1. What is ethnicity? Discuss the various dimensions of the problems of ethnicity in India.

**Ans:** An ethnic group or ethnicity is a category of people who identify with each other based on similarities, such as common language, ancestral, social, cultural, or national experiences. Unlike other social groups (wealth, age, hobbies), ethnicity is often an inherited status based on the society in which a person lives. In some cases, it can be adopted if a person moves into another society. Membership of an ethnic group tends to be defined by a shared cultural heritage, ancestry, origin myth, history, homeland, language or dialect, symbolic systems such as religion, mythology and ritual, cuisine, dressing style, art, and physical appearance.

The Indian society has absorbed several socio-cultural aspects which have eventually become the mainstay of its civilisation. India's social structure has been a unique blend of diverse religions, cultures and ethnic groups. Historically, India has been a hospitable land to numerous immigrants and invaders from distant parts of Europe and Asia. The cultural patterns of these alien settlers have, over the centuries, been interwoven with the native culture to produce India's glorious cultural heritage.

The uniqueness of India's social structure lies in its unity amidst diversity. The population of India is socially diverse, combining elements of six main social types, viz, the Nagrito, the Proto-Australoid, the Mongoloid, the Mediterranean, the Western Brachycephalis, and the Nordic. All the great religions of the world, viz., Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc., are found here. There are 15 major literary languages, besides numerous other languages and dialects. Diversity is seen between various communities and groups in the pattern of rural and urban settlements, community life, cultural and social behaviour as also in the institutional framework.

The caste system, a system of hierarchical social organisation that was evolved and practised almost from the beginning of the early civilisation, forms the basic foundation of India's pluralistic social structure. The importance of caste is often a mystery to Westerners, who confuse it with class divisions. It is quite unbelievable that men and women can be born into unalterable sections of society starting from the highest (Brahmin) to the lowest (Shudra). As per one's caste, one is assigned a duty, where a Brahmin is to teach and officiate as a priest, a Kshatriya to fight, a Vaishya to create wealth and a Shudra to till the soil. There is also the "Achhut", the untouchable, who carries out the necessary, but polluting tasks of society.

A multitude of castes and sub-castes are found in different parts of India, under different names, and different status. What is significant about the caste system is that castes are found not only among the Hindus who are more rigid in preserving a caste system, but this system also exists to some extent among the Indian Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains and Jews. To look at an example, caste is important for Sikhs for certain purposes like marriage. There are four major categories: ex-untouchable (sometimes called Mazhabis); artisan castes (Ramgarhias or carpenters); clerical and commercial castes (Khatris, Aroras, etc.); and Jats. And it is very seldom that Hindu Jats and Sikh Jats enter into marriage. In the classical Hindu scheme of things, Jats had a relatively low status, belonging either to the third or fourth rung of the great Varna system.

Looking at the religious front, India, being a secular country, does not have any state religion. The state of India allows freedom of faith, worship and religion. The amazing diversity and plurality of India is reflected in the number of religious faiths practised by the Indian people, some of which were born on this land, while others were brought in by the successive political and cultural invasions and assimilated by the people of this country. Among the major religions in India, Hinduism is the largest followed by Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism.

The Hindus, i.e., the followers of Hinduism, account for over 80 per cent of India's total population. The various divisions within the religion like Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras have been assigned strictly compartmentalised functions. However, with the passage of time, the caste distinctions have become loose, and with the growing social awakening, the lower caste people, who had been looked down upon by those belonging to the higher castes, are getting their rightful place in Hindu society.

Ethnicity is a way of categorizing a person by means of a shared or presumed ancestry. Unlike race, which is defined according to biological traits, ethnicity is defined according to common origin and other variable characteristics such as language and religion. India is a land of various ethnic and tribal groups. Cultural diversity is the unique feature of North-East India exhibited by a large number of tribal communities in the region. Owing to ill-planned economic development policies, there is evident regional imbalance and backwardness in all spheres of life in the north-eastern states. Poverty, lack of employment opportunities and aimless political process have resulted in gross dissatisfaction among the population. Ethnicity has been growing rapidly, and it has brought together the marginally differentiated ethnic groups as a strong united force, which continues to have frequent conflicts with the local governments on various issues of ethnic identity and independence.

There has been a lack of true information regarding the social structure of various ethnic groups of the North-East India. This book therefore tries to explore the genesis, factors, causes, consequences of the growth of ethnicity, ethnic movement, state formation and inter-ethnic relations, and its impact on the social structure. The role of economy, politics and religion has also been considered as wider causes of the movements in the north-eastern states.

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2. Discuss ‘social facts’ as a sociological method as used by Durkheim.

**Ans:** Rules of Sociological Methods” of Durkheim was published in the year 1895. The methodological framework for all of his subsequent work was developed in his “The Rules of sociological methods.” He has successfully analyzed social facts which facing up to the methodological problems of using empirical research in scientific study of society.