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Q4(c)

What are the different forms of untouchability still practised in India? Discuss with suitable illustrations

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · 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

- Define untouchability as a practice of exclusion, not only a legal status
- **Illustrate forms:** water, food, temple, occupation, residence, school, marriage, digital and market discrimination
- Use Guru, **Ambedkar**, PEMSAR 2013, and contemporary cases
- Keep illustrations specific

Revision summary

Untouchability is practised exclusion on grounds of hereditary pollution, abolished in **Article 17** but not in social geography.

Forms include water, food, temple, housing, school and marriage bans.

Manual scavenging continues despite the 2013 Act.

Urban cups, sewers and housing filters are contemporary illustrations.

Guru's humiliation and **Ambedkar's** annihilation agenda still describe the structure.

Introduction

Untouchability is the social practice of treating persons as **polluting to touch, well, temple, kitchen or neighbourhood** because of hereditary rank. **Article 17** abolished it. The **Protection of Civil Rights Act** and the **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act** criminalise it. **B. R. Ambedkar** and **Gopal Guru** insist it is still a lived geography of humiliation. Forms have shifted from the village well to the urban housing society and the sanitation contract.

Body

Classic and continuing forms

- **Water and food:** separate tumblers in some teashops, refusal of shared utensils, and exclusion from village tanks still appear in field reports from Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and northern states. Temple and ritual: barred entry, separate queues, and denial of priesthood. Occupation: hereditary assignment of leather, sanitation and death work; **manual scavenging** continues despite the **PEMSAR Act, 2013**. Residence: Dalit hamlets at the edge, urban ghettos, and housing-society filters. School: seating, mid-day meal serving, and teacher prejudice. Marriage: the sharpest closure; inter-caste couples face violence.

Newer illustrations

Urban anonymity does not end caste. Domestic workers may have separate cups. Matrimonial sites hide filters that are untouchability's cousin. Sanitation workers died in sewers in Delhi and other cities while municipalities outsourced the stigma. During droughts, water-tanker access can reproduce the well. In campuses, mess and hostel discrimination recurs. **Guru's** language of humiliation names the everyday, not only the riot.

- **Untouchability today is therefore** legal-illegal: forbidden and practised. Illustrations should stay tied to water, food, worship, work, housing and marriage-the same axes Ghurye listed as disabilities, now in new settings.

Flow diagram

Untouchability -> Water food temple
Untouchability -> Scavenging and stigmatised work
Untouchability -> Housing and marriage
Untouchability -> Urban and campus forms

Conclusion

Untouchability is still practised as exclusion from water, food, temples, housing, honourable work and marriage, with manual scavenging as its stark occupational form. Law abolished the status; social geography keeps the practice. Urban and digital life recast it more than they erase it.

Facts & figures

Article 17

Abolishes untouchability and forbids its practice in any form.

PEMSR Act 2013

Prohibits manual scavenging and dry latrines; deaths in sewers show the gap.

PoA Act 1989

Lists caste atrocities including many everyday exclusions as crimes.