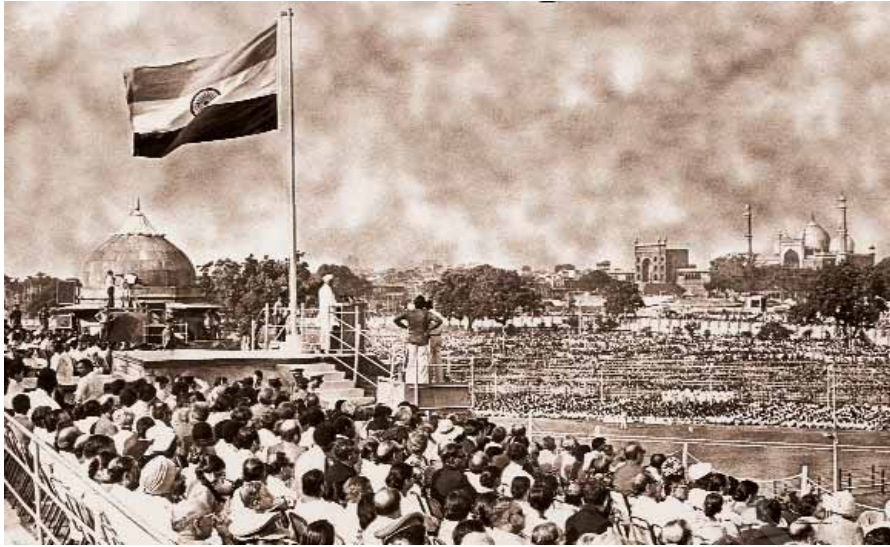
*Some rot in jails while others lie in their
graves*

Do shed a few tears for them O friend.

Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA)

This song was sung after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar in which a British general opened fire on a large group of unarmed, peaceful people killing many and wounding even more. Men and women, Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, rich and poor had gathered to protest against the British. This song was composed and sung to honour the memory of those brave people.





Pt. Nehru delivering an Independence Day speech

Songs and symbols that emerged during the freedom struggle serve as a constant reminder of our country's rich tradition of respect for diversity. Do you know the story of the Indian flag? It was used as a symbol of protest against the British by people everywhere.

In his book *The Discovery of India* Jawaharlal Nehru says that Indian unity is not something imposed from the outside but rather, "It was something deeper and within its fold, the widest tolerance of belief and custom was practised and every variety acknowledged and even encouraged."

It was Nehru, who coined the phrase, "unity in diversity" to describe the country.

India's national anthem, composed by Rabindranath Tagore, is another expression of the unity of India. In what way does the national anthem describe this unity?

QUESTIONS

1. Draw up a list of the different festivals celebrated in your locality. Which of these celebrations are shared by members of different regional and religious communities?
2. What do you think living in India with its rich heritage of diversity adds to your life?
3. Do you think the term "unity in diversity" is an appropriate term to describe India? What do you think Nehru is trying to say about Indian unity in the sentence quoted above from his book *The Discovery of India*?
4. Underline the line in the poem sung after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, which according to you, reflects India's essential unity.
5. Choose another region in India and do a similar study of the historical and geographical factors that influence the diversity found there. Are these historical and geographical factors connected to each other? How?

