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Q4(c)

What are the various forms of untouchability in India ? Critically examine

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · 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 various forms of untouchability in India? Critically examine
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Untouchability includes ritual exclusion, degrading labour and spatial segregation.

Urban sanitation and housing show modern forms.

Atrocity and honour violence police marriage.

Law criminalises the practice; custom often continues it.

Sanskritization does not equal annihilation.

Introduction

Untouchability is not only a temple door. It is a set of practices that mark some bodies as polluting in water, work, housing, and honour. Forms have shifted; the structure has not vanished.

Body

Classical and rural forms

- Denial of wells, roads, and temples, and the imposition of degrading labour such as scavenging, were the village grammar **Ambedkar** named.
- Jajmani service could hide untouchability as duty.

Contemporary forms

- **Residential segregation**, separate utensils in schools, and honour violence against inter-caste marriage are everyday continuations.
- Urban informal work repeats caste in sanitation contracts even when the city claims anonymity.
- Digital humiliation and atrocity videos are new media of an old stigma.

Critical examination

- Law, including the Protection of Civil Rights and PoA statutes, treats untouchability as a crime; practice treats it as custom.
- Sanskritization does not annihilate it; a mobile jati may still untouch someone below.

- **Beteille's disharmony is exact here:** constitutional equality beside graded pollution.

Flow diagram

Untouchability -> Well temple labour
Untouchability -> Housing work marriage
Untouchability -> New media stigma
Equal law -> Disharmonic gap
Housing work marriage -> Disharmonic gap

Conclusion

Forms of untouchability run from well and temple exclusion to sanitation labour, housing, marriage policing, and online stigma. A critical view sees change of site, not the end of the institution **Ambedkar** wanted annihilated.

Facts & figures

Manual scavenging

Caste-tied sanitation labour that is a material form of untouchability.

PoA Act

Criminalises caste atrocity, including many untouchability practices.

Ambedkar

Read untouchability as the extreme of graded inequality, not a side custom.

Residential segregation

Separate colonies and urban pockets that continue spatial untouchability.