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Q7(c)

Explain the issue relating to ethnicity and sub-ethnicity

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2017 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Perspectives on the study of Indian society

Perspectives on the study of Indian society: Indology (G.S. Ghurye); Structural functionalism (M.N. Srinivas); Marxist sociology (A.R. Desai).

Core demand of the question

- Explain the issues relating to ethnicity and sub-ethnicity
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Ethnicity is a political people-hood of language, tribe, or origin.

Sub-ethnicity is the inner split of clan, caste, class, or sect.

Accords fail when umbrellas hide those splits.

Reservation and census freeze some names and omit others.

Treat ethnic labels as claims, not as single social structures.

Introduction

Ethnicity is a named people-hood of language, region, or origin used for honour and resources. Sub-ethnicity is the split inside that name: clan, sect, caste, or hill versus plain. Indian politics constantly climbs and splits these rungs.

Body**Ethnicity as a claim**

- In the north-east, 'Naga' or 'Mizo' can organise a nation-like demand against the Indian state.
- In plains politics, 'Yadav' or 'Maratha' can work as an ethnicised caste.
- G. S. Ghurye's tribe-as-Hindu thesis clashes with ethnic self-definition of Adivasi groups.

Sub-ethnicity as the inner issue

- A tribal umbrella hides dialect, clan, and religious conversion splits, which then break accords.
- **Caste ethnicity hides gotra and class:** creamy layer versus labourers.
- Kashmiri, Assamese, or Tamil identity contains Hindu-Muslim or caste sub-codes that riots and parties activate.

Issues that follow

- Who is the authentic native, and who is the migrant, as in Assam's citizenship fights.
- Reservation lists freeze some ethnic names and exclude others.
- Elite brokers speak for a people while sub-groups remain unseen.

- **Andre Beteille's caution:** do not treat a cultural name as a single structure of class and power.

Flow diagram

Ethnicity people-hood -> Claim on state

Sub-ethnicity clan caste sect -> Split of the claim

Ethnicity people-hood -> Sub-ethnicity clan caste sect

Conclusion

Ethnicity organises solidarity against outsiders. Sub-ethnicity organises inequality and fission inside. The issue for Indian sociology is how the state and parties freeze names, and how those names leak in daily life.

Facts & figures

Naga umbrella

An ethnic claim that contains tribe and church splits at the negotiating table.

Assam nativity

Ethnic politics that turns migrant versus indigenous into a citizenship issue.

Caste as ethnicity

Peasant castes speaking as a people in state politics.

Ghurye contrast

Assimilation into Hindu society versus ethnic Adivasi self-naming.

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