

CHAPTER I

**CULTURAL IDENTITY:
A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

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CHAPTER - I

CULTURAL IDENTITY: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Culture and its Nature

Culture is an anthropological concept. It is derived directly from 18th century thought. The word 'culture' has a very broad meaning in anthropology. Sociologists and anthropologists have come to account for the concept of culture in a variety of ways. Culture, for early anthropology, was the common domain of the human; it distinguished our behaviour from that of other creatures and it provided a conceptual break in the dominant explanatory resource of biological and, latterly, genetic determinism. Culture is a familiar term with our tradition and can be employed to suggest holistic appraisals of the ways of life of a people, their beliefs, rituals and customs. It becomes intelligible as a general state of mind. It carries with it the idea of perfection, a goal or an aspiration of individual human achievement or emancipation. It invokes a state of intellectual or moral development in society. It is viewed as the collective body of arts and intellectual work within any one society. It is regarded as the whole way of life of a person. Mathew Arnold has defined culture in various ways. According to him: "It is sweetness and light, it is the best that has been thought and said, it is internal to the human mind and general to the whole community; it is a harmony of all the powers that make for the beauty and worth of human nature."¹

Culture predominantly meant refinement. Mathew Arnold, for example, considered culture to be a study of perfection, an inward condition of the mind and spirit. Cultural anthropologists have reworked these accepted concepts of culture to apply it not only to a learned and sophisticated few, but to all human beings. Culture has its own regulatory force which enables it to approve or disapprove of

certain forms of behaviour and way of life. It can control the nature of human relations and stabilizes them.

Abidi Hussain says: "Culture is a sense of ultimate value possessed by a particular society as expressed in its collective institutions, by its individual members in their depositions, feelings, attitudes and manners as well as in significant forms which they give to material objects."²

Clifford Geertz says that Culture is expressed by the external symbols that a society uses rather than being locked inside people's heads. He defined culture as "a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life."³

This implies that as human beings we are all supposed to be cultured. Culture in this sense has become a value free concept as opposed to the value-laden Arnoldian concept. Culture denotes the accumulated shared learning of a given group, covering behavioural, emotional and cognitive elements of the group's members total psychological functioning.

According to Tylor: "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."⁴

The term 'culture' has a complex, multifarious history and diverse range of meanings in contemporary discourses. Different anthropologists use it differently. 'Culture' covers the entire field of man's achievements. Culture encompasses all forms of art, recreation and language. Culture does not include only art, music, dance and drama but a whole way of life. In the words of Gurveen Kaur "The word 'culture' is used in two different ways. One could be called the 'thin' notion of culture and the other the 'thick' notion of culture. The 'thin' notion refers to the

style of dressing, cuisine, music, arts, dances and languages. The 'thick' notion is more comprehensive. It connotes a whole way of living the integrated web of ideas, values, traditions, customs and habits that give a community its distinctive life style."⁵

According to Laudin Harvey, "Culture is for man what water is for fish and air is for birds."⁶ William Raymond defines culture as "an individual habit of mind; the state of intellectual development of a whole society; the arts; and the whole way of life of a group of people".⁷ According to him, culture is a way of life which has its bearings not only on art and learning but also on institutions and ordinary behaviour.

According to Malinowski, "Culture is an instrumental reality, an apparatus for the satisfaction of the biological and derived need."⁸ He emphasizes on the biological aspects of culture and explains the biological characteristics of human behavior. Thus, the term 'culture' refers to a state of intellectual development or manners. The social and political forces that influence the growth of a human being are defined as 'culture'.

Culture is one of the most stimulating and motivating subjects of study in academic circles. It includes anthropology, history, literary studies, sociology and politics. Culture is a slippery but a comprehensive and inclusive term. It is not born or created but it evolves and grows. It is a way of life, a set of values beliefs and behaviours that makes one particular way of life distinguishable from another.

T. S. Eliot's opinion: "Culture means the way of life of a particular people living together in one place. That culture is made visible in their arts, in their social system, in their habits and customs and in their religion."⁹

According to Hofstede, culture is learned, not inherited. It derives from our social environment, not from our genes. He distinguishes culture from human nature based on the following reasoning: as a human being we can feel joy, fear,

anger, love, sadness, etc. All these feelings are part of human nature. However, the way these feelings are expressed is modified by culture. Culture is the software of mind. It is also distinguished from the personality of an individual. The latter is described as a unique personal set of mental programmes. A person always belongs to a number of the following levels, or indicators of identity, for instance: a national level according to one's country; a regional or ethnic or religious or linguistic affiliation; a gender level; a generation level; a social class level; and an organizational or corporate level for those who are employed.

Hofstede's five dimensions, on the basis of which cultures can be classified as follows:

1. Social inequality, including the relationship with authority.
2. The relationship between the individual and the group.
3. Concepts of masculinity and femininity; the social implications of having been born as a boy or a girl.
4. Ways of dealing with uncertainty, relating to the control of aggression and the expression of emotions.
5. A long term orientation in life versus a short term orientation.

Culture manifests in two ways: generic and local. Generic culture is an attribute of all human kind, an adaptive feature of our species on this planet for at least a million years or so. Generic culture directs attention to universal attributes of human behavior, to human culture. In contrast, local culture refers to those complex systems of meaning (encoded in symbols, schemas, and other sorts of cognitive representations) created, shared and transmitted by individuals in particular social groups. Local culture directs attention to diversity and difference. Most contemporary discussions of culture stress local sense, focusing on difference. Certainly this is the sense in which people usually connect culture to

conflict. But it is important to remember that culture also represents the generic or universalistic capabilities.

The term 'culture' refers to the language, beliefs, values and norms, customs, dress, diet, roles, knowledge and skills, and all the other things that people learn that make up the 'way of life' of any society. Culture is passed on from one generation to the next through the process of socialization. It plays an important role in one's life because it is a strong factor in shaping one's identity. Cultural identity is one's own sense of culture. It is the influence one gains by belonging to a certain group or culture. It also refers to the traditions, customs, and practices that affect a person.

Culture is universal in the sense that culture belongs to every society. Every group of people has and lives its own culture as its particular point of arrival in time and space, namely as its specific historical and geographical heritage, or as the answer to its past and present experiences. Culture consists of systems of meanings, of ideologies, of conventional knowledge, and of the cognitive and unconscious structures that are recognized in society at various levels of consciousness and verbal expression. Culture is a complex, abstract, and pervasive matrix of social elements that functions as an all-encompassing form or pattern of life by laying out a predictable world in which an individual is firmly oriented. From the instance of birth, a child is formally and informally taught how to behave. Children, regardless of their culture quickly learn how to behave in a manner that is acceptable to adults. Within each culture, therefore, there is no need to expend energy deciding what an event means or how to respond to it. The assumption is that people who share a common culture can usually be counted on to behave correctly and predictably. Culture provides us the rules that govern our actions. It provides human beings with a structure of action, behavior and responses. It may be argued that the primary mode of human beings of biological adaptation is

culture not anatomy. Culture is not inherently there in the human beings but it needs to be acquired later on and it is a long term process that begins from the state of infancy. From infancy on, members of a culture learn their patterns of behavior and ways of thinking until they have become internalized. The power and influence of these behavior and perception can be seen in the ways in which we acquire culture. Our culture learning proceeds with interactions, observations, and limitations.

As with communication, culture is ongoing and subject to rise and fall; culture seldom remains constant. As ideas and products involve within a culture they can produce change through the mechanism of invention and diffusion. Change also occurs through diffusion or borrowing from another culture. Change in culture affects only the surface structure of the culture. The deep structure resists major alteration. Visible change in dress, food, transportation, housing, and the like are simply attached to the existing cultural value system. Elements associated with the deep structure of the culture such as, values, ethics and morals, work and leisure, definitions of freedom, the importance of the past, religious practices, the pace of life and attitudes toward gender and age are very deep in the structure of a culture that they tend to persist generation after generation. Culture is like a complex system.

There are different types of cultures across the world and each culture has its unique essence. Culture is formed by many elements specific to a certain region or to people. It is insightful to know these elements that generate the culture of a particular place. Following are the elements of culture:

a) Language:

Various languages are essentially significant part of the culture.

b) Norms of Behaviour:

Every society or every civilization has a set of norms, which are an inseparable part, and an important element of the culture. This can include the folkways, mores, taboos and rituals in culture.

c) Values:

The social values of a particular civilization are also considered as an element of the culture. The values of a culture often refer to the things to be achieved or the things, which are considered of great worth or value in particular culture.

d) Religion and Belief:

The religion and belief of people in a civilization play an important role in shaping up of the culture as well.

e) Social Constructions:

Social collectives refer to the social groups, organizations, communities, institutions, classes, and societies, which are considered as symbolic social constructions,

f) Status and Social Roles:

This can include traditional gender-based or age based roles.

g) Cultural Integration:

This can include elements like sub-cultures, local-cultures and the difference between historical and cultural traditions.

Each culture has its own idea not only about what is important in the world but also about how people should act. This is the normative component of a culture, made up of its norms and values. Values are socially shared about what is good, desirable, or important. These shared ideas are usually the basis of a society's norms, social rules that specify how people should behave. Whereas norms are specific rules dictating how people should act in a particular situation,

values are the general ideas that support the norms. Violation of these norms is considered illegal or criminal acts, punishable under the law. In fact, all kinds of norms play an important role in controlling behaviour, and society has various methods of enforcing them. These enforcement measures are called sanctions, rewards for conforming to norms or punishments for violation of norms.

Culture is 'Realization of values'. Culture is one word of realization of values in theory and practice. Religion lends individuality to culture. Culture as a system consists of the natural self, the social self and the spiritual self. The passage through the natural to the spiritual characterizes the logical development of cultural consciousness.

Culture refers to the distinctive ways of life of such a group of people. Some kind of learned behaviour, which, in its specific aspects, is common to a group of people, transmitted by the older generation to its off spring, or transmitted in some portion by any member of one group to a member or members of another group is called "culture". It is a way of thinking, feeling, believing. It is the knowledge stored up (in memories of men, in books and objects) for future use patterns of doing certain things in certain ways, not the doing of them. Culture is one facet of human life. It is that which is learned by people as the result of belonging to some particular groups and is that part of learned behaviour which is shared with others. It is the main factor which permits us to live together in a society, giving us ready-made solutions to our problems, helping us to predict the behaviour of others, and permitting others to know what to expect of us. Ruth Benedict said, "What really binds men together is their culture – the ideas and the standards they have in common".¹⁰

Culture consists of a pattern, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of

culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning influences upon further action.

Literature and Culture:

Culture and literature are mutually related. Literature is more than a realistic depiction of human life. Literature embodies social, cultural and universal values which can affect human life in various ways. Literary creation has its roots in various social spheres such as language, economics, politics, race, ethnicity, class, caste, gender and culture. A text is an organic unity of socio-cultural relations, racial differences, religious ideologies, caste- class conflicts, gender biases, etc.

As a movement multiculturalism seeks to underscore the value of distinctly different ethnic, racial and cultural communities which cannot be allowed to melt into a common culture. It subsumes within it a lot of human differences which primarily include race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, occupation, socio-economic status, age and gender. As a social theory, it is relevant to all people representing various backgrounds.

Indian society is composed of people belonging to a variety of religions, sects, castes and tribes. The growth of castes, patriarchal practices and religious movements has occupied significant place in shaping Indian society in relation to national integration or disintegration and homogeneity or heterogeneity at all levels. Hinduism, a powerful religion has a caste system in which one's superior or inferior status is determined by birth. The dominance of Brahmans in the hierarchies of caste, gender and culture had been very powerful in pre-independent India. But apart from caste and religion, there have been a variety of factors that have divided people. After independence, we found a number of disintegrating factors beginning to demand their rights and cry for recognition. It is obvious that

the basis of Hinduism is the caste system, which is specially geared to preserve and promote 'upper' caste hegemony that is based on the systematic exploitation and oppression of the so-called 'lower' and subordinate classes. It poses an immense threat not just to the Muslims of the country, but also to the vast majority of the so called 'Dalit-Bahujans'. It is often believed that Hindutava preserves and promotes 'upper' caste rule and 'lower' caste slavery.

Identity involves a sense of belongingness of people to country, caste, class, religion, etc. It also relates to the culture and language which a group represents. India in the past was known as Vedic India, Buddhist India, and Hindu India and today we call it secular India. It shows that the identity of India was/is known by the religion, culture and language of her people. The issue of identity is not important to those who belong to the dominant culture, religion and society, but it is important to those who are 'broken' 'marginalized' and 'outsiders'. Each caste group has its distinct identity and diverse ways of life. Besides religion and caste as categories of grouping in Indian society, gender is also an important category. In the postmodern period, there is no country in the world where one can find an ethnically, racially and culturally homogeneous population. Due to globalization and modernization, the world has become a global village. As we know, India is a multicultural society, which is dissected on the basis of religion, caste and class.

Indian's culture is deeply rooted in an age-old ethos. It is a fascinating country, because of its diversity and multiplicity of languages, varieties of gods and goddesses, values and beliefs, customs, traditions and other religious practices.

The Concept of Cultural Identity:

The roots of the word 'identity' come from (late) Latin *identitas*. 'Identity' represents the idea of 'sameness' (from *idem*), parallel with the ideas of 'likeness' (*similitas*) and of unity (*unitas*). Identity, likeness, unity: this is a powerful trinity,

and its three terms easily blend into each other. In 1855 Herbert Spenser observed that resemblance when it exists in the highest degree of all is often called identity.

For Freud, identity rests on the child's assimilation of external people. The self is structured through the relationship of the ego, id and super-ego. Identity for Erikson is a process between the identity of the individual and the identity of the communal culture. It was Erikson who coined the phrase 'identity crisis' in the 1940s. At first, the term referred to a person who had lost a sense of 'personal sameness and historical continuity'.¹¹ Structuralist and post-structuralist questioning of the nature of self-identity, as found in the work of Lacan, Althusser and Foucault, may also be linked to an identity politics. The recognition that identity is not merely constructed, but depends upon some other, opens up the theoretical space for marginal or oppressed groups to challenge and re-negotiate the identities that have been forced upon them in the process of domination. Ethnic identities, gay and lesbian identities and female identities are thus brought into a process of political change. Identity points to an individual's link with the unique values, reared by a unique history of his people. The term identity expresses such a mutual relation in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (self-sameness) and a persistent sharing with some kind of essential character of others.

The concept of identity is an important one, as it is only through establishing our own identities and learning about the identities of other individuals and groups that we come to know what makes us similar to some people and different from others, and therefore form social connections with them. If people did not have an identity, they would lack the means of identifying with or relating to their peer group, to their neighbours, to the communities in which they lived or to the people they came across in their everyday lives. Identity therefore 'fits' individuals into the society in which they live. The identity of individuals and groups involves both elements of personal choice and the responses and attitudes of others. Individuals

are not free to adopt any identity they like, and factors like their social class, their ethnic group and their sex are likely to influence how others see them. The identity that an individual wants to assert and which he/she may wish others to see it having may not be the one that others accept or recognize.

Identity is a state of mind in which someone recognizes his/her character traits that leads to find out who he/she is and what he/she does and not that of someone else. In other words it's basically who you are and what you define yourself as being. Identity is formed into the "interaction" between the self and society. Identity bridges the gap between the "inside" and the "outside" between the personal and the public worlds. The fact that we project "ourselves" into these cultural identities, at the same time internalizing their meanings and values making them "part of us," helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world.

Identity becomes a "movable feast": formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. Within us are contradictory identifications that are continuously being shifted about. If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or "narrative of the self" about ourselves. The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy.

The identities are contradictory. They cross-cut or dislocated each other. The contradictions operated both "outside", the society, cutting across settled constituencies, and "inside" the heads of each individual.

The conservative philosopher Roger Scruton argues that:

"The condition of man [sic] requires that the individual, while he exists and acts as an autonomous being, does so only because he can first identify himself as something greater - as a member of a society, group, class, state or nation, of some

arrangement to which he may not attach a name, but which he recognizes instinctively as home.”¹²

National identities are strongly gendered. The meanings and values of “Englishness” have powerful masculine associations. Women play a secondary role as guardians of hearth, kith, and kin, and as “mothers” of the nation’s “sons”.

Lacanian psychoanalysis speaks - national identities continue to be represented as unified. One way of unifying them has been to represent them as the expression of the underlying culture of “one people”. Ethnicity is the term we give to cultural features - language, religion, custom, traditions, and feeling for “place” - which are shared by a people. National cultures help to “stitch up” differences in one identity.

Ethnic identity is a particularly important cultural identity because of the diversity in scope and the intensity for which it is communicated. Ethnic identity is identification with and perceived acceptance into a group with shared heritage and culture (Collier, 1986b). DeVos (1982) summarizes the difference between other general identities and ethnic identity by noting that Ethnic identity includes an emphasis on the past heritage and roots over present or future orientations.

In the modern world, the national cultures into which we are born are one of the principle sources of cultural identity. In defining ourselves we sometimes say we are English or welsh or Indian or Jamaican. National cultures are composed not only of cultural institutions, but of symbols and representations. A national culture is a discourse - a way of constructing meanings which influences and organizes both our actions and our conception of ourselves.

In psychology and sociology, identity is a person’s conception and expression of his/her individuality or group’s affiliations (such as national identity and cultural identity). Identity may be defined as the distinctive

characteristic belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group. Identity may be distinguished from identification; the former is a label, whereas the latter refers to the classifying act itself. However, the formation of one's identity occurs through one's identifications with significant others.

Erik Erikson (1902) became one of the earliest psychologists who took an explicit interest in identity. The Eriksonian framework rests upon a distinction among the psychological sense of continuity, known as the *ego identity* (sometimes identified simply as 'the self'); the personal idiosyncrasies that separate one person from the next, known as the personal identity; and the collection of social roles that a person might play, known as either the social identity or the cultural identity.

Anthropologists have most frequently employed the term 'identity' to refer to this idea of selfhood in a loosely Eriksonian way properties based on the uniqueness and individuality which makes a person distinct from others. Identity evoked more interest in anthropologists with the emergence of modern concerns with ethnicity and social movements in the 1970s. This was reinforced by an appreciation, following the trend in sociological thought, of the manner in which the individual is affected by and contributes to the overall social context. At the same time, the Eriksonian approach to identity remained in force, with the result that identity has continued until recently to be used in a largely socio-historical way to refer to qualities of sameness in relation to a person's connection to others and to a particular group of people.

We characterize intercultural communication as contact between persons who identify themselves as distinct from one another in cultural terms. We are concerned most with direct, person-to-person contact in which the operative cultural identities of interlocutors are revealed in discourse. Interlocutors may explicitly reveal cultural frames or may refer to, for example, homelands,

backgrounds, or communities. In a conversation, to the extent that persons relate to themselves and the other as members of different cultural groups, contact can be said to be intercultural. A continuum of cultural differences exists, but we are interested in contact in which the participants conduct themselves as if the other person is culturally different.

Cultural identity is dynamic and fluid because it is constituted and made in interaction, but it also has substance that is transmitted from generation to generation or from cultural group member to newcomer. A person's development of a cultural or minority identity occurs in a process over time. Minority identity is formed through contact with individuals from one's own group, as well as through contact with individuals from the dominant culture. At various stages of development, a person may recognize him or herself as a member of the dominant culture, at other stages may strongly proclaim membership in a minority culture and may openly criticize the dominant culture, and at still other stages take on a more pluralistic, and individual identity. Thus, the intensity with which the group member openly and explicitly defines himself or herself changes.

People, individuals and social group, differ in characteristics: sex, race, language, religion, history, moral values etc. The more the individual and collective self-perception level is consciously experienced, the more people are sensitive to cultural differences. Identification is based on differences, i.e. of one social and cultural group from others. Acute attention to differences leads to the separation of further identification characteristics. In turn, distance and separation causes a "deepening" of differences among individuals and groups. The differences may be of an anthropological (racial and ethnic), cultural, religious or political character. Cultural identity is much more; it is the freedom of a people writ large. It is the tradition they hold dear and the cumulative freedom which they pass on to new generations.

Various modern cultural studies and social theories have investigated cultural identity. In recent decades, a new form of identification has emerged which breaks down the understanding of the individual as a coherent whole subject into a collection of various cultural identifiers. These cultural identifiers may be the result of various conditions including: location, gender, race, history, nationality, language, sexuality, religious beliefs, ethnicity, aesthetics, and even food. As a “historical reservoir”, culture is an important factor of shaping identity. Some critics of cultural identity argue that the preservation of cultural identity, being based upon difference, is a divisive force in society, and that cosmopolitanism gives individuals a greater sense of shared citizenship. When considering practical association with international society, states may share an inherent part of their ‘Make up’ that gives common ground and an alternative means of identifying with each other. Nations provide the framework of culture identities called external cultural reality, which influences the unique internal cultural realities of the individuals within the nation.

Cultural identities are influenced by several different factors such as ones religion, ancestry, skin colour, language, class, education, profession, skill, family and political attitudes. These factors contribute to the development of one’s identity.

It is also possible and more fruitful to consider that a person’s identity had different dimensions that are real. On the one hand, identity can be said to have a personal or individual dimension. This dimension consists of how a person differs from other people and how he or she understands his or her individuality on the other hand, identity also contains a collective dimension. People need security, acceptance and shelter; and partly for this reason they identify with different groups and communities. These identifications come to form a central part of their cultural

identity. We can initially term the first dimension “a personal identity” and the second dimension “a cultural identity.”

It is useful to divide the cultural identity of a person or a group of different levels of dimensions. For example, we can speak about a local, regional, state-wide and continental (European, American, African) identity, and some people may even identify themselves with the whole globe.

In addition, Rien T. Segers and Reinhold Viehoff talk about the following dimensions in people’s cultural identity:

- a) A national, ethnic, religious and linguistic dimension.
- b) A dimension that is characterised by people’s behavior and self-definition and their roles in social life.
- c) A generation- specific dimension. Members of a single generation have same sorts of basic experiences of the world.
- d) People’s social positions. This dimension includes people’s family and kinship ties and their places in wider social hierarchies.
- e) An organizational- corporative dimension. This dimension is determined by people’s place in working life and by the co-operation network of their workplace.

All these dimensions affect people’s identity and their way of life. Thomas Hylland Eriksen writes, “Identity processes are fundamentally dual and comprise aspects of meaning as well as politics in a wide sense..... People are willing to die for their nation (or ethnic community) but not usually for their social class or city.”¹³ This Norwegian social anthropologist writes that concepts such as “ethnic group”, “ethnicity” and “ethnic conflict”, all of which belong together with “nationality” and cultural identity”. Eriksen presumes that these concepts in particular have been used in sociology, social anthropology, political science and history, but obviously they have also been important to other disciplines within the humanities and social sciences.

Cultural identity is a wider phenomenon than ethnic and national identity, which are subspecies of it. The concept of ethnicity usually refers to a group or community whose members believe that they descend from the same tribe or from the same ancestors: in brief, they stem from a common origin. Cultural identity is clearly linked to important other concepts such as ethnicity, nation and nation state. Adrian Hastings defines those terms. Hastings considers ethnicity to be a group of people with a shared cultural identity and spoken language. He correctly considers ethnicity to be the major distinctive element in a pre-national society, but ethnicity he adds “may survive as a strong subdivision with a loyalty of its own within established nations.”¹⁴ He says, a nation is a far more self-conscious community than an ethnicity. Then he gives a description of a nation-state: “... a state which identifies itself in terms of one specific nation whose people are not seen simply as ‘subjects’ of the sovereign but as a horizontally bonded society to whom the state in a sense belongs. There is an identity of character between state and people.”¹⁵

William Bloom (1990) offers an elegant summary of a current thinking, concluding that ... Identification is an inherent and unconscious behavioural imperative in all individuals. Individuals actively seek to identify in order to achieve psychological security, and they actively seek to maintain, protect and bolster identity in order to maintain and enhance this psychological security which is a sine qua non of personality stability and emotional well-being. This imperative works from infancy through adulthood and old age. Moreover, identifications can be shared, with the result that individuals who share the same identification will tend to act in concert in order to protect or enhance their shared identity.¹⁶ People tend to think that cultural identity is something stable.

The unity in diversity is a unique phenomenon in India. Being a large country with large population India presents endless varieties of physical features and cultural patterns. It is the land of many languages. It is only in India people

from all the major religions of the world can be found. In short, India is the epitome of the world. The vast population is composed of people having diverse creeds, customs and colours.

This diversity is also visible in the spheres of religion. The major religions of India are Hinduism (majority religion), Islam (largest minority religion), Sikhism, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism. India is a land where people of different religions and cultures live in harmony. This harmony is seen in the celebration of festivals. The message of love and brotherhood is expressed by all the religions and cultures of India. The religions of India celebrate different festivals and share their emotions that bring people together. People from the different religions and cultures of India, unite in a common chord of brotherhood and amity in this fascinating and diverse land. Religion plays a central and definitive role in the life of many of its people. Religion in India is characterized by a diversity of religious beliefs and practices. Throughout India's history, religion has been an important part of the country's culture.

The culture of India is the way of life of the people of India. India's languages, religions, dance, music, architecture, food, and customs differ from place to place within the country. This variety in race, culture, religion, etc. accounts for the existence of different ethnic groups who, although, live within the sanctums of one single nation, profess different social habits and characteristics.

Ethnicity is defined as a collectivity of people of a distinct nature in terms of race, descent and culture. Ethnic group denotes people who have common cultural, behavioural, linguistic, ritualistic, or religious traits. Thus, an ethnic group is a social collectivity having certain shared historicity and common attributes, such as race, tribe, language, religion, dress, diet, etc. A combination of them in a group makes it an ethnic group, which is perceived as such by its members and by members of other group.

Regional territories in India play an important role in differentiating these ethnic groups, with their own social and cultural identities. India is one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world, with some of the most deeply religious societies and cultures. People of different regions use different types of dresses. Their eating habits and customs are also quite different. Certain people are quite civilized while other is yet backward in their customs. Despite maintaining distinct identities several jatis, sects, and communities have organic links with other segments of the population of the region, which develops a cultural persona over time. In India different regions have their own distinct cultures. India is a vast country with great diversity of physical features. Certain parts in India are so fertile that they are counted amongst the most fertile regions of the world while others are so unproductive and barren that hardly anything can be grown there. The vast population of India consists of the jungle tribe (Hence Bhils, Kols, Santhals), the Greeks, the Sakas, the Kushanas, the Hunas, the Mongolians, the Arabs, the Turks, the Afghans etc. The physical features and color of the Indian people also differ from region to region- While the people of Kashmir are handsome and fair in complexion, these qualities are missing among the habitants of Assam.

The caste system in India is a system of social stratification which historically separated communities into thousands of endogamous hereditary groups called jatis, usually translated into English as “castes”. The jatis are thought of as being grouped into four varnas: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Each caste has its own rituals, rites, rules and customs. It can be seen in terms of linguistic, religious and other ethnic variations. The styles of life differ from region to region and vary even between different castes and religious groups within the same village.

There are three main classes - forward, backward and Dalit. Accordingly, the higher classes correspond with the higher castes and generally have access to better

and more numerous options than the other classes. India's class divide has long been characterised by a huge wealth divide between the upper and lower, with little in-between.

A race is a group of people with a set of distinctive physical features such as skin, colour, type of nose, form of hair etc. According to A.W. Green, a race is a large biological human grouping with a number of distinctive, inherited characteristics which vary within a certain range. The Indian sub-continent received a large number of migratory races mostly from the Western and the Eastern directions. Majority of the people of India are descendants of immigrants from across the Himalayas. Dr B.S Guha identifies the population of India into six main ethnic groups, namely (1) the Negrito (2) the Proto-Australoids, (3) the Mongoloids (4) the Mediterranean or Dravidian (5) the Western Brachycephals and (6) the Nordic. People belonging to these different racial stocks have little in common either in physical appearance or food habits.

In India, discriminatory attitude towards men and women have existed from generations and affect the lives of both genders. Although the constitution of India has granted men and women equal rights, gender disparity still remains. Traditionally in the Indian culture the gender roles are quite specific and very traditional. The women are supposed to take care of raising children and perform domestic works.

In brief cultural identity can be seen through different religions, castes, classes, races, ethnic differences and genders.

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