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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Explain the term cultural relativism and associated problems with it.

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Approach

- Start the answer by briefly defining what is cultural relativism
- Discuss the significance of cultural relativism.
- Discuss the various issues associated with it.
- Conclude Suitably.

Introduction

Cultural relativism is the ability to understand a culture on its own terms and not to make judgments using the standards of one's own culture. Using the perspective of cultural relativism leads to the view that no one culture is superior to another culture when compared to systems of morality, law, politics, etc.

Body

Significance of Cultural Relativism

- It is a concept that cultural norms and values derive their meaning within a specific social context.
- This is also based on the idea that there is no absolute standard of good or evil, therefore every decision and judgment of what is right and wrong is individually decided in each society.
- The concept of cultural relativism also means that any opinion on ethics is subject to the perspective of each person within their particular culture.
- In a holistic understanding of the term cultural relativism, it tries to promote the understanding of cultural practices that are unfamiliar to other cultures.
- Increasing knowledge of cultural diversity in the world has created doubts about objective morality.
- This led cultural relativists to conclude that there are no moral standards that transcend culture and by which the standards of a culture can be judged

Associated problems With Cultural Relativism

Cultural relativism leads to many unacceptable implications. For Example:

- A culture may try to marginalize or decimate a minority. It cannot be justified on the ground that it is admissible within that society's ethos.
- It propagates the idea that differences should be settled by the majority and as an accepted feature of the culture.
- If slavery or infanticide is practiced in a culture, it can be regarded as failing to measure up to the universal standard of morality.

Conclusion

Cultural relativism presents the challenge to ethics as universal standards of right or wrong, as it comes from the claim that moral judgments are relative to the individual or particular societies and are not universally applicable.