Indian Institute of Advanced Study

Rashtripati Nivas, Shimla – 171005

Three-day National Seminar

On

Diversity and National Integration: Addressing Contemporary Challenges

(18th-20th November 2026)

Theme-Note

The idea of national integration has primarily been understood in terms of the political unity and territorial integrity of a state. Such unity and integrity are undoubtedly fundamental, particularly in a country as geographically, socially and culturally diverse as India. However, the meaning of integration cannot be exhausted by the capacity to hold together states and regions within a common political and constitutional framework. It must also concern the conditions under which individuals and communities, despite differences of language, culture, region and social location, come to experience themselves as equal participants in a shared national identity. National integration is, therefore, as much an economic and social process as it is a political one; as much about everyday interaction and cultural recognition as about institutions and constitutional arrangements. India's plurality has historically required a continual negotiation between unity and difference, one in which the constitutional protections extended to linguistic and religious minorities, the reorganisation of states along linguistic lines, and the framework of affirmative action for historically disadvantaged groups have all represented attempts to translate formal equality into a more substantive experience of participation. The continuing evolution and contestation of these arrangements reflect the changing circumstances through which this relationship between unity and difference has had to be renegotiated, an effort to widen the substantive conditions of participation and belonging rather than a task completed at the founding. The challenge, therefore, has not simply been to preserve diversity, but to ensure that difference does not become a basis for exclusion, hierarchy or estrangement. Integration, in this sense, is concerned with creating the conditions under which diversity can coexist with social cohesion. This challenge acquires new dimensions in contemporary India. Economic and demographic transformation, uneven regional development, large-scale internal migration, expanding educational opportunity and digital connectivity are reshaping patterns of interaction, identity and aspiration at a much faster pace. These transformations create new possibilities for mobility, participation and exchange, while also raising sharper questions about who benefits from economic mobility and

who is displaced by it, whose language and cultural idiom organise public institutions, and whether expanding access to education and digital platforms is narrowing or deepening existing inequalities of voice and representation. Integration, then, is continually shaped and reshaped by the extent to which people participate in shared institutions and economic life, and encounter and understand one another across social and cultural difference. The question, therefore, is how a society can transform diversity into a source of collective strength while ensuring that a shared national identity remains compatible with the plurality of identities that constitute its social life. It is this broader and more fundamental understanding of integration, encompassing economic, social and cultural dimensions alongside political and constitutional ones, that forms the subject of this seminar. Addressing the contemporary challenges to integration requires examining how India's economic transformation, educational and institutional structures, and evolving public sphere are shaping the ways in which diversity is experienced, whether as a shared strength or as a continuing challenge to social cohesion. It is this broad and consequential question, across its many empirical and theoretical dimensions, that the seminar invites scholars, policy practitioners and independent subject experts to examine.

Rationale and Significance

This proposed seminar is designed to connect India's extensive civilizational heritage with current efforts toward social cohesion and effective governance. History and the Constitution provide a guiding framework within which the Indian experience regarding how unity can be maintained without sacrificing diversity should be placed.

The Indian civilization is strong not because of uniformity, but because it has the power to synthesize differences. Through Vedic times into the modern republic, Indian society faced and integrated an endless variety of streams of cultural and religious influences-Persian, Greek, Central Asian, Mughal, and European-while retaining its moral and philosophical distinctiveness. Core concepts like dharma, anekāntavāda, and sarva dharma sambhava have long served to make Indian society absorb diversity while sustaining coherence. The result is a composite culture, capable of transformation without rupture.

It is this philosophy of integration through plurality that the Constitution of India, framed by rigorous debate and foresight, has upheld. From the Constituent Assembly deliberations on secularism, minority rights, and linguistic autonomy comes a vision of its framers: unity rooted in justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. The "constitutional morality" espoused by Dr B.R. Ambedkar, which invokes ethical citizenship beyond legality, is of great relevance for contemporary nation-building. Yet, successive amendments and practices have spurred an

ongoing debate on whether the secular architecture of India ensures genuine equality or strengthens asymmetries between communities.

The recent spate of communal incidents and the rise of identity politics urgently require sober, evidence-driven inquiry, not rhetorical polarization. Similarly, caste hierarchies continue to dent the promise of equality under the Constitution. Linguistic and regional disputes-whether over the three-language formula or fiscal federalism-call for a nuanced understanding rather than zero-sum competition. Equally, the digital ecosystems have created new spaces for integration as well as division that call for new regulatory, ethical, and educational responses.

Finally, the cultural pride that comes with civic nationalism invites scholars to consider how heritage and modernity-along with inclusivity changing in India. Programs like Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat point to an institutional recognition that national integration has an emotive and a cultural dimension. In such a scholarship, one would explain exactly how shared cultural identity and constitutional values reinforce yet do not exclude each other.

Given this tradition of interdisciplinarity, the IIAS is the ideal forum for such conversations. Being intellectually independent and academically sophisticated, it is uniquely qualified to take on frontier questions in history, philosophy, politics, and culture.

1. Historical-civilizational dimensions: cultural synthesis, dharmic pluralism, and the living continuity of Indian civilization.
2. Constitutional Vision and Debates: Framers' Perspectives on Secularism, Diversity, and Constitutional Morality
3. Secularism and Equality in Practice: Reconciling “equal respect for all religions” with differential legal treatment across communities.
4. Federalism and Linguistic Accommodation: Reconciling national integration with regional and linguistic autonomy.
5. Caste and Social Justice: Challenging Persistent Hierarchies with Affirmative Action and Institutional Reform.
6. Regional and Economic Imbalances: With a view to reducing developmental imbalances through cooperative federal policies.
7. Digital and Media Ecosystems: Understanding the Dual Potential of Social Media for Cohesion and Conflict
8. Cultural and Educational Pathways: This includes bringing Indian knowledge systems into mainstream education and ethical education.

Participants and Methodology

It will bring together approximately 20-30 participants comprising well-known scholars, constitutional experts, policy actors, and civil society leaders. The format combines the presentation of papers with panel discussions and roundtable discussions. Case studies, empirical research, and cross-regional comparisons form the core of deliberations.

It is the negotiation between tradition and modernity, identity, and citizenship through respectful deliberation - and not assimilation or confrontation - that is the pathway to national integration in a plural democracy such as India. A seminar proposed here is aimed at fostering such a dialogue rooted in the civilizational ethos of India and informed by constitutional morality.

Linking historical continuity to the concerns of contemporary scholarship will, therefore, reaffirm the intellectual and ethical base of an inclusive India, drawing its strength from its diversity and unity into a common destiny.

4. **Aims and objectives**

The seminar aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

Overview

It shall review the roots of India's unity and diversity from a historical-philosophical perspective.

Read major constitutional debates relating to secularism, minority rights, federalism, and linguistic autonomy and bring out their relevance to the contemporary period.

Present findings on modern challenges: communaliism, caste hierarchies, regional inequality, and digital polarization, based on empirical research.

• Constitutional morality as part of the ethos that shall guide just majority-minority and national-regional interests.

Assessment of policies on integration in the field of education, economics, and culture, that is, Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat, among others.

• Evidence-based, actionable policy recommendations in support of true equality, cooperative federalism, and informed digital citizenship.

The outputs of the seminar are:

• A peer-reviewed edited collection of research papers and key interventions on national integration.

• A policy brief with actionable recommendations that contribute toward social cohesion.

• Collaborative academic networks of historians, jurists, social scientists and educators

• Teaching resources for university courses on Indian polity, society, and culture.

• Engaging with the wider public through lectures, op-eds, and outreach projects that bridge the gap between academia and civil society.

5. Significance of the seminar- How it will create new knowledge or contribute to the discipline

This seminar addresses a critical juncture in India's civilizational journey where the forces of globalization, westernization, and ideological confusion threaten to sever the cultural roots that have sustained national unity for millennia. The urgency stems from multiple converging crises: an alarming 84% surge in communal violence during 2024, the persistent challenge of pseudo-secularism that privileges certain communities while discriminating against the majority, and the systematic deracination of Indian youth through educational curricula that glorify external narratives while marginalizing indigenous knowledge systems. The seminar's significance lies in its potential to reclaim and articulate India's civilizational consciousness as the authentic foundation for national integration, moving beyond the failed framework of distorted secularism that has deepened rather than bridged communal divides. By examining how ancient values of dharma, shared sacred geography, and spiritual unity have historically prevented India's fragmentation despite invasions and colonial rule, this scholarly engagement offers pathways to contemporary cohesion rooted in cultural pride rather than imposed uniformity. The location at IIAS, Shimla—an institution committed to exploring questions of deep human significance through interdisciplinary inquiry—provides the ideal neutral academic space for rigorous examination of these sensitive issues. At a time when external forces seek to exploit internal divisions and separatist ideologies threaten territorial integrity, this seminar's contribution to understanding how cultural nationalism can strengthen rather than weaken pluralistic democracy becomes not merely academic but essential for national survival and resurgence. The expected outcomes—scholarly publications, policy recommendations, educational reforms, and a research network committed to Bharatiya perspectives—will equip India with the intellectual resources necessary to navigate the challenges of maintaining unity while celebrating diversity, ensuring that the nation's ancient wisdom informs its modern trajectory toward becoming a strong, confident, and culturally integrated Vishwaguru.

6. Conference outline, including sessions: The seminar will be organized around the following thematic sessions:

1. Political Representation and Democratic Participation
2. Media, Technology and the Political Economy of Information
3. Demography, Migration and the Evolving Nature of Citizenry

4. Growth, Federalism and Regional Development

5. Political Economy of Public Institutions

6. Human Capital and State Capacity

7. Education and Development

8. Pathways Forward: Policy and Practice

Call for Papers

A limited number of scholars of repute are invited for the IIAS Seminar. Those interested in participating (through online mode) should send (preferably by email) an abstract (300 words) of the proposed paper in English along with their C.V. (One page) directly to Convenors **Dr. Bhanu Pratap Singh** Email: bhanupratap2401@gmail.com and **copy to the Academic Resource Officer, Indian institute of Advanced Study, Shimla on his Email** seminar@iias.ac.in Tel: 0177-2831385

The abstract should clearly state the objectives, methodology, and relevance of the proposed paper including 4–6 keywords. The last date for submission of abstracts and one page CV is **05th November 2026 by 05:00 PM**. The Institute intends to send Invitation letters to selected participants (Virtual mode) by the 10th November, 2026. It is the policy of the Institute to publish the papers not proceedings of the seminars it organizes. Hence, all invited participants will be expected to submit complete papers (in English), hitherto unpublished and original, with citations in place, along with a reference section, to the Convener and copy to the Academic Resource Officer, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla– 171005 by 15th November, 2026.

Guidelines for submission

Font- Times New Roman
Font Size- 12
Paragraph spacing- 1.5

Bibliographical References

- Bibliographical references should be in a consistent style. For detailed instructions we refer to either of the following 3 books: *The Chicago Manual of Style, Hart's Rules*, or Butcher's *Copy-editing.* Please cross-check references to see that each reference makes sense and matches the relevant bit in the main text.

Books

- Single Author
  Chaudhuri, Amit, *Afternoon Raag*, London: Heinemann, 1993. p72.

  Surname, First name, *Title of Book*, Place of Publication: Publisher, (date) and page.

- Multiple Authors
  Basu, Tapan, Pradip Datta, Sumit Sarkar, Tanika Sarkar, and Sambuddha Sen, *Khaki Shorts Saffron Flags (Tracts for the Times/1)*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1993 and page.

Surname of first Author, First name of first Author and First name of second Author, Surname of second Author etc., *Title of Book*, Place of Publication: Publisher, (date) and page.

Edited Volume

- Single author
  George, K.M. (ed.), *Modern Indian Literature: An Anthology, Plays and Prose*, Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994 and page.

- Multiple authors
  Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Empire Writes Back* [1989], London and New York: Routledge, 1995 and page.

Translated Volume

- Kemal, Yasher (trans. from Turkish by Thilda Kemal), *The Wind form the Plain* [1960], London: Harvill Press, 1989 and page.

Paper in Edited Volume

- Single Author and Single Editor
  Masselos, J.C., 'The Khojas of Bombay: The Defining of Formal Membership Criteria During the Nineteenth Century', in *Caste and Social Stratification among the Muslims*, Imtiaz Ahmad (ed.), Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1973.

  Surname, First name of Author, 'Title of Paper', in *Title of Book*, First name of Editor Surname of Editor (ed.), Place of Publication: Publisher, (date) and page.

- Single Authors and Multiple Editors
  Salomon, C., 'The cosmogonic riddles of Lalan Faqir', in *Gender, Genre and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions*, A. Appadurai, F. Korom, and M. Mills (eds), Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991 and page.

  Surname of Author, First name of Author, 'Title of Paper', in *Title of Book*, First name of first Editor Surname of first Editor and First name of second Editor Surname of second Editor (eds), Place of Publication: Publisher, (date) and page.

Paper in Journal

- Single Author
  Bouiller, V., 'The Nepalese State and Gorakhnathi Yogis: The Case of the Former Kingdoms of Dang Valley, 18th-19th Centuries', *Contribution to Nepalese Studies*, 20 (1), 1993, pp. 29-52.

  Surname, first name, 'Title of Paper', *Name of Journal*, Volume number (Issue number), (date), pp. 000-0.

- Multiple Authors
  Murty, M. N. and R. Ray, 'A Computational Procedure for Calculating Optimal Commodity Taxes with Illustrative Evidence from Indian Budget Data', *Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 91(4), 1989, pp.655-70.

Surname of first Author, First name of first Author and First name of second Author Surname of second Author, 'Title of Paper', *Name of Journal*, Volume number (Issue number), (date), pp. 000-0.

Paper in Edited Journal

- Single author
  Gaborieau, Marc, 'Life-Cycle Ceremonies among Converted Muslims in Nepal and Northern India', in Islam in Asia, Yohanan Friedmann (ed.), vol. I, *South Asia*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1984 and page.

Unpublished Papers/Mimeographs/Discussion Papers/Working Papers

Chander, P. and L. Wide, 'Corruption and Tax Compliance', mimeo, New Delhi: Indian Statistical Institute, 1989.

Surname of first Author, First name of first Author and First name of second Author Surname of second Author (1991), 'Title of Paper', mimeo, Place: Organization, (date).

Newspaper: Author's Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Name of Newspaper* (City and Province/State of Publication, if not Included in Name), Date of Publication. https://doi.org/DOI Number or Name of Database.

Website/URL:

With author:

- Author Last Name, First Name. "Page Title." *Website Name*, Month Day, Year. URL.
- Example: Schallhorn, Cathlyn. "Chicago." *Britannica*, December 17, 2021. https://www.britannica.com/place/Chicago
- Full Note: First Name Last Name, "Page Title," *Website Name*, Month Day, Year, URL.
  - Example: 1. Jack Caulfield, "A Step-by-Step Guide to the Writing Process," *Scribbr*, April 24, 2020, https://www.scribbr.com/academic-writing/writing-process/

If there is no author or date:

- Bibliography: "Title of Page." *Website Name*, accessed Month Day, Year. URL.
  - Example: "About the UvA." University of Amsterdam, accessed July 24, 2018. http://www.uva.nl/en/about-the-uva
- Full Note: "Title of Page," *Website Name*, accessed Month Day, Year, URL.
  - Example: 1. "Catholic News Agency," accessed March 25, 2025, https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/

Citing blog posts and blogs

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from the titles, the word blog may be added in parentheses after the title of the blog. Blog posts can often be cited in...2. William Germano, “Futurist Shock,” Lingua Franca (blog), Chronicle of Higher Education, February 15, 2017, https://www...

News sites and blogs

- News sites and blogs Titles of news websites and blogs, like the titles of newspapers and other...along with the title. Titles of articles and blog posts should be placed in quotation marks (untitled posts...Wasted Food; “Food Waste Stump Speech,” in Wasted Food, a blog by Jonathan Bloom Huff Post; “The Best and Worst...

Titles for websites, blogs, and social media

- Titles for websites, blogs, and social media Whether they are mentioned in the text or...quotation marks) may be used for generic or descriptive titles. Blogs are treated like periodicals, their titles set in italics...Merriam-Webster.com CMOS Shop Talk; the Shop Talk blog YouTube.

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