



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the recent trends in the Indian caste system and the factors responsible for the change. (250 words)

18 Apr, 2022 GS Paper 1 Indian Society

Approach

- Briefly introduce Indian caste system along with its important features
- Discuss the various changes in the Indian caste system
- Also discuss the reasons behind the recent trends in caste system

Introduction

The caste system in India is a system of social stratification, social restriction and a basis for affirmative action in India. Historically, the caste system in India divided communities into thousands of endogamous hereditary groups called Jatis.

Body

Features of Indian caste system

- **Caste is Innate:** Caste system in India is characterised by absolute rigidity and immobility. It is the caste that determines one's status in life.
- **Caste is Endogamous:** Each one must marry within his own caste and within the subgroup if there be any in that caste.
- **Hierarchical Social Structure:** The caste structure of the society is hierarchy or system of subordination held together by the relations of superiority and inferiority at the apex of which are Brahmins and at the lowest rung are the shudras.

Recent Trends In Indian Caste system

- **Increase in the Organisational Power of Caste:** With the growth of literacy in India caste-consciousness of the members has been increasing to safeguard their interests. For example, formation of caste associations such as Jat sabha.
- **Political Role of Caste:** Caste has become an inseparable aspect of our politics as elections are fought more often on the basis of caste.
- **Decline in the rigidity of the caste system:** This is evident in the rising inter-caste marriages.
- **Demand for caste-based reservation:** Recent rise in reservation demands by Patidar community, Kapu community are some examples.
- **Protection for Scheduled Castes and other Backward Classes:** The constitutional safeguards provided to protect the interests of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has given a new lease of life to caste. These provisions have made some of them develop vested interests to reap permanently the benefits of reservation.
- **Sanskritization and Westernisation:** The former refers to a process in which the lower castes tend to imitate the values, practices and other life-styles of some dominant upper castes. The latter denotes a process in which the uppercaste people tend to mould their life-styles on the model of

Westerners.

- Competitive Role of Castes: Mutual interdependence of castes which existed for centuries is not found today. Now, each caste looks at the other with suspicion, contempt, and jealousy and finds in it a challenger, a competitor.

Causes for the recent trends in the caste system

- Uniform Legal System: The uniform legal system introduced by British and independent India has not only assured equality to all but also declared the practice of untouchability unlawful.
- Impact of Modern Education: Modern secular education has given a blow to the intellectual monopoly of a few upper castes by creating awareness among people and weakened the caste system.
- Industrialisation, Urbanisation and Westernisation: Due to these new economic opportunities are created which have weakened the rigid caste system.

Conclusion

Thus, the recent changes in the Indian caste system, highlights the increasing trend in caste-loyalty, caste-identity, caste-patriotism and caste-mindedness. Through various policy measures and awareness programmes efforts should be made to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or castes diversities.

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