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Q8(a)

What do you understand by dynamics of caste mobility? How did the concept of Sanskritization contribute to its functionality?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Anthropology GS 2 · 20 marks · Caste system in India

3.2 Caste system in India-Structure and characteristics, Varna and caste, Theories of origin of caste system, Dominant caste, Caste mobility, Future of caste system, Jajmani system. Tribe-caste continuum.

Core demand of the question

- What do you understand by dynamics of caste mobility? How did the concept of Sanskritization contribute to its functionality?
- Keep the answer to a 20-mark length of about 250 words

Revision summary

Caste mobility is group rise in rank, land, and honour.

Srinivas made **Sanskritisation** the cultural method of that rise.

Copying diet, rite, and marriage makes the claim visible.

It can vent protest without instantly breaking hierarchy.

Politics, **Westernisation**, and conversion are other dynamics it cannot cover.

Introduction

Caste mobility is the rise or fall of a jati's rank, wealth, and honour inside a local hierarchy. It is collective more than a single person's job jump. **Sanskritisation** is the cultural engine Srinivas gave that dynamic.

Body

Dynamics of mobility

- A jati may gain land, numbers, or a new occupation, then claim a higher varna-like style.
- **Politics, reservations, and sects add other ladders: Ambedkarite** exit, kshatriya sabhas, and party blocs.
- **M. N. Srinivas** insisted mobility is group imitation plus local acceptance, not a census miracle.

Sanskritisation as function

- **Sanskritisation** makes mobility socially readable. Diet, priesthood, and marriage rules signal the claim.
- **It functions as a safety valve:** protest becomes reform of custom rather than an immediate smash of hierarchy.
- **Marriott's** little-great tradition traffic is the ritual highway this copy uses, including **Vidyarthi's** sacred centres.

Limits of the function

- Dominant castes may refuse the claim. Mobility then stalls or turns to politics.
- **Westernisation** and conversion offer rival dynamics that **Sanskritisation** cannot name.
- For tribes, the same copy may mean women's seclusion, the cost **Elwin** feared.
- **Function is therefore partial:** it explains Hindu jati rise better than Dalit or tribal exit.

Flow diagram

Caste mobility -> Sanskritisation style copy
Caste mobility -> Westernisation politics
Sanskritisation style copy -> Local acceptance or refusal

Conclusion

Caste mobility is a local, collective bargain over rank. **Sanskritisation** gave it a working cultural mechanism, while leaving political and conversion paths to other concepts.

Facts & figures

Sanskritisation

Srinivas's term for a jati copying a locally higher Hindu style to raise rank.

Dominant caste

The group that often grants or refuses the mobility claim.

Westernisation

Srinivas's companion path: English, law, and new jobs instead of ritual copy.

Sacred complex

Vidyarthi's tirtha as a place where Sanskritising groups buy great-tradition services.

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