

CBSE Notes Class 6 Civics Chapter 1-Understanding Diversity

People are different from each other in many ways. Not just in looks, but they also belong to different regional, cultural or religious backgrounds. These differences enrich our lives in many ways. All these different people, who come from different backgrounds, and belong to all kinds of religions and cultures help to make India so interesting and diverse. What does diversity add to our lives? How did India become like this? Are all kinds of differences a part of diversity? Can diversity also be a part of unity?

Understanding Diversity

If three children of the same age are asked to draw human figures, every drawing will be different from each other. This is because everyone has a unique drawing style. Children not only do not look exactly like each other but also differ in terms of the language they speak, their cultural backgrounds, the religious rituals they observe and, of course, the way they draw! In the same way, if they are asked to fill in details about themselves, the answers would vary for each child. This helps students to recognize what they have in common with their classmates or how different they are from each other.

Making friends

How easy is it to make friends with someone who is very different? Given in the textbook is the example of two friends, who despite speaking different languages still communicated with each other, as it was important for them. They belonged to different religious and cultural backgrounds as well, emphasizing on the aspect of diversity. Apart from these differences, it can be seen that while one attended school, the other had to sell newspapers.

It is seen that some people may not have enough to eat or wear and sometimes not even a place to live. This is not just about differences but can be called an inequality. Inequality arises when a person does not have the resources and opportunities that are otherwise available to other persons. The caste system is another main example of inequality. Society is divided into different groups based on the work that people do and they were supposed to remain in those groups. For example, children of potters had to continue as potters. This was considered to be irreversible and for this reason, it was not considered necessary for the people to know anything more than was required for their profession. This encouraged inequality.

What does diversity add to our lives?

Imagine a world, where everything was the same. Other than the same two colours red and white, same food (maybe potatoes!), the same two animals, for example, the deer and the cat, and snakes and ladders, the same game, there was nothing different. There would be no diversity and it would be dull. Even the story writers will not have anything to write about, as most depend on ideas drawn from their experiences and real-life encounters to make stories more interesting and fun.

Diversity In India

India the land of many diversities include different languages, various types of food, different festivals, different religions and so on. At the same time, there are also many things that are similar.

How do we explain Diversity?

Sometime before 200 years ago, before the age of trains, aeroplane and bus or car, people used to travel by ships, on horses, on camels or on foot. They travelled in search of new places to settle in or people to trade with. At times, they stayed back at a place for a long time. Some others left their homes because of the scarcity of food caused by droughts and famine. Some made their home at the new places and gave rise to a mix of the old and new in their food, language, music, religion and so forth.

Various cultural influences help to shape life and culture in some regions that become very diverse because of their unique histories. In a similar way, 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. Eating habits and clothing of people differ in each of these regions. The kind of work they do is also different.

For example: Ladakh is a desert in the mountains in the eastern part of Jammu and Kashmir, where very little agriculture is possible as this region does not receive any rain and is covered in snow for a large part of the year. For drinking water, people depend on the melting snow during the summer months. People here keep sheep and goats. Goats produce pashmina wool, which is prized and the shawls made of this wool fetch a lot of money. People eat meat and milk products like cheese and butter. Each family owned some goats, cows and dzos (yak-cows). Meanwhile, the place also attracted traders despite being a desert. It was considered a good trade route as it had many passes through which caravans travelled to today's Tibet. These caravans carried textiles and spices, raw silk and carpets. Buddhism came to Tibet via Ladakh (also called Little Tibet). Islam was introduced in this region over 400 years ago and it has a significant Muslim population. 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 southwest corner of India 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, making this region an attractive place for traders (Jewish and Arab traders being the first to arrive). The Apostle of Christ, St. Thomas came here nearly 2000 years ago and 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 700 years ago, wrote a travelogue describing the lives of Muslims and said that they were a highly respected community. Portuguese discovered the sea route to India from Europe when Vasco da Gama landed with his ship. All these various historical influences resulted in people of Kerala practising different religions such as Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. The fishing nets called cheena-vala used here look exactly like the Chinese fishing nets. Even the utensil used for frying is called the cheenachatti. 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.

Kerala and Ladakh quite different in terms of their geographical features have a history with similar cultural influences. Both regions were influenced by Chinese and Arab traders. The geography of Kerala allowed for the cultivation of spices, while the special geographical location of Ladakh and its wool drew traders to these regions. Meanwhile, the influence of diverse cultures is not merely a thing of the past. Even present lives are all about moving from place to place for work and with each move, the cultural traditions and way of life slowly become part of the new place people reside in. Similarly, in their own neighbourhoods, people from several communities live close to each other. Daily lives are about the ways in which they can do things together and hear stories about each other's lives, customs and traditions.

Unity In Diversity

India's diversity is a source of its strength. Women and men from different cultural, religious and regional backgrounds came together to oppose British Rule in India. India's freedom movement involved thousands of people from different backgrounds. They worked together to decide joint actions, went to jail together, and found different ways to oppose the British. British thought to divide the Indians, because they were so different and then continued to rule them. However, the people showed how they could be different yet united in their battle against the British. There is also a song sung after the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre in Amritsar composed in memory of the brave people who were killed by a British General. The songs and symbols that emerged during the freedom struggle serve as a constant reminder of the Country's rich tradition and respect for diversity. The Indian flag was also used as a symbol of protest against the British. According to the Book, "The Discovery of India", by Jawaharlal Nehru, Indian unity is not 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.