

CBSE Class-12 Sociology Test Paper-01
Social institutions: Continuity and Change

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. Define “caste”.
2. Differentiate between varna and jati.
3. What does ‘sanskritisation’ refers to?
4. What does ‘dominant caste’ refers to?
5. Who are the absentee landlords?
6. Explain the principles of differentiation and hierarchy in relation to the caste system.
7. Describe “caste” as a social institution in the past.
8. How did the other interventions by the colonial state had an impact on the institution of caste.
9. Describe the most commonly cited defining features of caste.
10. Explain how caste played an inevitable role in the mass mobilisations of the nationalist movement.

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1. Caste is an institution uniquely associated with the Indian sub-continent. The English word 'caste' is actually borrowed from the Portuguese word 'casta', meaning pure breed. The word refers to a broad institutional arrangement that in Indian languages (beginning with the ancient Sanskrit) is referred to by two distinct terms, varna and jati.
2. Varna, literally means 'colour', and is the name given to a four-fold division of society into brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra,. Jati is a generic term referring to species or kinds of anything, ranging from inanimate objects to plants, animals and human beings. The word 'Jati' is most commonly used to refer to the institution of caste in Indian languages, though it is interesting to note that, increasingly, Indian language speakers are beginning to use the English word 'caste'.
3. 'Sanskritisation' refers to a process whereby members of a (usually middle or lower) caste attempt to raise their own social status by adopting the ritual, domestic and social practices of a caste (or castes) of higher status. The patterns for emulation chosen most often were the brahmin or kshatriya castes; practices included adopting vegetarianism, wearing of sacred thread, performance of specific prayers and religious ceremonies, etc.
4. 'Dominant caste' is a term used to refer to those castes which had a large population and were granted land rights by the partial land reforms effected after Independence. Once they got land rights, they acquired considerable economic power. Their large numbers also gave them political power in the era of electoral democracy based on universal adult franchise. Thus, these intermediate castes became the 'dominant' castes in the country side and played a decisive role in regional politics and the agrarian economy. Examples of such dominant castes include the Yadavs of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.
5. "The land reforms took away rights from the erstwhile claimants, the upper castes who were 'absentee landlords' in the sense that they played no part in the agricultural economy other than claiming their rent. They frequently did not live in the village either, but were based in towns and cities."
6. Theoretically, the caste system can be understood as the combination of two sets of principles, one based on difference and separation and the other on wholism and hierarchy.
Each caste is supposed to be different from – and is therefore strictly separated from –

every other caste. Many of the scriptural rules of caste are thus designed to prevent the mixing of castes – rules ranging from marriage, food sharing and social interaction to occupation.

On the other hand, the different and separated castes do not have an individual existence. The different caste can only exist in relation to a larger whole, the totality of society consisting of all castes.

Further, this societal whole or the system of caste is a hierarchical rather than an egalitarian system. Each individual caste occupies not just a distinct place, but also an ordered rank – a particular position in a ladder-like arrangement going from highest to lowest.

7. Caste is an institution uniquely associated with the Indian sub-continent. The word refers to a broad institutional arrangement that in Indian languages (beginning with the ancient Sanskrit) is referred to by two distinct terms, varna and jati.

The four varna classification is roughly three thousand years old. However, the ‘caste system’ stood for different things in different time periods.

In its earliest phase, in the late Vedic period roughly between 900 — 500 BC, the caste system consisted of only four major divisions. These divisions were not very elaborate or very rigid, and they were not determined by birth.

It is only in the post- Vedic period that caste became the rigid institution that is familiar to us from well-known definitions.

8. Other interventions by the colonial state such as the land revenue settlements and related arrangements and laws served to give legal recognition to the customary (caste-based) rights of the upper castes.

These castes now became land owners in the modern sense rather than feudal classes with claims on the produce of the land, or claims to revenue or tribute of various kinds. 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.

9. The most commonly cited defining features of caste are the following:

- i. Caste is determined by birth. Caste is never a matter of choice. One can never change one’s caste, leave it, or choose not to join it, although there are instances where a person may be expelled from their caste.
- ii. Membership in a caste involves strict rules about marriage. Caste groups are “endogamous”, i.e. marriage is restricted to members of the group.

- iii. Caste membership also involves rules about food and food-sharing. What kinds of food may or may not be eaten is prescribed and who one may share food with is also specified.
 - iv. Caste involves a system consisting of many castes arranged in a hierarchy of rank and status. In theory, every person has a caste, and every caste has a specified place in the hierarchy of all castes. While the hierarchical position of many castes, particularly in the middle ranks, may vary from region to region, there is always a hierarchy.
 - v. Castes also involve sub-divisions within themselves, i.e., castes almost always have sub-castes and sometimes sub-castes may also have sub- sub-castes. This is referred to as a segmental organisation.
 - vi. Castes were traditionally linked to occupations. A person born into a caste could only practice the occupation associated with that caste, so that occupations were hereditary, i.e. passed on from generation to generation. On the other hand, a particular occupation could only be pursued by the caste associated with it – members of other castes could not enter the occupation.
10. Efforts to organise the “depressed classes” and particularly the untouchable castes predated the nationalist movement, having begun in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was an initiative taken from both ends of the caste spectrum – by upper caste progressive reformers as well as by members of the lower castes such as Mahatma Jotiba Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar in western India, Ayyankali, Sri Narayana Guru, Iyothedass and Periyar (E.V. Ramaswamy Naickar) in the South.
- Both Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar began organising protests against untouchability from the 1920s onwards. Anti-untouchability programmes became a significant part of the Congress agenda so that, by the time Independence was on the horizon, there was a broad agreement across the spectrum of the nationalist movement to abolish caste distinctions.
- The dominant view in the nationalist movement was to treat caste 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.