



Mains Practice Question

Q. What do you mean by ethnicity and how is it different from race? Discuss the characteristics of ethnicity. (150 words)

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Approach:

- Give a concise definition of Ethnicity.
- Establish the differences between Race and Ethnicity.
- Enumerate characteristics of Ethnicity.

Body:

- The word Ethnicity comes from the root word- ethnic which loosely means race. It is based on shared culture. People belonging to the same ethnic group believe in their common descent because of similarities related to physiology or culture or both.
- They need not always have the same religion or nationality. Ethnicity signifies self-consciousness of a group of people united or closely related by shared experiences such as language, religious belief, common heritage, etc.
- Ethnicity pertains to the word ethnic, which however is different from the race. The traditional definition of race and ethnicity is related to biological and sociological factors respectively.

Differences between race and ethnicity are:

- Race refers to a person's physical characteristics, such as bone structure, skin, hair, eye colour etc.
- Ethnicity, however, refers to cultural factors; including nationality, regional culture, ancestry, and language etc.
- While race usually denotes the attributes of a group, ethnic identity typifies the creative response of a group who consider themselves marginalised in society.

Some characteristics of ethnicity are

It relates to ascriptive identities like caste, language, religion, region etc.

- It is socially mobilised and territorially confined and has numerically sufficient population, and is a pool of symbols depicting distinctiveness.
- It has a reference group in relation to which/whom a sense of relative deprivation (real or imagined) is aggregated.
- Being left out of the developmental process or even being a victim of uneven development, ethnicity causes ethnic movements.
- It is manifested in Indian politics not merely due to grassroot discontent but it is also a creation of vested political interest.

Ethnic groups that use ethnicity to make demands in the political arena for alteration in their status, in their economic well-being, etc. are engaged very often in a form of interest group politics.

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