



## The Psychology of National Integration: A Study in the Context of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'

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### Abstract

The present article postulates the concept of National Integration as transcending mere geographical delineations, establishing it as a complex 'Psycho-Social Construct'. Drawing upon the tenets of 'Gestalt Psychology' specifically the maxim that *"the whole is greater than the sum of its parts"* this study argues that India represents a unified 'Collective Consciousness' rather than a mere conglomeration of states. The primary objective of this inquiry is to evaluate the Government of India's flagship initiative, 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' (EBSB), within the theoretical underpinnings of social psychology, specifically utilizing Henri Tajfel's 'Social Identity Theory' and Gordon Allport's 'Contact Hypothesis'.

This article critically analyzes the psychological dichotomy existing between the prevalent 'Micro-Identity' (Regional) and the 'Macro-Identity' (National) within the Indian context. The research suggests that EBSB functions as a potent 'Behavior Modification Intervention'. Through mechanisms such as Commensality (shared dining) and cross-cultural dialogue, the initiative catalyzes 'Cognitive Restructuring' within the citizenry. This process facilitates the 'Recategorization' of group boundaries on the individual's mental landscape, effectively dissolving the *"In-group vs. Out-group"* ("Us vs. Them") binary and reinforcing a 'Common Ingroup Identity' ("We-ness"). Conclusively, the study asserts that for the sustenance of national integrity, the 'Internalization' of values and ethos is far more paramount than constitutional unification, thereby fostering the creation of a 'Psychologically Resilient' society.

**Keywords:** National Integration, Psycho-Social Analysis, Social Identity, Cognitive Dissonance, Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat, Behavior Modification, Cultural Intelligence (CQ).

### Introduction

In a conventional sense, a 'Nation' is often perceived merely as geographical boundaries delineated on a map. However, when viewed through the lens of psychology, a nation is not a tangible physical entity, but rather a 'Psychological Reality' constructed within the minds of its citizens. The 'Gestalt Theory' in psychology posits that *"the whole is greater than the sum of its parts."* Applying this axiom to the Indian context, India is not merely an aggregate of 28 states and 8 Union Territories; rather, it is a monolithic cultural consciousness. Nonetheless, a fundamental limitation of the human psyche is its reliance on 'Categorization' to comprehend complexity. Our cognitive faculties are predisposed to bifurcate individuals into 'Ingroup' (Us) and 'Outgroup' (Them) to simplify the processing of social information.



In a nation characterized by such profound cultural plurality as India, there exists a persistent apprehension that an individual's 'Micro-Identity'—rooted in language, caste, or region—might supersede their 'Macro-Identity', i.e., their nationality. When an individual asserts their identity as "exclusively Gujarati" or "exclusively Bengali" prior to acknowledging their identity as "Indian," it precipitates a fissure of 'Psychological Division'.

In this context, Carl Jung's concept of the 'Collective Unconscious' assumes significant relevance. While India may appear heterogeneous on the surface, a unified undercurrent of values, beliefs, and ethos permeates our social unconscious. The fundamental psychological objective of the 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' (EBSB) initiative is to transmute this 'Unconscious Unity' into 'Conscious Behavior'. It aims to expand the citizenry's 'Mental Map', ensuring that the vast expanse from Kashmir to Kanyakumari is perceived not as alien territory, but as an integral extension of the 'Self'.

## Psychological Analysis of National Integration

To comprehend the intricate process of national integration, it is imperative to conduct an in-depth analysis of two fundamental psychological pillars governing human behavior: 'Social Identity' and 'Cognitive Processes'.

### 1. Social Identity and In-group Dynamics

According to the 'Social Identity Theory' (SIT) propounded by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, an individual defines their self-concept through membership in social groups such as caste, language, or state. In the Indian context, a 'Multi-layered Identity' is prevalent. A psychological conflict emerges when one's 'Regional Identity' enters into a competitive dynamic with their 'National Identity'.

In this regard, Gaertner and Dovidio's 'Common Ingroup Identity Model' is highly pertinent. This model posits that the most effective strategy for prejudice reduction is the 'Recategorization' of group boundaries. The 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' (EBSB) initiative functions precisely on this psychological mechanism. It transforms the divisive conceptualization of "*Gujarati vs. Marathi*" (Us vs. Them) into a superordinate group conceptualization of "*We are Indians*" (We). In this process, the regional identity is not obliterated but is effectively subsumed within the overarching national identity.

### 2. Stereotypes and Cognitive Restructuring

Our cognitive apparatus often harbors specific 'Cognitive Schemas' or 'Stereotypes' regarding individuals from other states. For instance, generalizations such as "*people of this state are lethargic*" or "*people of that state are aggressive*" are common. These preconceived notions are frequently grounded in the 'Availability Heuristic', mental shortcuts based on limited information or hearsay.



From a psychological perspective, inter-state exchange programs like EBSB induce 'Cognitive Dissonance'. When a student discovers through empirical experience that their prior beliefs were erroneous, 'Cognitive Restructuring' occurs within their psyche. In accordance with Leon Festinger's theory, this influx of new information dismantles archaic prejudices and constructs a new, realistic, and positive understanding. Consequently, national integration transcends being merely an emotional upsurge and evolves into a rational psychological comprehension.

## **'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat': An Applied Tool for Behavior Modification and Social Bonding**

From a psychological standpoint, national sentiment cannot be cultivated solely through intellectual discourse; it originates from experiential realization and behavioral manifestation. We can contextualize the 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' (EBSB) campaign as a significant 'Behavior Modification Intervention' within the realm of social psychology. This initiative simultaneously influences the three core components of human behavior: the Cognitive (Thinking), the Affective (Feeling), and the Conative (Acting).

### **(A) The Psychology of Commensality: Bridging the Gap from 'Food' to 'Psyche'**

Indian culture has historically emphasized the removal of '*Panktibhed*' (social distinction in dining rows), and EBSB integrates this ethos with modern psychological principles. Psychological research substantiates that the act of eating together in a group—known as Commensality—triggers the release of 'bonding hormones' such as Oxytocin and Endorphins in the brain.

When a student from Gujarat sits with a peer from Telangana to partake in '*Hyderabadi Biryani*' or '*Sarva Pindi*', they are not merely savoring a flavor; rather, within their Unconscious Mind, they are dismantling the 'Neophobia' (fear of the new) associated with that culture. This process dissolves the feeling of alienation and establishes a foundation of mutual Trust.

### **(B) Language as an Affective Bridge**

Language is not merely a medium of communication but a vehicle of emotion. According to Psycholinguistics, even the utterance of a few words in another's mother tongue generates a profound sense of 'In-group' belonging in the listener's mind.

Under the aegis of EBSB, when individuals acquire common phrases of a partner state's language, the 'Psychological Distance' between the two communities diminishes significantly. The linguistic bridge constructed between "*Kem Cho?*" and "*Vadkkam*" transports two strangers onto a shared emotional platform, fostering interpersonal resonance.



## (C) Cultural Exchange as 'Exposure Therapy'

Often, our prejudices against other regions stem from the 'Fear of the Unknown' (Xenophobia). In Clinical Psychology, 'Exposure Therapy' is utilized to eliminate phobias. The youth exchange programs under EBSB function as a form of 'Social Exposure Therapy'. When the youth empirically observe the lifestyle, art, and struggles of another state, the negative Stereotypes harbored in their minds are shattered. This direct exposure replaces archaic misconceptions with 'Realistic Understanding' and 'Respect', thereby curing the social pathology of regional bias.

## Psychological Impediments and Remediation in the Path of National Integration

In the architecture of nation-building, psychological distance constitutes a more formidable barrier than geographical separation. From a psychological perspective, the root cause of disintegration lies in the mindset of 'Ethnocentrism'. This is a 'Cognitive Distortion' wherein an individual perceives their own culture or region as the 'gold standard' and views others as inferior or 'deviant'.

In the current digital era, social media platforms function as 'Echo Chambers', which exacerbate this phenomenon by reinforcing 'Confirmation Bias'. This implies that individuals selectively accept information that validates their regional prejudices while systematically rejecting contradictory evidence. For instance, if a North Indian individual accepts stereotypes regarding South Indian culture as absolute truth, it creates a cognitive blockade against authentic dialogue.

**Psychological Solution and the Role of EBSB:** To dismantle these mental complexes, mere 'Tolerance' is insufficient; there is a pressing need to cultivate 'Cultural Intelligence' (CQ).

- **Cognitive Restructuring:** Programs conducted under the aegis of EBSB in educational institutions effectively challenge the concept of 'Otherness' embedded in the student's mind. When a student acquires the language or sings the folk songs of another state, it fosters new understanding at the **neural level**, effectively rewiring the brain to accept diversity.
- **Contact and Equality:** According to psychologist **Gordon Allport**, prejudice can only be eradicated when contact occurs on a platform of 'Equal Status'. EBSB provides precisely this egalitarian platform, where no culture is deemed 'superior' or 'inferior'; rather, every culture is equally 'Indian'. This process gradually dissolves 'Regional Ego' and transmutes it into 'National Pride'.

## Conclusion

In the final analysis, as a scholar of psychology, it is imperative to assert that National Integration is not a static destination, but a continuous, Dynamic Psychological Process. While the Constitution provides the jurisprudential framework and the economy offers



material fortitude, it is the 'Collective Consciousness' that truly sustains the vital spirit of the nation.

The 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' initiative must not be perceived merely as a governmental administrative program; rather, it should be envisioned as a mechanism for the reconfiguration of the nation's 'Mental Map'. As long as the anguish of a youth in Kashmir does not find affective resonance with a youth in Kanyakumari, and until the identity of Gujarat is not seamlessly assimilated with the identity of Bengal, our psychological integration remains incomplete.

The India of the future cannot sustain its global standing solely by becoming an Economic Superpower; it must evolve into a 'Psychologically Resilient Society' to truly emerge as a 'Vishwa Guru'. To achieve this, we must utilize the mediums of education, literature, and art not merely to preach the ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', but to facilitate its deep 'Internalization' within the psyche of the youth. When diversity ceases to be a cause for division and transforms into a reason for celebration, only then will the psychology of a truly 'Shreshtha Bharat' be realized.

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