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Q19

Why is caste identity in India both fluid and static?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · GS I · 15 marks · Social Empowerment, Communalism and Secularism
Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism and secularism.

Core demand of the question

- Why is caste identity in India both fluid and static?
- Explain the two sides with social mechanisms, not slogans

Revision summary

Sanskritization, migration, and quota politics make caste claims move.

Endogamy, atrocities, and caste associations keep rank sticky.

The office can be fluid while the wedding remains static.

Law bans untouchability; practice often does not.

Both words in the question are therefore right at the same time.

Flow diagram

Sanskritization migration Mandal -> Fluid public caste

Endogamy atrocity associations -> Static private caste

Fluid public caste -> Same person two faces

Static private caste -> Same person two faces

Conclusion

- Enforce atrocity law and end manual scavenging through the 2013 Act in practice.
- Use education and urban housing mix to widen the marriage circle, because that is where static caste is reproduced.
- Keep reservation as a tool against frozen disadvantage without treating every certificate as the whole of a person.

Caste is fluid in work, politics, and some ritual claim, and static in **endogamy**, stigma, and official lists. The double character will last until marriage and violence change as much as the job market already has.

Facts & figures**Sanskritization**

Srinivas's term for collective ritual mobility of a jati toward a locally higher model.

Mandal, 1990

Implementation of OBC reservation that politicised caste lists at the national centre.

SC/ST (PoA) Act, 1989

Criminal law against caste atrocity, evidence that rank is still enforced by violence.

Article 17

Abolition of untouchability in the Constitution.

Endogamy

Marriage inside the jati, the main social machine that makes caste static across generations.

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