Chapter 8: Unity in Diversity, or Many in the One

Questions — Questions, Activities and Projects

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

SOLUTION

The chapter opens with two quotations about unity in diversity.

Tagore: 'Oh, grant me my prayer, that I may never lose the bliss of the touch of the one in the play of the many.'
Tagore sees the many forms of life and culture as a joyful 'play', and within that play he seeks to feel the one underlying spirit. For India, this means celebrating every language, festival, and tradition while recognising the shared humanity and values beneath them.

Aurobindo: 'The principle of unity in diversity which has always been normal to [India]... the Many in the One, would place her on the sure foundation of her Swabhava and Swadharma.'
Aurobindo says that unity in diversity is not new for India — it is India's natural way of being. Swabhava means one's true nature; Swadharma means one's true duty. He argues that accepting this principle strengthens, rather than divides, the nation.

Both quotations agree: India's many differences do not weaken it — they express a deeper oneness.

Answer: Tagore sees the 'many' as a joyful play of life, within which he seeks the 'one' underlying spirit. Aurobindo says unity in diversity is India's natural and historic way — the Many in the One is the foundation of her true nature (Swabhava) and duty (Swadharma). Both agree that India's diversity expresses a deeper unity, not division.

Q2 Select a few stories from the Panchatantra and discuss how their message is still valid today. Do you know of any similar stories from your region?

SOLUTION

The Panchatantra is an ancient Sanskrit collection of animal stories (at least 2,200 years old) that teaches life skills and moral values.

Example story: 'The Lion and the Mouse' — A small mouse saves a mighty lion

caught in a hunter's net. Message: Even the weak can help the strong; never look down on anyone. This is still valid — in daily life, a small act of kindness can make a big difference.

Example story: 'The Crow and the Pitcher' — A thirsty crow drops pebbles into a pitcher to raise the water level. Message: Use your intelligence and patience to solve problems. Still valid today in problem-solving.

Similar stories exist in every Indian region — folk tales of clever animals or humble heroes who teach the same values. (Students should share a story from their own region in class discussion.)

Answer: The Panchatantra teaches timeless values through animal stories. For example, 'The Lion and the Mouse' shows that even the weak can help the strong — still true today. Similar folk tales exist in every Indian language and region, showing the same values in local settings. (Share a story from your region in discussion.)

Q3 Collect a few folk tales from your region and discuss their message.

SOLUTION

Folk tales are traditional stories passed down orally in a community. Every region of India has its own rich collection.

Model example — 'Tenali Rama' stories (South India): Tenali Rama, a clever court poet, uses wit to solve problems and teach lessons about honesty, humility, and intelligence.

Model example — 'Birbal' stories (North India): Akbar's wise minister Birbal solves riddles with common sense, teaching that wisdom matters more than power.

Common messages in folk tales: be honest, help the poor, do not be greedy, use your mind over brute force.

Students should collect 2-3 folk tales from their own family or community elders and share them in class. Note what value each story teaches.

Answer: Folk tales carry moral lessons of a community. For example, Tenali Rama tales (South India) celebrate wit and honesty; Birbal tales (North India) praise common sense. Students should collect stories from local elders and discuss the values they teach — these often match the Panchatantra's universal messages.

Q4 Is there any ancient story that you have seen being depicted through a form of art? It could be a sculpture, a painting, a dance performance, a movie. Discuss with your classmates.

SOLUTION

Ancient stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata have been depicted through many art forms across India for centuries.

Examples:
Sculpture: The Ramayana scenes are carved on the walls of temples like Hampi (Karnataka) and Angkor Wat (Cambodia) — showing Rama, Sita, Hanuman, and Ravana.
Painting: Miniature paintings from Himachal Pradesh (18th century) depict Ramayana episodes — the chapter shows one such painting in Fig. 8.6.
Dance: Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, and Chhau dance performances often retell stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata.
Movie: The TV serial 'Ramayana' (1987, directed by Ramanand Sagar) is a famous modern retelling watched by millions.

Students should share what they have personally seen — a temple carving, a dance show, a film, or a painting — and describe the story it depicted.

Answer: Ancient stories appear in many art forms. Ramayana scenes are carved on temple walls (Hampi, Angkor Wat), painted in Himachal Pradesh miniatures, performed in Kathakali dance, and retold in films like the 1987 TV serial 'Ramayana'. Students should share any sculpture, painting, dance, or movie they have seen depicting an ancient story.

Q5 Discuss in class the following quotation by India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, when he travelled to many parts of India before Independence: "Everywhere I found a cultural background which had exerted a powerful influence on their lives. ... The old epics of India, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and other books, in popular translations and paraphrases, were widely known among the masses, and every incident and story and moral in them was engraved on the popular mind and gave a richness and content to it. Illiterate villagers would know hundreds of verses by heart and their conversation would be full of references to them or to some story with a moral, enshrined in some old classic."

SOLUTION

Nehru travelled across India before Independence and was struck by how deeply the Ramayana and Mahabharata had shaped the lives of ordinary people.

Key observations from the quotation:
Even illiterate villagers could recite hundreds of verses from the epics by heart.
People's everyday conversation was full of stories and moral lessons from these texts.
This cultural background was shared across regions and communities — rich or poor, educated or not.

What this tells us: The two epics created a shared cultural world across India. Despite differences in language, region, and background, people from Assam to Kerala knew the same stories. This is a powerful example of unity in diversity — one set of stories, countless local versions, one shared spirit.

Nehru's observation also shows that culture is not only for the educated — folk retellings and oral traditions carried these epics to every village.

Answer: Nehru found that even illiterate villagers across India could recite hundreds of verses from the Ramayana and Mahabharata by heart, and daily conversation was full of their stories and morals. This shows that the two epics created a shared cultural world across India despite regional differences — a strong example of unity in diversity.