

**CBSE Class-12 Sociology Test Paper-02**  
**Social institutions: Continuity and change**

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**General instruction:**

- Question 1-5 carries two marks each.
  - Question 6-8 carries four marks each.
  - Question 9-10 carries six marks each.
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1. Describe caste as an institution.
2. Why has the relationship between varna and jati been the subject of much speculation and debate among scholars?
3. How has the caste been theoretically understood as?
4. Castes are supposed to be complementary and non-competing groups. What do you mean by this?
5. What was the dominant view in the nationalist movement with regard to caste?
6. What are the opinions on the age of the caste system?
7. Explain why caste was a very unequal institution.
8. How did the development activity of the state and the growth of private industry affected caste?
9. What was the most important official effort during colonialism to collect information on the caste?
10. Apart from census, what were the other interventions by the colonial state that had an impact on the institution of caste?

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1. Caste is an institution uniquely associated with the Indian sub-continent. While social arrangements producing similar effects have existed in other parts of the world, the exact form has not been found elsewhere. Although it is an institution characteristic of Hindu society, caste has spread to the major non-Hindu communities of the Indian sub-continent. This is especially true of Muslims, Christians and Sikhs.
2. The precise relationship between varna and jati has been the subject of much speculation and debate among scholars. The most common interpretation is to treat 'varna' as a broad all-India aggregative classification, while 'jati' is taken to be a regional or local sub-classification involving a much more complex system consisting of hundreds or even thousands of castes and sub-castes. While the four varna classification is common to all of India, the jati hierarchy has more local classifications that vary from region to region.
3. Theoretically, the caste system can be understood as the combination of two sets of principles, one based on difference & separation & the other on wholism & hierarchy.
4. It means each caste has its own place in the system which cannot be taken by any other caste. Since caste is also linked with occupation, the system functions as the social division of labour, except that, in principle, it allows no mobility. Therefore, castes are not only unequal to each other in ritual terms, they are also supposed to be complementary and non-competing groups.
5. The dominant view in the nationalist movement regarding caste was to treat it as a social evil and as a colonial ploy to divide Indians. But the nationalist leaders, above all, Mahatma Gandhi, were able to simultaneously work for the upliftment of the lower castes, advocate the abolition of untouchability and other caste restrictions, and, at the same time, reassure the landowning upper castes that their interests, too, would be looked after.
6. The opinions on the exact age of the caste system differs.
  - i. It is generally agreed, though, that the four varna classification is roughly three thousand years old.
  - ii. However, the 'caste system' stood for different things in different time periods. So it is misleading to think of the same system continuing for three thousand years.
  - iii. In its earliest phase, in the late Vedic period roughly between 900 — 500 BC, the caste

system was really a varna system and consisted of only four major divisions.

- iv. These divisions were not very elaborate or very rigid, and they were not determined by birth. Movement across the categories seems to have been not only possible but quite common.
  - v. It is only in the post-Vedic period that caste became the rigid institution that is familiar to us from well-known definitions.
7. The historical evidence clearly indicates that caste was a very unequal institution.
- i. Some castes benefitted greatly from the system, while others were condemned to a life of endless labour and subordination.
  - ii. Most important, once caste became rigidly determined by birth, it was in principle impossible for a person to ever change their life circumstances.
  - iii. Whether they deserved it or not, an upper caste person would always have high status, while a lower caste person would always be of low status.
  - iv. There were prescribed rules found in ancient scriptural texts that involved prohibitions or restrictions of various sorts.

However, since these prescriptions were not always practiced, we cannot say to what extent these rules actually determined the empirical reality of caste – its concrete meaning for the people living at that time.

8. The development activity of the state and the growth of private industry affected caste indirectly in the following ways:
- i. Through the speeding up and intensification of economic change. Modern industry created all kinds of new jobs for which there were no caste rules.
  - ii. Urbanisation and the conditions of collective living in the cities made it difficult for the caste-segregated patterns of social interaction to survive.
  - iii. At a different level, modern educated Indians attracted to the liberal ideas of individualism and meritocracy, began to abandon the more extreme caste practices.
  - iv. On the other hand, it was remarkable how resilient caste proved to be. Recruitment to industrial jobs, whether in the textile mills of Mumbai (then Bombay), the jute mills of Kolkata (then Calcutta), or elsewhere, continued to be organised along caste and kinship-based lines.
  - v. The middle men who recruited labour for factories tended to recruit them from their own caste and region so that particular departments or shop floors were often dominated by specific castes.

- vi. Prejudice against the untouchables remained quite strong and was not absent from the city, though not as extreme as it could be in the village.
9. By far the most important official effort to collect information on caste was through the census.
- i. Census first begun in the 1860s, the census became a regular ten-yearly exercise conducted by the British Indian government from 1881 onwards.
  - ii. The 1901 Census under the direction of Herbert Risley was particularly important as it sought to collect information on the social hierarchy of caste – i.e., the social order of precedence in particular regions, as to the position of each caste in the rank order.
  - iii. This effort had a huge impact on social perceptions of caste and hundreds of petitions were addressed to the Census Commissioner by representatives of different castes claiming a higher position in the social scale and offering historical and scriptural evidence for their claims.
  - iv. Overall, scholars feel that this kind of direct attempt to count caste and to officially record caste status changed the institution itself.
  - v. Before this kind of intervention, caste identities had been much more fluid and less rigid; once they began to be counted and recorded, caste began to take on a new life.
10. The following were the impact of other interventions on the institution of caste:
- i. The land revenue settlements and related arrangements and laws served to give legal recognition to the customary (caste-based) rights of the upper castes.
  - ii. These castes now became land owners in the modern sense rather than feudal classes with claims on the produce of the land, claims to revenue or tribute of various kinds.
  - iii. Large scale irrigation schemes like the ones in the Punjab were accompanied by efforts to settle populations there, and these also had a caste dimension.
  - iv. At the other end of the scale, towards the end of the colonial period, the administration also took an interest in the welfare of downtrodden castes, referred to as the ‘depressed classes’ at that time.
  - v. It was as part of these efforts that the Government of India Act of 1935 was passed which gave legal recognition to the lists or ‘schedules’ of castes and tribes marked out for special treatment by the state.
  - vi. This is how the terms ‘Scheduled Tribes’ and the ‘Scheduled Castes’ came into being. Castes at the bottom of the hierarchy that suffered severe discrimination, including all the so-called ‘untouchable’ castes.