



Mains Practice Question

Q. "Caste system is assuming new identities and associational forms. Hence, caste system cannot be eradicated in India". Comment. (250 words)

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Approach:

- Briefly explain the traditional caste system in India.
- Explain how it has evolved in practice and highlight the differences from the traditional/older forms.
- Explain with examples its associational forms.

Introduction

- Caste refers to a broad hierarchical institutional arrangement along which basic social factors like birth, marriage, food-sharing etc are arranged in a hierarchy of rank and status. These subdivisions are traditionally linked to occupations and decide the social relations with respect to other upper and lower castes.
- The traditional hierarchical ordering of castes was based on the distinction between 'purity' and 'pollution'. While the manifestation of the order has changed to a large extent in the recent times, the system itself has not changed much.
 - For example- even though untouchability and caste-based discrimination is barred under the Constitution of India, occupations like manual scavenging have the majority of workers from lower castes.

Body

New identities and associational forms

- **Political:** In contrast to the older structure, various caste communities have asserted themselves by forming political parties based on caste identities. For example-
 - Bahujan Samaj Party. Political mobilization based on caste has been rising.
 - Lingayats' demand to be considered as a minority community.
- **Economic:** Development policies targeting the backward castes and scheduled have benefitted only a section of the population. These sections have emerged as the elite and this has created a division within the backward castes. Also, the welfare policies have led to social stigma among the castes which are not included. These policies have strengthened the caste-based mobilization. For example:
 - Dominant castes like Marathas, kapus and patidars have been demanding reservation.
 - Socially empowered and landholding communities like Jats have also mobilized themselves and have demanded reservation.
- **Social:** Under the impact of globalization and technological advancement, the strict codes of marriage and inheritance have diluted with more inter-caste marriages taking place. Caste groups like Khap Panchayats have been brought under the scrutiny of the judiciary. The expression of social exclusion and maintaining the caste-based division by the communities has however not vanished but has changed to become more subtle. For example-

- The matrimonial advertisements are frequent in the newspapers that especially demand brides and grooms from particular communities.
- Even religions that do not follow caste systems like Muslims and Christianity have observed caste-like discrimination. Dalits who have converted to Christianity have separate graveyards in States like Kerala.

Conclusion

- Considering that these divisions offer solidarity and psychological strength to various marginalized groups, even if the caste-based discrimination is diffused through the legislative enforcement the divisions of identity will be difficult to erase.

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