Mains Practice Question

Q. Does identity based politics weakens democracy by creating multiple fissures in society or strengthens it by increasing bargaining power of a collective group? Discuss giving reasons in support of your answer (250 words)

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Approach

- Define Identity politics.
- Analyze major identity markers in India and their influence on Indian democracy.
- Give a balanced conclusion.

Introduction

The identification of members of the group on the basis of sharing common attributes on the basis of all or some of the attributes, language. gender, language, religion, culture, ethnicity etc. indicates the existence or formation of identity. The mobilization on the basis of these markers is called identity politics.

Body

Major identity markers in India and their impact on Indian democracy:

- **Linguistic identity:** Linguistic states provide freedom and autonomy for collectivities within a heterogeneous society. However, critics argue that linguistic states 'have reinforced regionalism and has provided a platform for the articulation of a phenomenal number of identity claims. They argue that the effective result of recognition for linguistic groups has disembodied the feelings of national unity and national spirit in a climate where 'Maharastra for Marathis, Gujrat for Gujratis, etc" has reinforced linguistic mistrust and defined the economic and political goods in linguistic terms.
- **Religious identity:** Indian society has been divided along religious lines even before independence, through partition and various communal violence episodes motivated by religious identity politics.
- **Caste Identity:** Caste has become an important determinant in Indian society and politics. The rise of the dalit politics, and backward class politics following the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report has reinforced identity politics. The net effect of these mobilizations along caste-identities has resulted not only in the empowerment of newly emerging groups but has increased the intensity of confrontational politics and possibly leading to a growing crisis of governability.
- **Ethnic identity:** Various communities in NE India such as Nagas have distinct culture and language, thus they claim to have separate identity. Through mobilizations along the ethnic lines many hitherto excluded groups have asserted themselves for their share of resources. However , this process of inclusion is marred by violent conflicts as claims by ethnic groups overlaps and creates conflict among groups threatening security and sovereignty of India.

Conclusion

- Identity politics at times may be responsible for certain level of conflicts and contradictions, however identity politics is universal phenomenon in democratic societies.
- Identity politics is complex phenomenon in a diverse society like India. The democratic political system in India enables various groups to organize and assert on the basis the common attributes which they share. Identity politics has both negative and positive roles in Indian democracy.