

WRAP Exams · wrapexams.com

Prelims PYQ, Mains model answers, and copy evaluation. Write to the desk for this paper, a doubt, or the AI waitlist.

ask@wrapexams.com · +91 85951 84903 · wrapexams.com

Q1(c)

Analyse the differences between the attributional and interactional approach in studying the caste system

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · 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

- Analyse the differences between the attributional and interactional approaches to caste
- Use **Ghurye** on attributes and **Marriott**, **Dumont**, and **Srinivas** on interaction
- Keep the contrast operational

Revision summary

Attributional caste scores groups by listed traits such as diet, occupation and ritual.

Ghurye and colonial lists exemplify that approach.

Interactional caste ranks groups by who gives and receives food, service and honour.

Marriott, **Dumont** and **Srinivas** made interaction the test of hierarchy.

Lived rank can diverge from textbook attributes.

Introduction

Attributional studies rank a caste by the traits it is said to possess. Interactional studies rank it by who gives and who receives food, service, women, and honour in daily life. Both describe caste; they do not photograph the same thing.

Body

Attributional approach

- G. S. **Ghurye** listed features such as segmental division, hierarchy, restrictions on feeding and marriage, civil and religious disabilities, and lack of free occupational choice.
- **Census** ethnography and many textbooks still score a jati by occupation, diet, dress, and ritual status as if those attributes were a fixed essence.
- The approach is strong for comparison across regions and for legal schedules. It is weak when attributes change while rank stays, or when rank changes while old labels remain.

Interactional approach

- **McKim Marriott** argued that caste position is produced in transactions: cooked food, raw food, garbage, and ritual service.
- **Louis Dumont** placed interaction under a binary of pure and impure: who can touch whom is an enactment of ideology, not a list of hobbies.
- M. N. **Srinivas**'s dominant caste shows that land, numbers, and office can reorder local interaction even when textual attributes stay 'low' or 'high'.

Why the difference matters

- Attribution can freeze a group as vegetarian or priestly while the village already takes its water from another jati's well on new terms.
- Interaction captures **Sanskritization** as a change of practice before a change of name, and it captures boycott as a political weapon.
- A full answer uses attributes as claims people make, and interaction as the test of those claims.

Flow diagram

Attributes diet occupation ritual -> Ghurye census lists
Food service marriage honour -> Marriott Dumont Srinivas
Ghurye census lists -> Claimed rank
Marriott Dumont Srinivas -> Lived rank

Conclusion

Attributional caste is a catalogue of traits. Interactional caste is a map of exchanges. Indian sociology needs both, but rank is decided in interaction.

Facts & figures

Ghurye

Classical attributional list of caste features used across Indian sociology.

Marriott

Kishan Garhi work on interactional ranking through food and service.

Dumont

Pure and impure as the binary that organises caste interaction.

Srinivas

Dominant caste: local power can recast interaction without a new varna label.

Sanskritization

Change of interactional practice that later seeks an attributional upgrade.