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Q7(c)

Elucidate the resurgence of ethno-nationalism from an anthropological lens.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · Anthropology GS 2 · 15 marks · Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization

1.1 Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization-Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic), Protohistoric (Indus Civilization). Pre-Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan cultures. Contributions of the tribal cultures to Indian civilization.

Core demand of the question

- Define ethno-nationalism anthropologically
- **Explain resurgence:** late twentieth and twenty-first century Indian and comparative cases
- Use Geertz, Barth, Brass, and Indian tribal/linguistic movements
- Keep the lens analytical, not a security pamphlet

Revision summary

Ethno-nationalism is the political claim of an ethnic people to a state or autonomy.

Geertz (primordial attachment), Barth (boundary) and Brass (elites) are the core lens.

Resurgence follows weakened class ideology, census-media numbers, resource conflicts and indigenous world talk.

Indian cases include Naga, Mizo, Bodo, Gorkha, Jharkhand, linguistic nativism and majoritarian fusion with religion.

It can defend language and land; it can also create inner minorities.

Introduction

Ethno-nationalism is the claim that a **people defined by ethnicity** - language, tribe, religion as descent, or a named history - **ought to have a state, or a state-like autonomy**. Anthropology treats it as a modern way of organising identity, not as a return to a tribal essence. Its resurgence is the return of that claim after a period when class, secular party or developmental nationalism seemed to dominate.

Body

The lens

Clifford Geertz (Old Societies and New States) described **primordial** attachments - blood, language, sacredness - that new states inherit. **Fredrik Barth** showed that ethnicity is a **boundary** maintained by contact, not a museum culture. **Paul Brass** and **instrumentalists** stress elites who convert culture into votes. **Walker Connor** called the nation a felt kinship. Indian material needs all three: feeling, boundary, and organisation.

Ethno-nationalism differs from **civic nationalism** (Constitution as membership) and from **religious fundamentalism** (scripture as law), though they can fuse (majoritarian Hindu

rashtra talk; Khalistan; some Islamist nationalisms). Tribal **ethno-nationalism** asks for a Jharkhand, a Nagalim, a Bodoland, or a **Sixth Schedule**, often without exiting India.

Why resurgence

After 1989, socialist class language weakened globally; **census, television and later social media** made ethnic numbers visible. In India, **Mandal**, Mandir, and the **reorganisation of states** (2000, 2014) taught that identity pays. **Insurgency and peace accords** in the North-East institutionalised ethnicity as a negotiating unit. **Global indigenous** discourse (UNDRIP, even without ILO 169 in India) gave ST movements a world vocabulary of peoples.

Economic liberalisation produced winners in some linguistic states and losers in tribal resource belts; **mining and dams** (Narmada, Niyamgiri, Jharkhand coal) ethnicised development conflict. Diasporas fund homeland parties. **COVID-19 and migration** revived "outsider" talk in cities and in Assam.

Indian illustrations

Naga nationalism is the longest; accords try to fit it inside the Union. **Mizo** ethno-nationalism became a state. **Bodo** and **Gorkha** movements seek councils or states. **Jharkhand** fused tribe and region. **Tamil, Telangana** and **Shiv Sena** nativism show that ethno-nationalism is not only tribal. **Khalistan** and **Kashmiri** nationalisms (distinct histories) show the hard edge. Majoritarian **Hindu nationalism is ethno-religious: it uses a civilisational majority rather than a small people, which is why Ghurye's** unity and **Ambedkar's** warning both remain relevant.

Resurgence does not mean every tribe wants a nation. Many want **PESA, FRA and dignity** inside the republic. Anthropology's task is to see when a cultural boundary becomes a **sovereignty claim**, and when the state answers with autonomy rather than only force.

Risks

Ethno-nationalism can protect a language. It can also **minoritise an inner other** (Muslims in a Hindu nation-talk; non-Bodos in BTR; Bru in Mizoram). **Barth's** boundary is always two-sided. A secular, liberal, democratic state (the next question's contrast) must allow cultural politics without letting blood define citizenship.

Flow diagram

Ethnic boundary -> Ethno-national claim
 Ethno-national claim -> Autonomy or secession
 Media numbers resources -> Ethno-national claim
 Inner minority -> Risk of exclusion

Conclusion

Ethno-nationalism is ethnicity organised as a claim to political sovereignty or autonomy. It has resurged because numbers, media, resource conflict and weak class language make peoplehood pay. In India it ranges from **Sixth Schedule** demands to majoritarian nation-talk. The anthropological question is who is enclosed as the people, and who is left outside the boundary.

Facts & figures

Barth 1969

Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: ethnicity is maintained at the border through contact, not by cultural isolation.

Geertz 1963

Primordial sentiments in new states: language, blood and sacredness as political facts.

UNDRIP 2007

Global indigenous-peoples language that some ST movements use; not the same as a ratified ILO 169 for India.

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