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Q6(a)

Is annihilation of caste possible? Discuss the future of caste system in the light of various proactive measures taken by the Indian State.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · 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

- Ask whether **annihilation of caste** is possible
- Discuss the future of caste in the light of proactive measures of the Indian State
- Use **Ambedkar** and later law
- Give a reasoned forecast, not a slogan

Revision summary

Ambedkar defined annihilation as ending graded inequality, not polishing it through Sanskritisation.

The State used **Article 17**, atrocity law, reservation, Mandal, and panchayat quotas.

A Dalit and OBC middle class and party system show real change.

Endogamy, atrocities, and list-competition show caste surviving.

Full annihilation is not present; partial civic equality is.

Introduction

B. R. **Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste** treated jati as a graded inequality that reform of custom could not end. He asked for a destruction of the religious basis of caste, intermarriage, and a new moral community. The Republic later used law, reservation, and development. The question is whether those measures can finish his programme.

Body

Ambedkar's test

- Caste is not only division of labour but division of labourers, ranked and endogamous.
- Temple entry and Sanskritisation leave the ladder standing. Annihilation needs **inter-caste marriage**, a break with shastric authority, and equal citizenship.
- **Conversion (1956)** was a collective exit, not a private piety.

State measures

- **Abolition of untouchability (Article 17)**, the **Protection of Civil Rights Act**, and the **SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989** (amended 2015) criminalise caste humiliation.

- **Articles 15(4), 16(4), 46**, and reservation in legislatures, jobs, and education (with **Indra Sawhney**, creamy layer for OBC, and later EWS as a separate track) are proactive ranking tools.
- **73rd and 74th Amendments** reserve panchayat and municipality seats for SC and ST, including women.
- Land reform, scholarships, and Stand-Up or similar enterprise schemes try to shift class. **Mandal** (1990) expanded the OBC public.

What has changed

- A Dalit and OBC middle class exists in offices, universities, and parties. **Kanshi Ram** and later Bahujan politics made caste a public claim, not only a stigma.
- Urban anonymity, courts, and campuses weaken everyday untouchability in some settings.

What has not

- Marriage remains largely endogamous. Honour violence and honour-coded families show the ladder in the household.
- Atrocities in rural land and love cases continue. Reservation created a new competitive politics of lists, not a casteless public.
- **Ambedkar** warned that political democracy without social democracy would keep caste. That warning still fits.

Is annihilation possible?

- As a total end of jati in one generation, no. Endogamy and ritual rank reproduce it.
- As a reduction of graded humiliation through law, numbers in office, and mixed work, yes, in part, already.
- Future caste is likely to be **politicised, legally regulated, and still marital**, unless intermarriage and local land power change at scale.

Flow diagram

Ambedkar annihilation -> Intermarriage and break with shastra
 State Articles 17 reservation PoA -> Office and criminal law
 Office and criminal law -> Partial reduction
 Endogamy rural power -> Caste continues

Conclusion

Annihilation in **Ambedkar**'s full sense is not yet possible because marriage and rural power still reproduce jati. State measures have made caste a constitutional adversary and a political resource. The future is a weaker ritual ladder and a stronger caste-in-politics, unless social democracy catches up with the statute book.

Facts & figures

Annihilation of Caste

Ambedkar's 1936 text arguing that caste cannot be ended by reforming Hindu custom alone.

Article 17

Abolishes untouchability and forbids its practice in any form.

PoA Act 1989

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, strengthened in 2015, as the main criminal tool against caste violence.

Indra Sawhney 1992

Structured OBC reservation, creamy layer, and the ordinary 50 percent ceiling.

73rd Amendment

Reserved panchayat seats for SC, ST, and women, creating a local official class from below.

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