



Mains Practice Question

Q. In India, language is not only a reflection of the diversity of the country but is also the carrier of the caste system, cultural oppressions and societal inequalities. Comment. (250 words)

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Approach

- Mention about linguistic diversity of the country.
- Explain how it is carrier of caste system, cultural oppression and societal inequities.
- Conclude by mentioning about the constitutional principle of unity in diversity.

Introduction

UNESCO has recognized India as one of the most linguistically diverse countries, having 22 scheduled languages, hundreds of local languages and dialects.

However, social tension and conflicts arising from linguistic chauvinism have led to growth of divisive tendencies and present a major threat to the social fabric, economic development and survival of democracy in India.

Body

Linguistic diversity as a source of social strife

Caste system:

- Usage or prominence of a particular language often reflects the dominance of one community in the Indian society. For example, **sanskrit**, most of the times has been associated with the dominance of brahmanism in society. The idea of 'purer' forms of language and its distinction from 'dialects' propagates the influence of a particular caste or community which marginalises all the other 'impure' forms.

Cultural oppression:

- There is a **north-south divide** mainly due to attempts of imposition of Hindi as the link-language of India. This has roots in anti-Brahmanism Dravidian movements in South India, which opposed caste based society and Hindi was also seen as a language that perpetuates a 'backward' culture of caste and gender oppression.
- Masses speaking regional languages often face **discrimination** in terms of sharing of political power, employment, economic status, etc.
- People migrating from undeveloped regions to cities face discrimination because of unfamiliar language and customs.
- **Ethnic clashes and violence** emerge out of complexities of linguistic and ethnic politics, thereby **promoting regionalism**. For eg: riots in Assam in the early 1980s, Anti-Hindi riots in southern India by ethnic Dravidians in 1965, etc.

Societal inequalities

- Linguistic diversity along with regional developmental deficit creates social inequalities which tend to **produce social conflicts** among different caste groups. For example demands of reservation by Jaats, Maratha, Patels.
- While **English** is considered a language which is devoid of caste conscious vocabulary, it is also known as the language of educated elites and has created a new class divide. Majority of the jobs being created in India, particularly in the service sector are dominated by English language speakers.

Way Forward

- Government should be sensitive towards the people's aspirations. Any attempt of forceful imposition of any one language on masses should be refrained.
- Advanced technologies like Artificial Intelligence should be used to preserve and protect the languages under threat of extinction.
- Programme like **Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat** is a step in the right direction to promote unity in diversity.

Conclusion

The need today is to respect, protect and nurture the diversity of our nation so that unity is ensured. The problem needs to be addressed at societal level, in which the communities voluntarily engage in conservation of language diversity that is part of cultural wealth. Multilingual education should be acknowledged in education, administrative systems, cultural expression and even cyber space. Apart from this, it is also important to be aware of the hierarchical structures associated with the languages. The collective awareness can then create more sensitivity, bring more empathy towards linguistic differences and play an important role in unifying the country against the cultural oppression, casteism and social inequalities.

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