

Unity in Diversity, or 'Many in the One'

Class 6 — Social Science (Exploring Society: India and Beyond) — Chapter 8

NCERT Comprehensive Notes 2025-26

Section 1

Chapter Overview

Chapter 8, titled "**Unity in Diversity, or 'Many in the One'**", is part of the theme *Our Cultural Heritage and Knowledge Traditions* in the NCERT textbook *Exploring Society: India and Beyond* for Class 6. The chapter opens with two powerful quotations — one by **Rabindranath Tagore** and another by **Sri Aurobindo** — both highlighting the foundational principle that India's unity lies within its remarkable diversity. The chapter explores how Indians share common threads in food, clothing, festivals, and literature despite vast differences in language, region, and community. Through vivid examples such as staple grains, the sari, harvest festivals under different names, and the timeless spread of the Ramayana and Mahabharata across hundreds of regional versions, students learn that diversity is not a source of division but a source of enrichment.

USP Key Points — At a Glance

- ★ India has over **1.4 billion** inhabitants — about **18%** of the world's population
- ★ The 'People of India' project surveyed **4,635 communities** across all States
- ★ India has **325 languages** using **25 scripts** as recorded in the survey
- ★ The **Panchatantra** has about **200 adaptations** in more than **50 languages** worldwide
- ★ The Ramayana and Mahabharata together fill about **7,000 pages** in their original Sanskrit versions
- ★ A scholar counted about **100 folklore versions** of the Mahabharata in Tamil Nadu alone
- ★ Makara Sankranti is celebrated on or around **January 14** under different names across India

Section 2

A Rich Diversity

India's diversity is immediately visible to anyone travelling across the country. A simple train journey reveals changing landscapes, different types of dresses and food, diverse languages — both familiar and unfamiliar — and different scripts displayed on signboards and stations. Even within one's own region, people from other parts of India with distinct customs and traditions are commonly encountered. This rich diversity is usually the first thing that strikes visitors to India.

The People of India Project

With over 1.4 billion inhabitants (approximately 18% of the world's population), India's diversity is hardly surprising. In the late 20th century, the **Anthropological Survey of India**, a national organisation, conducted a massive survey called the '**People of India project**'. This was a landmark study that covered 4,635 communities across all States of the country.

Key Findings of the People of India Project:

The survey counted **325 languages** using **25 scripts**. It also observed that many Indians may be called 'migrants' — meaning people who are not living near their birthplace or with their original community. This finding highlights how the movement and mixing of people has been a natural feature of Indian society.

The Concept of 'Unity in Diversity'

While diversity is indeed beautiful, making sense of it is not always easy. Over a century ago, the British historian **Vincent Smith** wondered how a single history of India could possibly be written given such bewildering diversity. His own answer was that India offers "**unity in diversity**" — the idea that despite the enormous variety in languages, customs, religions, and traditions, there is an underlying common thread that binds all of India together. The chapter then sets out to explore several dimensions of Indian life to demonstrate this principle of the 'Many in the One'.

Unity in Diversity

A concept that recognises the existence of a common bond or underlying unity among the vast variety of cultures, traditions, languages, and peoples that make up a nation. In the Indian context, it means that India's many differences enrich rather than divide the country.

ASPECT OF DIVERSITY	EXAMPLES FROM INDIA
Languages	325 languages recorded in 25 different scripts
Communities	4,635 communities surveyed across all states
Landscapes	Mountains, deserts, coasts, plains, forests — all within one country
Clothing	Sari, dhoti, lungi, salwar kameez, mekhela chador — each with hundreds of regional varieties
Food	Thousands of dishes prepared from common staple grains but with distinct regional flavours
Festivals	Same harvest festival celebrated under different names (Sankranti, Pongal, Lohri, Bihu, etc.)
Migration	Many Indians live far from their birthplace, creating cultural mixing throughout the country

Section 3

Food for All

The food of India provides one of the most vivid examples of unity in diversity. The number of different dishes and preparations found across the country is in the thousands, if not lakhs! Yet, underlying this astounding variety is a common set of ingredients — the same staple grains, common spices, and shared vegetables form the base from which countless regional specialties are created.

Staple Grains of India

Certain food grains are common to almost every part of the country and are called '**staple grains**' because they form the basic food for most Indians. These can be broadly classified into cereals, millets, and pulses.

CATEGORY	EXAMPLES	SIGNIFICANCE
Cereals	Rice, Barley, Wheat	Primary carbohydrate source across India; rice dominates in south and east, wheat in north and west
Millets	Pearl millet (Bajra), Sorghum (Jowar), Finger millet (Ragi)	Drought-resistant grains grown across drier regions; gaining modern recognition as 'superfoods'
Pulses	Various dals (Arhar, Moong, Masoor, Chana), Rajma, Lobia	Primary protein source in vegetarian diets; consumed in every region

Common Spices

In addition to staple grains, some common spices are used throughout the country, giving Indian cuisine its distinctive character. Key spices include **turmeric (haldi)**, **cumin (jeera)**, **cardamom (elaichi)**, and **ginger (adrak)**. This list can be extended to include common vegetables and cooking oils shared across regions.

Unity in Diversity through Food: The same ingredients (unity) are used in countless combinations (diversity) to prepare an endless variety of dishes. For example, rice appears as biryani in Hyderabad, idli-dosa in Tamil Nadu, pitha in Assam, and plain steamed rice with dal across many states — yet the base grain remains the same.

USP Key Points — Food

- ★ India's food diversity runs into **thousands, if not lakhs**, of different dishes
- ★ **Staple grains** (rice, wheat, millets, pulses) are common to almost every part of the country
- ★ Spices like **turmeric, cumin, cardamom, and ginger** are used throughout India
- ★ Same ingredients prepared differently across regions = **unity (ingredients) + diversity (recipes)**
- ★ Common vegetables and oils also form a shared culinary base across the nation

Section 4

Textiles and Clothing

Every region and community in India has developed its own distinctive styles of clothing and dresses. Yet, a remarkable commonality is visible in some traditional Indian garments, irrespective of the material used. The most outstanding example is the **sari** — a plain, unstitched length of cloth worn in most parts of India.

The Sari — A Symbol of Unity in Diversity

The sari is a single type of garment that comes in **hundreds of varieties**. It is made from different fabrics — mostly cotton or silk, and in modern times, synthetic fabrics too. The diversity of the sari lies in its weaving methods, designs, printing techniques, and colours, which are produced from many kinds of pigments. Some designs are woven directly into the fabric, while others are printed after the cloth is woven.

FAMOUS SARI TYPE	REGION	KEY FEATURE
Banarasi	Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh	Rich silk with gold and silver brocade (zari) work
Kanjivaram	Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu	Heavy silk with contrasting borders and temple designs
Paithani	Paithan, Maharashtra	Handwoven silk with peacock motifs and oblique square design on pallu
Patan Patola	Patan, Gujarat	Double ikat technique — one of the most complex weaving methods
Muga	Assam	Made from golden Muga silk — exclusive to Assam
Mysore Silk	Mysore, Karnataka	Pure silk with real gold zari, known for elegance and lightness

History of the Sari

The sari has a very long history. A stone relief from **Vaishali (today in Bihar)** depicting a woman in a sari goes back a few centuries BCE, proving that this garment has been part of Indian culture for over two thousand years. Over the centuries, several travellers to India marvelled at the sari's simplicity, economy, and the diverse ways in which it is worn.

Chintz — India's Impact on Global Textiles: For a very long time, India produced the finest cotton in the world. Indian textiles were exported as far away as Europe. One beautiful type of printed cotton called '**chintz**' became so popular in 17th-century Europe that sales of some European dresses dropped sharply. Eventually, to protect their own products, **England and France banned the import of chintz from India!** This shows the global demand for Indian textiles.

Ways of Wearing and Using the Sari

There are many ways of wearing the sari — they vary from one region to another and from one community to another. New ways of draping the sari are still being invented. Beyond its primary function as a dress, women often put the sari to many creative uses: as a cradle for babies, a bag for carrying goods, a fishing net, a head covering for protection from sun, and much more.

The Dhoti — Another Example: Like the sari, the **dhoti** is another unstitched garment worn across India, primarily by men. It too comes in different fabrics, styles of draping, and is used for multiple purposes — demonstrating the same principle of unity in diversity.

Relief

A design that stands out from the surface of a panel (which may be of stone, wood, ceramic, or another material). The stone relief from Vaishali showing a woman in a sari is an important historical evidence of Indian clothing traditions.

Festivals Galore

India has an immense variety of festivals. Interestingly, many common festivals are celebrated across India at almost the same time, though they carry different names in different regions. This is a powerful example of unity in diversity — the same spirit of celebration expressed through diverse regional traditions.

Makara Sankranti — One Festival, Many Names

The chapter takes the example of **Makara Sankranti**, which marks the beginning of the **harvest season** in many parts of India and is celebrated on or around **January 14** every year. This festival is connected to the sun's transit into the zodiac sign of Makara (Capricorn) and marks the end of the winter solstice period. Despite being rooted in the same astronomical event and agricultural cycle, it is known by different names across India.

FESTIVAL NAME	REGION / STATE
Makara Sankranti	Odisha, parts of central India
Makar Sankranti	Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, parts of north India
Pongal	Tamil Nadu
Makara Sankramana	Karnataka
Makara Vilakku	Kerala
Uttarayan	Gujarat
Maghi / Lohri	Punjab
Magh Bihu	Assam
Khichdi Parv	Uttar Pradesh, Bihar
Makar Sankraat	Parts of northern India
Poush Songkranti	West Bengal
Pedda Panduya	Andhra Pradesh / Telangana
Shishur Saenkraat	Jammu & Kashmir

October–November Festival Season: Many major festivals also take place in India during October–November, such as **Dussehra / Vijayadashami / Durga Puja** (celebrating the victory of good over evil) and **Diwali / Deepavali / Kali Puja / Tihar** (the festival of lights). These too are celebrated under different names with different customs in different parts of the country, while sharing a common underlying spirit.

USP Key Points — Festivals

- ★ The same harvest festival is celebrated around **January 14** under **13+ different names** across India
- ★ Makara Sankranti marks the beginning of the **harvest season** and the sun's transit into **Makara (Capricorn)**
- ★ October–November sees major festivals like **Dussehra** and **Diwali** celebrated nationally with regional variations
- ★ Festival names differ but the **spirit of celebration, gratitude, and community gathering** remains the same

An Epic Spread

Literature offers one of the finest illustrations of unity in diversity. Indian literatures are extremely diverse — and among the most abundant in the world. Over centuries, despite differences in language and technique, they have shared important themes and concerns, creating a deeply interconnected cultural fabric.

The Panchatantra — One Text, Many Languages

The **Panchatantra** is a collection of delightful stories with animals as the main characters that teaches important life skills. The original Sanskrit text is **at least 2,200 years old**, but its stories have been adapted in almost every Indian language. Beyond India, the Panchatantra has travelled to Southeast Asia, the Arab world, and Europe, inspiring new collections of stories along the way. It is estimated that about **200 adaptations** of the Panchatantra exist in more than **50 languages**. This is a perfect example of how 'one' collection of stories has become 'many'.

The Ramayana and Mahabharata — India's Two Great Epics: The most striking case of unity in diversity in Indian literature is that of India's two great epics — the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharata**. These two long Sanskrit poems, which together might fill some **7,000 pages** in their original versions, narrate the stories of heroes who fight to re-establish **dharma** (righteousness).

The Mahabharata

In the Mahabharata, the **Pandavas**, with **Krishna's** help, fight their own cousins, the **Kauravas**, to recover their kingdom. The epic contains many shorter stories that focus on values and constantly ask questions about what is right and what is wrong.

The Ramayana

In the Ramayana, **Rama**, with the help of his brother **Lakshmana** and of **Hanuman**, defeats the demon **Ravana**, who had kidnapped his wife **Sita**. Like the Mahabharata, the Ramayana also explores themes of duty, sacrifice, and moral values.

Spread Across India and Beyond

For more than **two millenniums (2,000+ years)**, these two epics have been translated or adapted into regional literatures in India and beyond. In addition, there are countless folk versions. A scholar conducting a survey in **Tamil Nadu alone** counted about **100 versions of the Mahabharata** that have survived in folklore forms. The number for the whole of India would be immensely larger.

Many communities, especially **tribal communities**, have their own versions of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Tribes such as the **Bhils, Gonds, Mundas**, and many others have preserved their own adaptations. Most tribes of India's **northeast and Himalayan regions, including Kashmir**, have their own versions of one or both epics. These tribal adaptations are transmitted orally, along with legends about how the epic heroes visited the tribes' respective regions.

Epic

A long poem generally narrating the adventures of heroes and other great figures of the past. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are India's two greatest epics.

FEATURE	RAMAYANA	MAHABHARATA
Original Language	Sanskrit	Sanskrit
Traditional Author	Valmiki	Vyasa
Main Hero	Rama	Pandavas (Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadeva)
Key Helpers	Lakshmana, Hanuman	Krishna
Main Conflict	Rama vs Ravana (to rescue Sita)	Pandavas vs Kauravas (to recover their kingdom)
Central Theme	Triumph of dharma over adharma	Struggle to establish dharma; questions of right and wrong
Regional Versions	Hundreds across India and Asia	100+ in Tamil Nadu folklore alone; countless across India
Tribal Connections	Bhils, Gonds, Himalayan tribes, NE tribes	Bhils, Gonds, Mundas, Irula, NE tribes and many more

K.S. Singh's Observation: The anthropologist **K.S. Singh**, who directed the 'People of India' project, observed regarding the Mahabharata that there is hardly a place in the country which the epic heroes, such as the Pandavas, did not visit according to folklore. The same may be said of the Ramayana. Over the centuries, these two epics created a dense web of cultural interactions across India and many parts of Asia — yet another powerful example of unity in diversity.

Section 7

The Deeper Cultural Unity

Beyond food, clothing, festivals, and literature, many more facets of Indian culture demonstrate the principle of unity in diversity. India's classical arts, including classical music, dance, and architecture, all show both diversity and unity. Each region has developed its own distinctive traditions, yet they share common aesthetic principles, themes, and spiritual foundations.

The Big Questions of the Chapter

The chapter raises three fundamental questions that students should reflect upon throughout their study:

1. What is meant by 'unity in diversity' in the Indian scenario?

It means that despite India's enormous variety — in languages, religions, food, clothing, customs, and traditions — there is an underlying cultural bond that holds the nation together. This bond is not imposed but has evolved naturally over thousands of years through shared values, common stories, and interconnected traditions.

2. What aspects of India's diversity are the most striking?

The most striking aspects include: 325 languages in 25 scripts, 4,635 distinct communities, vast differences in food yet common staple grains, hundreds of varieties of sari yet one basic garment, the same festivals under different names, and the same epics retold in countless regional versions.

3. How do we make out the unity underlying the diversity?

By looking beyond surface differences to find common threads: shared ingredients in food, common garment forms like the sari, festivals marking the same natural cycles, and literature based on the same epic stories. The deeper we look, the more we see that India's diversity is built upon a foundation of unity.

The Role of Tribal Communities

An important aspect covered in this chapter is the contribution of tribal communities to India's cultural unity. Tribes such as the Bhils, Gonds, Mundas, and Irula tribals have their own versions of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, often linking the epic heroes' travels to their own regions. For example, the **Irula tribals** of the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu maintain a shrine containing a carved stone called '**Pancha Pandavar**' depicting the five Pandava brothers, commemorating the Pandavas' legendary passing through the area.

Key Takeaways

USP Key Points — Chapter Summary

- ★ India offers **immense diversity** in landscapes, people, languages, dresses, foods, festivals, and customs
- ★ Diversity is easy to perceive in many fields, but there is also an **underlying unity**
- ★ India's unity **celebrates diversity** because diversity does not divide — it **enriches**
- ★ Food shows unity through **shared staple grains and spices** used in diverse regional dishes
- ★ The **sari** and **dhoti** are single garments with hundreds of regional varieties
- ★ **Makara Sankranti** and similar harvest festivals show one festival celebrated under **13+ names**
- ★ The **Ramayana and Mahabharata** have been adapted into hundreds of regional and tribal versions over **2,000+ years**

Section 8

Glossary of Key Terms

Unity in Diversity

The idea that despite vast differences in culture, language, and traditions, India is held together by a common underlying bond.

Staple Grains

The basic food grains consumed by most Indians — includes cereals (rice, wheat, barley), millets (bajra, jowar, ragi), and pulses (various dals, rajma).

Relief

Epic

A design that stands out from the surface of a panel, which may be of stone, wood, ceramic, or another material.

A long poem generally narrating the adventures of heroes and other great figures of the past. India's two greatest epics are the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Chintz

A beautiful type of printed cotton from India that became extremely popular in 17th-century Europe, leading England and France to ban its import.

Makara Sankranti

A harvest festival celebrated on or around January 14 across India, marking the sun's transit into the zodiac sign of Makara (Capricorn).

Panchatantra

An ancient Sanskrit collection of animal fables (at least 2,200 years old) teaching life skills, adapted in about 200 versions in over 50 languages worldwide.

Dharma

A concept central to Indian philosophy meaning righteousness, duty, and moral order. The heroes of the Ramayana and Mahabharata fight to re-establish dharma.

Anthropological Survey of India

A national organisation that conducted the massive 'People of India project', surveying 4,635 communities and recording 325 languages in 25 scripts.

Migrants

People who are not living near their birthplace or with their original community. The 'People of India' survey observed that many Indians may be called migrants.

Swabhava

One's own nature or essential character. Sri Aurobindo used this term to describe India's inherent tendency towards unity in diversity.

Swadharma

One's own duty or path. Along with Swabhava, Aurobindo used this to describe the natural foundation of India's principle of the 'Many in the One'.

Section 9

Questions & Answers / MCQs

NCERT Exercise Questions with Answers

Q1. Conduct a class discussion on the two quotations at the start of the chapter.

Answer: The chapter opens with two powerful quotations. **Rabindranath Tagore's** prayer asks that he may never lose the experience of oneness even while enjoying the diversity of the world — he sees the 'One' playing through the 'many'. **Sri Aurobindo's** statement goes further by declaring that unity in diversity has always been India's fundamental nature (Swabhava) and guiding duty (Swadharma). He says that recognising the 'Many in the One' is not something new for India but is the very foundation of its civilisation. Together, both thinkers emphasise that India's diversity is not a problem to be solved but a beautiful expression of a deeper oneness that should be cherished and celebrated.

Q2. Read the National Anthem and its translation. Where do you see the diversity? And where the unity?

Answer: India's National Anthem, *Jana Gana Mana*, written by Rabindranath Tagore, beautifully illustrates unity in diversity. The **diversity** is visible in the mention of different regions and geographical features — Punjab, Sindh, Gujarat, Maratha, Dravida (South India), Utkala (Odisha), Banga (Bengal), along with the Vindhya and Himalaya mountains and the rivers Yamuna and Ganga. Each name evokes a distinct region with its own culture, language, and traditions. The **unity** is expressed through the idea that all these diverse regions and peoples come together under one 'Bharat Bhagya Vidhata' (the Dispenser of India's destiny). The anthem does not erase differences — it names them and then declares that they are all part of one nation, whose people seek the blessings of victory together. This is the essence of 'Many in the One'.

Q3. Select a few stories from the Panchatantra and discuss how their message is still valid today.

Answer: The Panchatantra contains timeless wisdom through its animal fables. For example: (i) **The Monkey and the Crocodile** — teaches the importance of quick thinking and presence of mind in dangerous situations, a skill equally important today in our fast-paced lives. (ii) **The Tortoise and the Geese** — warns against the dangers of talking too much and not listening to wise advice, relevant in today's age of social media where careless words can cause great harm. (iii) **The Blue Jackal** — teaches that pretending to be what you are not will eventually be exposed, a lesson about honesty and authenticity that is valid in today's world of false identities. These messages about wit, wisdom, friendship, and caution remain universally relevant even after 2,200 years, which is why the Panchatantra has been adapted in over 50 languages.

Q4. Collect a few folk tales from your region and discuss their message.

Answer: (Sample answer based on Madhya Pradesh) Madhya Pradesh has a rich tradition of folk tales. One popular folk tale is about **Raja Bhoj**, the legendary king of Dhar, known for his wisdom, generosity, and patronage of scholars. These stories teach that a true ruler uses knowledge and wisdom for the welfare of all people. Another folk tradition involves tales from the **Bhil tribal community**, which often feature brave heroes protecting their forests and rivers. These stories carry the message of living in harmony with nature and being courageous in defending one's community. Such folk tales show that every region of India has its own treasure of stories, yet the core messages — of wisdom, courage, honesty, and respect for nature — are remarkably similar across the country, reinforcing the theme of unity in diversity.

Q5. Is there any ancient story that you have seen being depicted through a form of art?

Answer: Ancient Indian stories, especially from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, have been depicted through countless art forms. The chapter itself shows an 18th-century painting from Himachal Pradesh depicting a major episode from the Ramayana (likely Ravana's abduction of Sita or the battle of Lanka). Other examples include: **Madhubani paintings** from Bihar depicting scenes of Sita's Swayamvara and Rama breaking the bow; **Kathakali dance performances** in Kerala dramatising episodes from the Mahabharata; **temple sculptures** at Khajuraho, Hampi, and Mahabalipuram showing scenes from both epics; **Ramlila** theatrical performances across north India; and modern movies and TV serials based on these ancient stories. This proves how these stories have been kept alive through art across time and space.

Q6. Discuss the quotation by Jawaharlal Nehru about the cultural background of India.

Answer: Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, observed during his pre-Independence travels across India that a powerful cultural background influenced the lives of people everywhere he went. He specifically noted that the old epics — the Ramayana and the Mahabharata — were widely known among the masses through popular translations and paraphrases. Even illiterate villagers knew hundreds of verses by heart, and their daily conversations were full of references to these stories or to morals from old classics. Nehru's observation powerfully supports the chapter's theme of unity in diversity: despite India's vast linguistic and regional differences, the same cultural stories and moral values had permeated every corner of the country. The epics served as a shared cultural vocabulary that connected people across barriers of language, literacy, and geography — a living proof of the 'Many in the One'.

Additional Short Answer Questions

Q7. What was the 'People of India' project? What were its key findings?

Answer: The 'People of India' project was a massive survey conducted by the **Anthropological Survey of India** in the late 20th century, directed by anthropologist **K.S. Singh**. It surveyed **4,635 communities** across all States of the country. The key findings were: India has **325 languages** written in **25 different scripts**, and many Indians can be considered 'migrants' because they do not live near their birthplace or with their original community. The project highlighted both the extraordinary diversity and the deep interconnections among India's communities.

Q8. How does the example of Indian food illustrate 'unity in diversity'?

Answer: Indian food illustrates unity in diversity because the same set of **staple grains** (rice, wheat, millets like bajra and jowar, and pulses like various dals) and **common spices** (turmeric, cumin, cardamom, ginger) are used throughout the country — this is the unity. However, these same ingredients are combined in countless different ways to produce thousands of regional dishes with distinct flavours, textures, and preparations — this is the diversity. One vegetable can be prepared in many different ways across regions. Thus, the base ingredients (unity) and the recipes (diversity) together demonstrate how Indian cuisine is both one and many.

Q9. What is 'chintz'? Why did England and France ban its import?

Answer: **Chintz** was a beautiful type of printed cotton fabric produced in India. For a very long time, India produced the finest cotton in the world, and Indian textiles were exported as far away as Europe. Chintz became so popular in **17th-century Europe** that the sale of some European dresses dropped sharply, threatening the local textile industry. To protect their own products, **England and France eventually banned the import of chintz from India**. This incident shows the global demand for Indian textiles and India's historical excellence in cotton production and textile art.

Q10. How do India's tribal communities contribute to the spread of the epics?

Answer: India's tribal communities have played a vital role in spreading the epics by creating and preserving their **own regional versions** of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Tribes such as the **Bhils, Gonds, Mundas**, and many others have their own oral adaptations of these epics. Most tribes of India's northeast and Himalayan regions, including Kashmir, also have their own versions. These tribal adaptations are transmitted orally through generations and include legends connecting the tribes' own history with the epic heroes. For example, the **Irula tribals** of the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu maintain a shrine with a carved stone depicting the five Pandava brothers to commemorate the Pandavas' legendary passing through their area. This widespread tribal connection to the epics shows how deeply these stories have penetrated every level of Indian society.

Q11. Explain the significance of the sari as a symbol of unity in diversity.

Answer: The sari is a powerful symbol of unity in diversity because it is fundamentally **one garment** — an unstitched length of cloth — worn across most parts of India (unity). However, it comes in **hundreds of varieties**: different fabrics (cotton, silk, synthetic), different weaving techniques (Banarasi, Kanjivaram, Paithani, Patan Patola, Muga, Mysore), different designs (woven or printed), different colours, and different ways of draping. Its history stretches back centuries, as shown by a stone relief from Vaishali dating to a few centuries BCE. Women also use the sari creatively for purposes beyond clothing — as a cradle, bag, fishing aid, and more. This combination of one basic concept expressed in countless regional variations makes the sari a perfect metaphor for India's unity in diversity.

Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

1. How many communities were surveyed in the 'People of India' project?

- (a) 2,500
- (b) 3,725
- (c) 4,635
- (d) 5,200

✓ Answer: (c) 4,635

2. How many languages were counted by the People of India project?

- (a) 125
- (b) 225
- (c) 325
- (d) 425

✓ Answer: (c) 325

3. Makara Sankranti is celebrated on or around which date?

- (a) January 1
- (b) January 14
- (c) January 26
- (d) February 14

Answer: (b) January 14

4. The printed cotton fabric from India that became very popular in 17th-century Europe was called:

- (a) Muslin
- (b) Chintz
- (c) Khadi
- (d) Calico

Answer: (b) Chintz

5. The original Sanskrit text of the Panchatantra is at least how many years old?

- (a) 1,000 years
- (b) 1,500 years
- (c) 2,200 years
- (d) 3,000 years

Answer: (c) 2,200 years

6. The Ramayana and Mahabharata together fill approximately how many pages in their original versions?

- (a) 3,000 pages
- (b) 5,000 pages
- (c) 7,000 pages
- (d) 10,000 pages

Answer: (c) 7,000 pages

7. What is the harvest festival called in Tamil Nadu?

- (a) Lohri
- (b) Bihu
- (c) Pongal
- (d) Uttarayan

Answer: (c) Pongal

8. The stone relief of a woman wearing a sari was found in:

- (a) Hampi, Karnataka
- (b) Vaishali, Bihar
- (c) Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh
- (d) Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu

Answer: (b) Vaishali, Bihar

9. About how many adaptations of the Panchatantra exist worldwide?

- (a) About 50
- (b) About 100
- (c) About 200
- (d) About 500

Answer: (c) About 200

10. Which British historian observed that India offers 'unity in diversity'?

- (a) James Mill
- (b) Vincent Smith
- (c) Thomas Macaulay
- (d) William Jones

Answer: (b) Vincent Smith

11. The harvest festival is called 'Uttarayan' in which state?

- (a) Punjab
- (b) Assam
- (c) Gujarat
- (d) West Bengal

Answer: (c) Gujarat

12. Which of the following is NOT a millet mentioned in the chapter?

- (a) Bajra (Pearl millet)
- (b) Jowar (Sorghum)
- (c) Ragi (Finger millet)
- (d) Maida (Refined flour)

Answer: (d) Maida (Refined flour) — Maida is not a millet; it is refined wheat flour.

Case-Based Questions

Case Study 1: The Sari Across India

Riya is preparing a school project on Indian clothing. She learns that the sari, an unstitched length of cloth, is worn in most parts of India. It comes in hundreds of varieties — Banarasi silk from Varanasi, Kanjivaram from Tamil Nadu, Paithani from Maharashtra, Patan Patola from Gujarat, and Muga silk from Assam. Each type is different in fabric, weaving, design, and colour, yet they are all one garment — the sari. She also discovers that a stone relief from Vaishali in Bihar, dating back centuries BCE, shows a woman wearing a sari, proving its ancient origins.

1. Name any three famous types of saris and their regions.
2. How does the sari illustrate 'unity in diversity'?
3. What historical evidence shows the sari's ancient origins?
4. Why did England and France ban the import of Indian chintz?

Answers:

1. Three famous saris: (i) Banarasi — Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, (ii) Kanjivaram — Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, (iii) Paithani — Paithan, Maharashtra.
2. The sari illustrates unity in diversity because it is fundamentally one garment (unity) worn across India, but it comes in hundreds of varieties in terms of fabric, weaving, design, colour, and draping style (diversity).
3. A stone relief from Vaishali (in present-day Bihar), dating back a few centuries BCE, depicts a woman wearing a sari. This proves the sari has been part of Indian culture for over 2,000 years.
4. Indian printed cotton called 'chintz' became so popular in 17th-century Europe that European dress sales dropped sharply. To protect their own textile industry, England and France banned chintz imports from India.

Case Study 2: One Festival, Many Names

Arjun's family celebrates Makar Sankranti in Maharashtra by flying kites and exchanging tilgul (sesame-jaggery sweets). His friend Meera from Tamil Nadu celebrates Pongal around the same date by cooking sweet rice in a clay pot until it overflows. Another friend, Harpreet from Punjab, celebrates Lohri on January 13 with bonfires and dance. Arjun is surprised to learn that all these festivals happen around the same time — on or around January 14 — and are all connected to the harvest season.

1. Why are all these festivals celebrated around the same date?
2. Name the harvest festival as celebrated in Gujarat and Assam.
3. How does this example support the concept of 'unity in diversity'?
4. What does Makara Sankranti mark astronomically?

Answers:

1. All these festivals are celebrated around January 14 because they mark the same astronomical event — the sun's transit into Makara (Capricorn) — and the beginning of the harvest season across India. The agricultural cycle is shared by the whole country.
2. In Gujarat, the harvest festival is called **Uttarayan**. In Assam, it is called **Magh Bihu**.
3. This supports unity in diversity because the underlying occasion (harvest, sun's transit) is the same across India (unity), but each region celebrates it with different names, customs, foods, and rituals (diversity).
4. Makara Sankranti marks the sun's transit into the zodiac sign of Makara (Capricorn), signalling the end of the winter solstice period and the beginning of longer, warmer days.

Case Study 3: The Epics in Every Corner

Dr. Sharma, a folklore researcher, visits the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu and discovers a carved stone maintained by the Irula tribals called 'Pancha Pandavar', depicting the five Pandava brothers. The shrine commemorates the Pandavas' legendary passing through the area. She also learns that the Bhils, Gonds,











and Mundas have their own versions of the Mahabharata and Ramayana, transmitted orally through generations. A survey in Tamil Nadu alone counted about 100 folklore versions of the Mahabharata.

1. Who are the Irula tribals and what do they commemorate?
2. Name three tribal communities that have their own versions of the epics.
3. How many folklore versions of the Mahabharata were found in Tamil Nadu?
4. What does this widespread presence of epic stories tell us about India's cultural unity?


Answers:

1. The Irula tribals are a tribal community from the Nilgiris region of Tamil Nadu. They maintain a shrine containing a carved stone called 'Pancha Pandavar' that depicts the five Pandava brothers, commemorating the Pandavas' legendary visit to their area.
2. Three tribal communities with their own epic versions: (i) Bhils, (ii) Gonds, (iii) Mundas.
3. About **100 folklore versions** of the Mahabharata were found in Tamil Nadu alone.
4. The widespread presence of epic stories — from mainstream literary traditions to tribal folklore — tells us that the Ramayana and Mahabharata have created a dense web of cultural interactions across every corner of India. They serve as a shared cultural foundation that connects diverse communities, proving that India's cultural unity runs deep beneath its surface diversity.

Exam Tips — Score Full Marks

-  Memorise the key numbers: **1.4 billion, 18%, 4,635 communities, 325 languages, 25 scripts, 7,000 pages, 200 adaptations, 50+ languages, 100 folklore versions, January 14**
-  Always give **specific examples** when explaining unity in diversity — mention sari types, festival names, food grains, or tribal versions of epics
-  Know all **13 regional names** of the Makara Sankranti festival — this is a frequently asked question
-  Understand the difference between **cereals (rice, wheat, barley), millets (bajra, jowar, ragi), and pulses (various dals, rajma)**
-  Remember **Vincent Smith** (British historian who coined 'unity in diversity'), **K.S. Singh** (directed People of India project), and the quotations by **Tagore** and **Aurobindo**
-  For 5-mark answers, structure your response: **Define the concept** → **Give 2-3 examples** → **Conclude with the unifying principle**
-  The **chintz story** (Indian cotton so popular that England/France banned it) is a favourite case-study topic — know it well
-  Link the **Panchatantra** facts: 2,200 years old, Sanskrit original, animal fables, 200 adaptations, 50+ languages — these are high-scoring data points
-  For answers about epics, mention **both tribal and literary versions** to show comprehensive understanding
-  Practice writing about the sari as unity in diversity — cover fabric types, history (Vaishali relief), draping styles, and creative uses

UNIQUE STUDY POINT

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