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Q2(c)

What are the changes in the cultural and structural aspects of the caste system since independence?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2017 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Caste System

Caste System: Perspectives (G.S. Ghurye, M.N. Srinivas, Louis Dumont, Andre Beteille); Features of caste system; Untouchability - forms and perspectives.

Core demand of the question

- What are the changes in the cultural and structural aspects of the caste system since independence?
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Law and vote made hierarchy publicly illegitimate even as practice continued.

Sanskritization now competes with Dalit and OBC identity.

Village service grids loosened; occupations and parties recast caste.

A small reserved middle class appeared.

Endogamy and land still structure everyday caste.

Introduction

Since Independence, caste has changed in culture and in structure, without disappearing. Culture shifted from an openly sacred hierarchy toward identity, shame, and rights talk. Structure shifted from a village service grid toward politics, education, and labour markets, while **endogamy** and atrocity still hold.

Body

Cultural change

- Untouchability is legally an offence and publicly stigmatised, a disharmonic value shift in Beteille's sense.
- Sanskritization continues, but reservation and Ambedkarite pride offer other languages than copying twice-born style.
- Cinema, campus, and urban anonymity weaken everyday pollution talk, yet honour and marriage ads keep it alive.

Structural change

- Land reform, Green Revolution, and dominant-caste politics recast who commands the village surplus.
- Adult franchise and caste associations turned jati into vote blocs.
- Occupations opened in towns, so hereditary service is no longer the only map, though Dalit labour still clusters in dirty and casual work.

- Protective discrimination created a small Dalit and OBC middle class, and a creamy-layer debate.

What did not change enough

- **Endogamy** remains the spine.
- Rural land and urban rental markets still carry caste.

Flow diagram

Independence law vote -> Culture rights shame identity
Independence law vote -> Structure politics class mobility
Endogamy atrocity -> Persistence

Conclusion

Culturally, caste is less a proud sacred ladder and more a contested identity. Structurally, it is less a closed village occupational order and more a political-economic resource. Both changes are real; neither is completion.

Facts & figures

Article 17

Constitutional abolition of untouchability that changed the public culture of caste.

Dominant caste

Srinivas's local power form that grew with land reform and panchayat politics.

Sripuram

Beteille's case of caste, class, and power beginning to part after agrarian change.

Endogamy

The structural hinge that independence did not break.