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Q1(b)

Caste domination, factionalism and political power

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Anthropology GS 2 · 10 marks · Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization

1.1 Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization-Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic), Protohistoric (Indus Civilization). Pre-Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan cultures. Contributions of the tribal cultures to Indian civilization.

Core demand of the question

- Define dominant caste and faction in the Indian village and region
- Show how caste domination becomes political power
- Give ethnographic and contemporary electoral examples
- Note how Mandal, reservation law and later party systems have changed the old village picture

Revision summary

Srinivas's dominant caste combines numbers, land, rank and an educated elite.

Factions are vertical followings around leaders, described by Bailey and others.

Village domination scaled into regional parties after adult franchise.

Mandal and **Indra Sawhney** widened OBC claims; panchayat reservation shares some offices.

Caste blocs remain, but they now work through parties, cooperatives and social media as well as the village.

Introduction

Caste domination, factionalism and political power are three linked ways of reading rural and regional India. **M. N. Srinivas** named the dominant caste. **F. G. Bailey, Ralph Nicholas** and later political anthropologists named the faction. Together they explain why numbers, land and office travel together.

Body**Dominant caste**

Srinivas, from Rampura and other Mysore villages, said a caste is dominant when it is numerous, owns a large share of local land, ranks fairly high, and has a Western-educated elite. Numerical strength plus economic control plus ritual rank produces local power. Okkaligas in parts of Karnataka, Jats in western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, Reddys and Kammas in Andhra, and Yadavs in parts of Bihar and UP have played this role at different scales.

Domination is **local and historical**. A caste that dominates one taluk may be a minority in the next. **André Bêteille** in Tanjore showed how land reform, tenancy and education can split economic power from ritual rank.

Factionalism

A faction is a vertical following around a leader, not a horizontal class. Kin, clients, debtors and caste-fellows gather behind a big man. Bailey's Bisipara (Odisha) and Nicholas's Bengal work showed that village politics often splits into two or more such blocs. Elections, panchayat seats and irrigation disputes become the public face of private followings.

Factions cut across a single caste and can join unlike castes. They also reproduce caste, because the leader's first pool of trust is still kin and jati.

From village to political power

After adult franchise, dominant-caste networks fed state parties. Charan Singh's Jat base, Lalu Prasad Yadav's Yadav-Muslim arithmetic, and the Reddy-Kamma contest in Andhra are regional translations of Srinivas's village fact. The **73rd Amendment** and Panchayati Raj put offices into the same arena. Rotating reservation for SC, ST and women, read with **K. Krishna Murthy** and later panchayat cases, forces some sharing of chairs without ending landed influence.

Mandal (1990) and **Indra Sawhney v. Union of India** (1992) shifted the grammar from a few landed "dominant" castes to a wider OBC claim on the state. New elites - Yadav, Kurmi, Thevar, Vokkaliga - used both numbers and reservation. Older twice-born domination did not vanish; it moved into education, urban capital and upper-house networks.

The **Sachar Committee** (2006) and later caste surveys in Bihar showed that political power and census categories still follow community blocs. Factionalism now lives in WhatsApp groups and cooperative societies as much as in the village chaupal.

Flow diagram

Dominant caste -> Land and numbers
 Dominant caste -> Faction / leader
 Faction / leader -> Panchayat and party
 Mandal and Indra Sawhney -> Panchayat and party

Conclusion

Dominant caste explains who owns the village. Faction explains how that ownership is organised as a following. Adult franchise, Mandal and panchayat law turned both into electoral machines without abolishing either.

Facts & figures

M. N. Srinivas

Defined dominant caste from Mysore village studies: numerical strength, land, ritual rank and a modern elite.

Indra Sawhney (1992)

Supreme Court upheld 27 percent OBC reservation, imposed a 50 percent ceiling in ordinary circumstances, and excluded the creamy layer.

73rd Amendment

Constitutionalised Panchayati Raj and reserved seats for SC, ST and women, changing how village factions contest office.

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