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Q7(a)

Has caste system hindered democracy and adult franchise in India. Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2018 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 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

- Has the caste system hindered democracy and adult franchise in India? Discuss
- Treat as a 20-mark answer

Revision summary

Caste hinders democracy as equal civic worth, which **Ambedkar** named.

It did not stop adult franchise from becoming routine.

Dominant castes and vote banks organise the booth.

Mandal and Dalit parties show caste as a democratic resource too.

The result is elections without caste-blind equality.

Introduction

Caste has hindered democracy as equal civic life, and it has also been the language through which adult franchise actually works. The honest discussion is both. Franchise was not blocked at the booth in the long run. Equality of voice still is.

Body

How caste hinders

- Graded inequality, as **Ambedkar** argued, makes 'one person, one value' a lie when honour and land are ranked.
- Dominant castes capture panchayats, booths, and tickets, Srinivas's local power in electoral form.
- Atrocity and social boycott punish independent Dalit voting.
- Vote banks freeze citizens as blocs, a hindrance to deliberative democracy even when turnout is high.

How franchise used caste

- Adult franchise forced parties to count every jati. **Mandal** and Dalit parties are democratic effects, not only distortions.
- **Andre Beteille's disharmony:** the vote is an equality machine inside a ranked society.
- Champaran-to-republic history shows peasants entering the nation as numbers, then as caste blocs.

Has it hindered 'the system'

- It did not stop elections from becoming routine.
- It has hindered liberal hopes of a caste-blind citizen.
- G. S. Ghurye's civilisational hierarchy is a cultural drag; the Constitution is the counter-drag.

Changing balance

- **Discrete castes, muddled hierarchies:** rank is less a single ladder, voting more of a bargain.
- Media and courts add other pillars; caste still staffs the booth.

Verdict

- Caste hinders democratic equality more than it hinders the holding of elections.

Flow diagram

Adult franchise -> Count of all adults
Caste dominance stigma -> Hinders equal voice
Caste dominance stigma -> Vote bank mobilisation
Adult franchise -> Elections run
Hinders equal voice -> Elections run

Conclusion

Caste has not prevented adult franchise from running. It has organised and limited that franchise through dominant-caste capture, vote banks, and stigma. Democracy in India is real as a count, and hindered as a fellowship of equals.

Facts & figures

Ambedkar

Without social equality, political democracy remains incomplete.

Dominant caste

Local land-and-numbers power that captures elected office.

Mandal

Franchise turning OBC jatis into a national democratic bloc.

Beteille disharmony

Vote as equality value beside ranked social structure.