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Q1(c)

Jajmani system : continuity and change

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Anthropology GS 2 · 10 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

- **Write a note on the jajmani system:** continuity and change
- Define the exchange and name classic village studies
- Show what continues and what cash, law, and migration have broken
- Keep the note within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Jajmani is hereditary service of artisan and serving castes for landed patrons, named by Wiser.

Beidelman stressed coercion; Srinivas and Lewis described harvest shares and rites.

Ritual calls to barber and priest continue in many villages.

Cash wages, mills, land reform, and MGNREGA have broken daily dependence.

Epstein's Mysore villages show the market replacing customary shares.

Introduction

Jajmani is a village system of hereditary service in which artisan and serving castes work for landed patron households in return for grain, clothes, and ritual dues rather than a daily cash wage.

Body**The classic picture**

- **William Wiser** named jajmani from a Uttar Pradesh village: the jajman is the patron, the kamin or purjan is the server.
- **Thomas O. Beidelman** stressed inequality and coercion inside the same exchange.
- **Oscar Lewis** in Rampur and **M. N. Srinivas** in **Rampura** recorded barber, washerman, carpenter, and priest tied to harvest shares and life-cycle rites.
- The system linked caste occupation, land, and ritual rank in one local economy.

Continuity

- Life-cycle rites still call the barber, priest, and drummer in many villages.
- Some grain shares and festival gifts survive beside cash.
- Dominant-caste patrons still organise labour at weddings and harvests, as **André Beteille** saw in Tanjore even when tenancy law had begun to bite.

Change

- Cash wages, mills, and urban jobs cut hereditary monopoly of the smith and weaver.
- Land reform, MGNREGA, and reserved panchayat seats reduce total dependence on one jajman.
- **Scarlett Epstein** in Wangala and Dalena showed irrigation and the market replacing customary shares.
- Migration and shop goods mean many kamins no longer live by one village's grain.

Flow diagram

Jajman landholder -> Grain and ritual dues
Kamin artisan service -> Grain and ritual dues
Cash mills migration law -> Kamin artisan service

Conclusion

Jajmani was a hereditary service economy around land and ritual. Rites keep fragments of it. Cash, law, mills, and migration have ended it as the main village wage system.

Facts & figures

William Wiser

Described jajmani in a Uttar Pradesh village: patrons (jajman) and hereditary serving castes.

Thomas O. Beidelman

Interpreted jajmani as an exploitative hierarchy, not a balanced moral economy.

Rampura

Mysore village of M. N. Srinivas where service castes were tied to dominant-caste land and ritual.

Scarlett Epstein

Wangala and Dalena studies showing irrigation and cash eroding customary village exchange.

André Béteille

Tanjore work showing land and tenancy change splitting economic power from ritual service.