

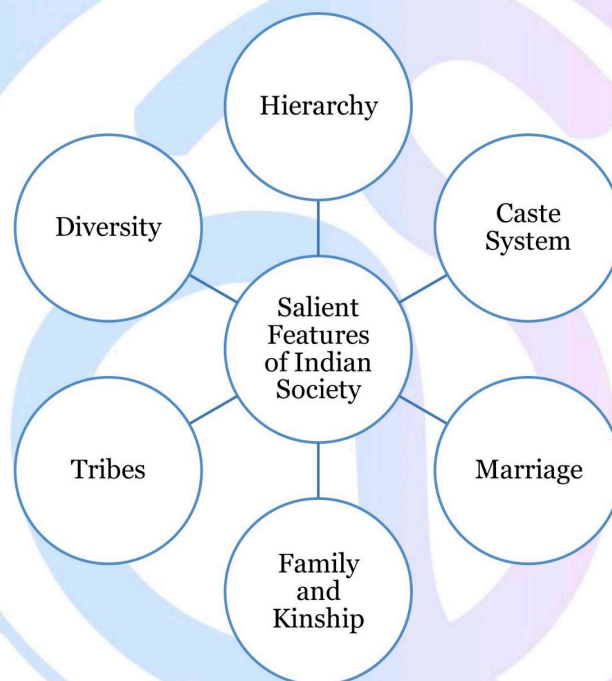
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SALIENT FEATURES OF INDIAN SOCIETY

Indian society is a pluralistic society with a complex social order characterized by a multitude of ethnic, linguistic, religious, and caste divisions. It comprises people living in rural, urban, tribal setting and all sections which carry the ethos of Indianness.

Amid the complexities and so much diversity among the nation, widely accepted cultural themes, the feeling of oneness, brotherhood, and values of constitution binds individuals and enhances social harmony and order.

After independence, several demands of the reorganization of states based on cultural similarity, linguistic identity, and others emerged from different parts of India. Though the government restructured various states and also formed new states, cultural units have been intact in India to this day. Indian society is an exemplification of multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-ideological constructs, which co-exist, at once striving to strike harmony and also to retain its individuality.



1. Hierarchy

- **Definition:** Division of society on various factors vertically. Unlike in other countries, Indian hierarchy is not about administrative hierarchy.
- **Types of hierarchy seen in India:**
 - **Age:** Members of the family shower enormous respect to the elders, due to their age and wisdom acquired during their life period.
 - **Example:** According to the Hindu tradition, when you touch the feet of an elder person, you are in turn blessed with knowledge, intellect, strength, and fame.
 - **Gender:** Indian society is largely a patriarchal society where men make all decisions in both society and their family unit. They hold all positions of power, authority and are considered superior.

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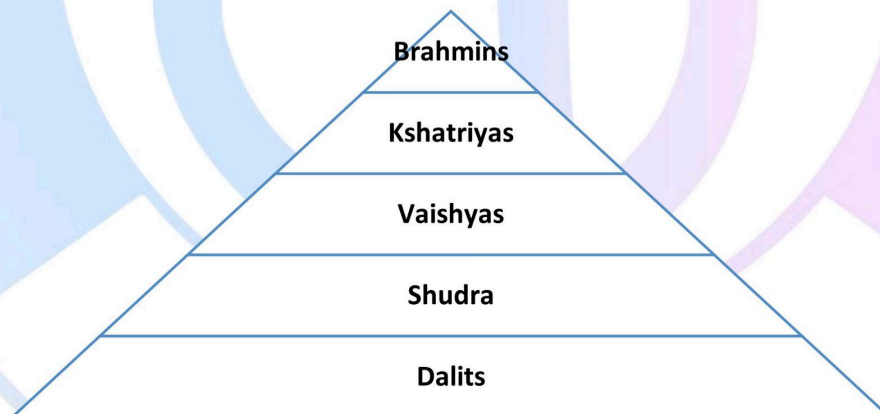
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- **Example:** Male child preference, cases of domestic violence, etc. Also, according to the estimates of the World Inequality Report 2022, in India, men earn 82% of the labor income whereas women earn 18% of it.
- **Language:** Our traditional languages have different vocabulary on the basis of age.
 - **Example:** In Hindi, if one wants to talk to elders or any other respected person, they use the word "aap," but in English, there is only one word "you" for both younger and elder persons.
- **Caste System:** Castes are rigid social groups characterized by hereditary transmission of lifestyle, occupation, and social status.
 - **Example:** Matrimonial ads reflect the still-followed caste system in Indian society.
- **Wealth and Power:** Individuals are also ranked according to their wealth and power.
 - **Example:** Some powerful people, or "big men," sit confidently on chairs, while "little men" come before them to make requests, either standing or squatting, not presuming to sit beside a man of high status as an equal.

2. Caste system

- **Origin of caste system**

- **Traditional theory:** Caste system is of divine origin and is an extension of the varna system, where the four varnas originated from the body of Lord Bramha.



- **Racial theory:** Rig Vedic literature stresses the differences between the Arya and non-Aryans (Dasa), in terms of their complexion, speech, religious practices, and physical features, which later developed into the caste system.
- **Political theory:** Caste system is a clever device invented by the Brahmins and Kshatriyas in order to place themselves on the highest ladder of social hierarchy.
- **Occupational theory:** The origin of the caste system can be found in the nature and quality of social work performed by various groups of people. Those professions

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regarded as better and respectable made the persons who performed them superior to those engaged in "dirty" professions.

- **Example:** Lohar (blacksmith), Chamar (tanner), Teli (oil-pressers).
- **Religious Theory:** Social stratification originated on account of religious principles and customs. In ancient India, religion had a prominent place. The king was considered the image of God. The priest kings accorded different positions to different functional groups. The theory tried to explain the origin of caste system on the basis of prohibitions regarding sacramental food.
- **Evolutionary Theory:** Caste system did not come into existence all of a sudden or at a particular date, but it is the result of a long process of social evolution based on:
 - Hereditary occupations
 - The desire of the Brahmins to keep themselves pure
 - Lack of rigid unitary control of the state
 - Beliefs in reincarnation and the doctrine of Karma
 - Ideas of exclusive family, ancestor worship, and the sacramental meal
 - Clash of races, color prejudices, and conquest
 - Static nature of Hindu society
 - Geographical isolation of the Indian peninsula
 - Foreign invasions
 - Rural social structure

Features of caste system in India

- **Segmental division of society:** The society is divided into various small social groups called castes, in which the membership is determined by the consideration of birth.
 - **Example:** One can only become Brahmin by birth.
- **Endogamy:** The members of a caste or sub-caste should marry within their own caste or sub-caste.
 - **Example:** Pratiloma Marriage, Hypergamy Marriage, though mentioned in Vedic texts, were strictly prohibited in the Gupta period.
- **Hereditary status and occupation:** Megasthenes mentioned hereditary occupation as one of the two features of the caste system, the other being endogamy.
- **Restriction on food and drink:** A caste would not accept cooked food from any other caste lower than itself in the social scale, due to the notion of becoming polluted.

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- **Example:** In North India, Brahmins would accept pakka food (cooked in ghee) only from some castes lower than their own. However, no individual would accept kachcha (cooked in water) food prepared by an inferior caste.
- **Concept of Purity and Pollution:** Higher castes claimed to have ritual, spiritual, and racial purity, which they maintained by keeping the lower castes away through the notion of pollution. Even the shadow of a lower-caste person was considered enough to pollute a higher caste man.
 - **Example:** This is where the notion of untouchability originated.
- **Restrictions on Interaction:** The members of one caste cannot mix or move freely with the members of other castes. This ban on interaction becomes even more rigid when it involves mixing a superior caste with an inferior one. Every caste abides by well-established customs and well-defined norms of interaction.
- **Marital Restrictions:** Caste endogamy is strictly enforced, where members of each caste marry only within their own caste. Inter-caste marriage is not only viewed with disfavor but is also highly resented and discouraged.
- **Jati Panchayat:** The status of each caste is carefully protected, not only by caste laws but also by the conventions through a governing body called Jati Panchayat.
 - **Example:** Kuldriya in Madhya Pradesh and Jokhila in South Rajasthan.

Functions of the caste system

- **Means of livelihood:** It has accommodated multiple communities by ensuring each of them a monopoly of a specific means of livelihood.
 - **Example:** The work of a goldsmith is done by sonar, blacksmith by lohar. This provides monopoly on work.
- **Social security:** It is the individual's caste that canalizes their choice in marriage, plays the roles of the state-club, the orphanage, and provides health insurance benefits and funeral.
 - **Example:** The responsibility of arranging marriages in India is among relatives and caste members. Also, relatives help in times of need.
- **Preservation of culture:** It has handed down the knowledge and skills of hereditary occupations from one generation to another, ensuring high productivity.
- **Teaches values and norms:** Caste plays a crucial role in the process of socialization by teaching individuals the culture, traditions, values, and norms of their society.
- **Trade unionism:** Caste acted as a trade union and protected its members from exploitation.
- **Promoted political stability:** As Kshatriyas were generally protected from political competition, conflict, and violence by the caste system.
- **Racial purity:** Maintained racial purity through endogamy.
- **Quality production:** Specialization led to quality production of goods and thus promoted economic development.

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- **Example:** Many handicraft items of India gained international recognition due to this.

Dysfunctions of the caste system

- **Restricts economic and intellectual advancement:** It keeps economic and intellectual opportunities confined to a certain section of the population only.
 - **Example:** We wouldn't have been able to get important personalities like Ambedkar if the caste system was strictly followed.
- **Undermines productivity:** It undermines labor efficiency and prevents perfect mobility of labor, capital, and productive effort.
 - **Example:** The kalapani (crossing the seas) represents the proscription in Hinduism. According to this prohibition, crossing the seas to foreign lands causes the loss of one's social respectability as well as the corruption of one's cultural character and posterity.
- **Exploitation of women and "untouchables":** It has inflicted hardships through practices like denial of entry into temples, child marriage, prohibition of widow remarriage, and seclusion of women.
- **Discrimination:** The lower caste people face discrimination in various ways. They were not treated at par with upper caste people. They could not inter-dine or inter-mix with upper caste people.
- **Religious conversion:** Many people who faced discrimination and exploitation in the Hindu caste system chose to convert to other religions like Islam and Christianity, which further leads to religious hatred and enmity among various communities.
- **Undemocratic:** It opposes real democracy by giving a political monopoly to Kshatriyas in the past and acting as a vote bank in the present political scenario. There are political parties that solely represent a caste.
 - **Example:** BSP was formed by Kanshi Ram mainly to represent SC, ST, and OBC.
- **Disintegrating factor:** Caste conflicts are widely prevalent in politics, reservations in jobs and education, and inter-caste marriages, etc.
 - **Example:** Demand for Jat reservation, agitation by Patidar community.
- **Opposes modernization:** The caste system, by compelling an individual to act strictly in accordance with caste norms, stands in the way of modernization by opposing change.
- **Fall of Hinduism:** History has evidence that the evils of the caste system led to the fall of Hinduism and the birth of other religions. Those who faced discrimination in Hinduism due to its caste system chose to disregard it, which ultimately weakened and defamed Hinduism.

Dalit Movements in India

- **Republican Party of India, 1957:** It replaced the All India Scheduled Castes Federation and was formed to fight against the atrocities committed to Dalits and to spread the message of Lord Buddha.
- **Dalit Panther Movement, 1972:** Dalit youths fought for their civil rights and raised their voice against the unjust caste system. The movement contributed immensely towards Dalit literature. It made popular the term "Dalit," in preference to terms such as "Harijans" and "Untouchables."
- **Backward & Minorities Community Employees Federation:** It was established by Kanshiram in 1973, who emerged as a prominent leader of Dalits in 1970. The main objective of this organization was to uplift and empower Dalits.
- **Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti:** Established in 1981 by Kanshiram as a non-political agitation of BACEF. Its primary purpose was to raise awareness of Dalit issues. Its constituents

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were unemployed Dalits, engineers, and lawyers who could provide leadership and spread awareness among Dalits.

- **Bahujan Samaj Party, 1984:** It was founded by Kanshi Ram and stressed education for women, fighting against dowry by warning people, including Dalits, not to take dowry.
- **Bhim Army:** Founded by lawyer Chandrashekhar Azad for Dalit emancipation through education.

Dynamics of Dalit Movement

- **Sanskritization:** Some Dalit leaders followed the process of Sanskritization to elevate themselves to a higher position in caste hierarchy. They tried to adopt established cultural norms and practices of the higher castes. Imitation of high-caste manners by Dalits was an assertion of their right to equality.
- **Adi-Hindu movement:** Treating Dalits as outside the fourfold Varna system and describing them as 'outcastes' or 'Panchama' gave rise to a movement called the Adi-Hindu movement.
- **Finding Sects:** As a protest against Hinduism, some Dalit leaders founded their own sects or religions.
 - **For example:** Guru Ghasi Das (MP) founded the Satnami Sect. Gurtichand Thakur (Bengal) founded Matua Sect. Ayyan Kali (Kerala) founded SJPY (Sadhu Jana Paripalan Yogam). Mangu Ram (Punjab) founded Adi Dharam.
- **Ambedkar's activism:** Attempts were also made to organize Dalits politically in order to fight against socio-economic problems.
 - **Example:** He tried to abolish the exploitative Khoti system prevailing in the Konkan part of Maharashtra, and the Vetti system (a wage-free hereditary service to the caste Hindus in the local administration).

3. Marriage

- **Definition:** Marriage is a social, religious, or legal contract between one/more male & one/more female for the purpose of procreation and psychophysical needs.
- **Structural and functional changes in the marriage system:**
 1. **Purpose of marriage:** In traditional societies, the primary objective of marriage is 'dharma' or duty, especially among Hindus. But today, the modern objective of marriage is more related to 'life-long companionship' between husband and wife.
 2. **Form of marriage:** Traditional forms of marriages like polygamy and polygyny are legally prohibited in India. Nowadays, mostly monogamous marriages are practiced.
 3. **Age of marriage:** According to legal standards, the marriageable age for boys and girls stands at 21 and 18, respectively. The average age of marriage has gone up, and pre-puberty marriages have given way to post-puberty marriages.
 4. **Changes in the form of marriage:** Traditional forms of marriages like polygamy and polygyny are legally prohibited in India. Nowadays, mostly monogamous marriages are practiced.

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5. **Changes in the aim and purpose of marriage:** In traditional societies, the primary objective of marriage is 'dharma' or duty, but today, the modern objective of marriage is more related to 'life-long companionship' between husband and wife.
6. **Divorce and desertion rates:** Relaxed legislative provisions for divorce have virtually affected the stability of marriage, particularly in urban areas due to economic prosperity and internet connectivity.
7. **Live-in relationships:** They are on a steady growth rate in India, especially among the youth in metropolitan cities, and got legal recognition in 2010 when the Supreme Court held that living together comes under the right to life and liberty (Article 21).
8. **Preference to neolocal:** Patrilocal, where a couple settles in the husband's home or community, is changing to neolocal, where a couple resides separately from both the husband's natal household and the wife's natal household.
9. **Same-sex marriage:** Though same-sex marriages are not legally recognized in India, nor are same-sex couples offered limited rights such as a civil union or domestic partnership, hearings on several petitions are ongoing.

4. Kinship and family

- **Changes in the family:**
 - **Structural Changes:**
 - **Nuclear family:** The kinship-based, extended or joint families have been increasingly replaced by nuclear households, leading to fundamental alterations in long-standing interpersonal relationships.
 - **Egalitarian:** An egalitarian relationship is one in which the benefits, duties, and obligations are equally shared by its members, unlike a patriarchal system where women were considered the primary caregivers.
- **Neolocal family:** Neolocal residence occurs when a newly married couple establishes their home independent of both sets of relatives.
 - **Children:** Children are increasingly considered to be an economic liability rather than an economic asset, as in traditional culture. It causes fertility rates to drop as the societies become richer and modern.
 - **Functional Changes - Shift from unit of production to unit of consumption:** Family now performs only essential functions such as food, shelter, clothing, etc., while other functions such as education, health, etc., are outsourced to various institutions like schools, hospitals, old age homes, etc.

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Difference and similarities between family structure of South India and North India

North India	South India
Patrilineal (lines of descent from a person's male ancestors)	Patrilineal/Matrilineal
Patrilocal (couple settles in the husband's home or community)	Patrilocal/Matrilocal
Village Exogamy	No Village Exogamy
Descriptive Kinship terminologies	Classificatory Kinship terminologies
- Example: Chacha, Tau, Phupha, Mause refers to Uncle	- Example: Maamaa is used for forms of uncles
Bride takes a lower position compared to groom	Bride takes a lower position compared to groom
Unidirectional flow of gifts	Bidirectional flow of gifts

5. Tribes in India

- **Definition:** Tribes have been classified as a group of people with a little background who were entitled to have a common name, language, and territory, tied by strong kinship bonds, practicing endogamy, distinct customs, rituals, and beliefs, simple social rank, and political organization, with common ownership of resources and technology.
- **Statistics:** There are about 705 Scheduled Tribes in the country, constituting 8.6% of the population, according to the 2011 census.
- **Geographical classification:**
 - **Himalayan region:** Gaddi, Jaunsari, Naga, etc.
 - **Middle India:** Munda, Santal, etc.
 - **Western India:** Bhil, Grasia, etc.
 - **South Indian region:** Toda, Chenchu, etc.
 - **Islands region:** Jarawas in Bay of Bengal, Aminidivi in Arabian Sea.

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- **Features of tribes in India:**
 - **Definite common topography:** Tribal people live within a definite topography, and it is a common place for all members of a particular tribe occupying that region.
 - **Dependence on land:** In the absence of a common but definite living place, the tribals will lose other characteristics of a tribal life.
 - **For example:** Soligas, a forest-dwelling indigenous community in Karnataka, depend on forest land near them.
- **Sense of unity:** Sense of unity is an invariable necessity for a true tribal life. The very existence of a tribe depends on the tribal's sense of unity during times of peace and war.
 - **For example:** Unity among tribal people can be seen in tribal revolts against Britishers.
- **Endogamous group:** Tribal people generally do not marry outside their tribe, and marriage within the tribe is highly appreciated and much applauded.
- **Common dialect:** Members of a tribe exchange their views in a common dialect, which further strengthens their sense of unity.
 - **For example:** Santali, which was already included in the Eighth Schedule, is one among them.
- **Ties of blood-relationship:** Blood relation is the greatest bond and the most powerful force, inculcating a sense of unity among the tribals.
- **Protection awareness:** Tribal people always need protection from intrusion and infiltration, and for this, a single political authority is established, with all powers vested in this authority.
- **Distinct political organization:** The whole political authority lies in the hands of a tribal chief. In some tribes, tribal committees exist to help the tribal chief discharge his functions in the tribe's interests.
- **Common culture:** The common culture of a tribe springs from the sense of unity, common language, common religion, and common political organization, producing a life of homogeneity among the tribals.
- **Egalitarian values:** There are no institutionalized inequalities like the caste system or sex-based inequalities. Thus, men and women enjoyed equal status and freedom.
 - **For example:** The sex ratio of the tribal population in the country is higher than the national average at 990 females per 1,000 males.
- **Rudimentary type of religion:** Tribes believe in certain myths and a rudimentary type of religion.

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Issues faced by the tribes in India

- **Loss of control over natural resources:** With the advent of industrialization in India and the discovery of mineral and other resources in tribal-inhabited areas, these pockets were thrown open to outsiders, and state control replaced tribal control.
 - **For example:** In Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha, dams, mines, industrial development, and others account for the displacement of over 21 million 'development'-induced Internally Displaced Persons. Of these, Adivasi communities, constituting about 40%, are the worst affected.
- **Loss of ownership rights over land:** With the concepts of protected forests and national forests gaining currency, the tribals felt uprooted from their cultural moorings and had no secure means of livelihood.
- **Lack of education:** Tribal superstitions, prejudices, extreme poverty, nomadic lifestyles, and lack of interest in alien subjects taught through an unfamiliar language, as well as a lack of suitable teachers, contribute to this.
 - **For example:** As per Census 2011, the literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes (STs) was 59%, whereas the overall literacy rate was 73% at the all-India level.
- **Displacement:** Acquisition of tribal land by the government for mining and infrastructure projects led to large-scale displacement of the tribal population.
 - **For example:** Tribal pockets of the Chotanagpur region, Orissa, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh.
- **Rehabilitation:** No settlements were provided for the displaced tribals within industrial areas, who were forced to live in peripheries in slums or migrate to adjoining states to work as unskilled workers under conditions of poverty.
- **Problems of health and nutrition:** They face health problems such as the prevalence of diseases like malaria, cholera, tuberculosis, diarrhea, jaundice, iron deficiency, and anemia, with high infant mortality rates and low levels of life expectancy.
- **Erosion of identity:** Traditional institutions and laws of tribals are coming into conflict with modern institutions, creating apprehension among the tribals about preserving their identity.
- **Bonded labourers:** In some places, tribals have been made to serve as bonded laborers in return for their loans from moneylenders.
 - **For example:** The Doms and Koltas in U.P., in Rajasthan this is known as the Sagri system, in Andhra the Vetti system, in Orissa the gothi, in Karnataka the jetha, and in M.P. the naukrinama.

6. Sect

A sect is a group of people with somewhat different beliefs from those of a larger group, which may be related to caste, region, or religion. In recent times, the term "sect" has also been used to describe any religious group that has broken away from an established religion and is guided by its own set of doctrines.

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Salience of sect in Indian society vis-à-vis caste

- **Abiding by certain values:** Caste in Indian society is a main division, but 'sect' is a further sub-division that adheres to certain values.
 - **Example:** Brahmins as a caste are sub-divided into sects of Brahmins from Northern and Southern India.
- **Unique identity among caste:** A unique identity of a particular sect among the caste leads to a further division of society.
 - **Example:** Brahmins of Bengal being a separate entity are further sub-divided into paschatya vaidikas, Barendras, etc.
- **Water-tight compartments:** Sects are seen as water-tight compartments, which also prevent exogamy in the name of beliefs and values.
 - **Example:** Sudras being in the lower state of the Varna system are sub-divided into clean and unclean Sudras based on their work.
- **Political identity:** Owing to rising socio-economic status, various sub-castes in India are asserting their dominance in political and social sectors.
 - **Example:** Gujjar, Jats, Patidhar, etc.
- **Belonging to a greater group:** 'Sect' among the caste is seen as a unifying factor, but with a feeling of union to a greater group.
 - **Example:** All castes of the chaturvarna system are seen as belonging to the religion of Hinduism as a whole.

Salience of Sect in Indian society vis-a-vis region

- **Geographically selected culture:** Sect in a region is linked with both geography and culture of the area.
 - **Example:** The Shaikh are a Muslim community found in the northern Indian states. There are four main sections in Shaikh, i.e., Siddiqi, Farooq, Usmani, Abbasi. In the plains, we see warriors of Sikh, Maratha, Gujjara, Gurkha, etc.
- **Beyond boundaries:** Regional differences or diversity is confined to a particular extent, but sectarian diversities go beyond these.
 - **Example:** Lingayats of Karnataka are a prominent sect spread in Maharashtra too.
- **Create sectarian boundaries:** The Indian political map would be significantly different from the cultural map, especially with respect to sectarian divisions.
 - **Example:** India can be politically sub-divided into a number of regions where sects like Lingayat, Veerashaivas of Karnataka are popular. The prominent sects in Maharashtra are the Nath Sect, Datta Sect, Varkari Sect, and Samartha Sect.

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- **Unifying factors:** India can be united based on sect where geographical boundaries separate differing people.
 - **Example:** The Shakti sect of Hinduism is prevalent from Kashmir to Tamil Nadu.

Saliency of sect in Indian society vis-a-vis religion

- **A clear sub-division:** A sect in a religion is seen as a clear sub-division, following its own belief system.
 - **Example:** Anandmargis in Bengal.
- **Stricter division:** Religion can accommodate various sects, but a sect is always different and specific to a single value and culture.
 - **Example:** The Shakti sect is prominent in Hinduism and does not accommodate any other gods.
- **Stronger force:** Sect is seen as more powerful than religion due to people following it strictly as a cult.
 - **Example:** Despite opposed feelings regarding many sects, people follow it tremendously, leading to a cult form of worship.
- **A core belief system:** A sect has a separate and unique core belief system, being part of a larger religion.
 - **Example:** Shaivism, which worships God Shiva, has Veerashaivism, which is radical and believes in equality with no priests mediating between God and devotee.

For many centuries, the people of India have shown strength in creating manageable order from complexity, bringing together widely disparate groups in structured efforts to benefit the wider society, encouraging harmony among people with divergent interests. Knowing that close relatives and friends can rely upon each other, allocating different tasks to those with different skills, and striving to do what is morally right in the eyes of the divine and the community—these are some of the great strengths on which Indian society can rely as it seeks to meet the challenges of the future.