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Q8

Has caste lost its relevance in understanding the multi-cultural Indian Society? Elaborate your answer with illustrations.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · GS I · 10 marks · Social Empowerment, Communalism and Secularism
Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism and secularism.

Core demand of the question

- Has caste lost its relevance in understanding the multi-cultural Indian Society? Elaborate with illustrations
- Keep the elaboration within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Caste no longer monopolises Indian social explanation.

Srinivas showed mobility through Sanskritisation and dominant castes.

Béteille saw class rise without the death of caste identity.

Marriage, elections, and atrocities keep jati empirically alive.

Multi-cultural India needs caste plus class, gender, and region.

Introduction

Caste is no longer the only key to Indian society. It has not become a museum piece. **M. N. Srinivas** and **André Béteille** still help: ritual rank changed, inequality and identity did not vanish. Multi-cultural India is language, religion, region, class, and jati.

Body

What has weakened

- Urban occupations, the Constitution, and **reservations** broke the old legal varna state. A software park does not display a village jajmani chart.
- **Srinivas's** Sanskritisation and dominant caste already showed mobility and politics, not a frozen Manu.
- Inter-caste dining in cities, and class mixing in malls, make everyday caste less visible to the elite eye.

What remains relevant

- Marriage is still largely endogamous. Matrimonial columns and apps filter jati even when the office does not.
- **Béteille** argued that caste as a closed status system was yielding to class, yet caste as identity and network survived. Elections, khap disputes, and caste associations illustrate the second life.
- Atrocities, manual scavenging, and campus exclusion show hierarchy as violence, not as a forgotten custom.

- **Multi-cultural claims of language and religion often sit on a caste base:** a 'Hindu' or 'Tamil' public is still internally ranked.

Elaborate with the right answer

- Caste has lost monopoly as the sole explanation. It has not lost relevance. Class, gender, and region must sit beside it, as Bêteille insisted, without a premature obituary.

Flow diagram

Ritual hierarchy -> Weaker in law and city jobs
Endogamy vote atrocity -> Still relevant
Class region religion -> Multi-cultural reading
Still relevant -> Multi-cultural reading

Conclusion

Caste is less total in law and office than in 1950. It remains a primary tool for marriage, vote, and humiliation. Multi-cultural India is misread if caste is declared irrelevant.

Facts & figures

M. N. Srinivas

Sanskritisation and dominant caste: caste as changing process, not a frozen ladder.

André Bêteille

Stressed class and inequality while warning that caste identity does not simply evaporate.

Endogamy

Persistent caste marriage markets in print and digital matchmaking.

PoA Act

Law against caste atrocities, evidence that hierarchy still produces crime.

Reservations

Constitutional policy that both weakens exclusion and keeps caste as a public category.

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