

ANANTAM IAS • OPTIONAL NOTES

Sociology Optional Social Structure I: Rural and Agrarian Social Structure, and the Caste System

Paper 2 • Unit 2

The village as fact and as fiction, the land systems that made rural India's classes, and the four canonical readings of caste, set against each other rather than listed.

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UPSC SYLLABUS

B. Social Structure: (i) Rural and Agrarian Social Structure: (a) The idea of Indian village and village studies. (b) Agrarian social structure: evolution of land tenure system, land reforms. (ii) Caste System: (a) Perspectives on the study of caste systems: G.S. Ghurye, M.N. Srinivas, Louis Dumont, Andre Beteille. (b) Features of caste system. (c) Untouchability: forms and perspectives.

The Idea of the Indian Village: Little Republic and Its Critics

Before the village was studied it was imagined, and the image did political work. The phrase 'little republics' comes from Charles Metcalfe's 1830 minute describing village communities as nearly self-sufficient and almost independent of outside relations, lasting where nothing else lasts. Everything in this syllabus item is an argument with that sentence.

- Metcalfe's image was administrative in origin: a self-contained, unchanging corporate body, which conveniently implied that colonial rule at the top left the real India untouched below.
- Henry Maine's 'Village Communities in the East and West' (1871) gave it evolutionary respectability, making the Indian village a surviving specimen of an archaic communal stage that Europe had passed through.
- Marx, in his 1853 New York Daily Tribune pieces on British rule in India, accepted the self-sufficiency picture and drew the opposite conclusion: these communities were the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, they confined the mind within the narrowest compass, and their destruction by the railway and the market, however brutal, was progressive. Note this carefully: Marx endorses the colonial ethnography and rejects the colonial politics.
- Louis Dumont demolished the empirical claim in 'The Village Community from Munro to Maine' (1966, Contributions to Indian Sociology): the village community is an ideological and administrative construct of colonial thought, not a sociological unit. For Dumont and Pocock the real unit of Indian society is caste, and a village is an assemblage of people, not a society.
- Srinivas fought back in 'The Indian Village: Myth and Reality' (1975). Villages have real vertical unity: shared deities, festivals, panchayat, a common defence of village honour against neighbouring villages, and an identity villagers themselves invoke. Self-sufficiency is a myth; the village as a unit of social organization is not.
- The empirical destruction of self-sufficiency: Marriott's 'Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization' (1955) shows villages linked upward to the great tradition and outward to shrines and markets; villages were always tied by kinship (village exogamy pushes marriage outward), by pilgrimage, by revenue, by markets and by the courts. No village ever fed, married and judged itself.
- Beteille's position, asked in 2023: the village is a real and enduring unit of settlement and identity, but it is not a little republic and not a microcosm carrying Indian civilizational values in the Gandhian sense. The village that actually exists is stratified, and treating it as the repository of civilizational value is a nationalist reading, not a sociological one.
- The political stake, and the best closing line available on this topic: Gandhi's gram swaraj rested on the village as the moral basis of Indian civilization; Ambedkar told the Constituent Assembly in November 1948 that the village is a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism, and said he was glad the Draft Constitution had discarded it as a unit. The village debate is a caste debate wearing a geography costume.
- The synthesis to offer: the village is not an isolate, not a republic and not egalitarian, but it remains a real unit of settlement, of identity and, decisively, of the spatial enforcement of caste. Segregated hamlets are

why the village keeps mattering.

KEY TERMS

Little republic — Metcalfe's 1830 image of the Indian village as self-sufficient, self-governing and almost independent of outside relations, an image later shown to be a colonial construct.

Vertical unity — Srinivas's term for the real solidarity that cuts across caste within a village, expressed in shared deities, festivals and collective honour against other villages.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Critically examine briefly the phrase 'Little Republics' as used to denote India's villages. [2021, Paper II, Q1d, 10 marks]
- Do you agree with the view of Andre Beteille that India's villages are representative of Indian society's basic civilizational values? Present a sociological overview. [2023, Paper II, Q2a, 20 marks]
- What is the idea of 'Indian village'? Explain. [2014, Paper II, Q4c, 10 marks]

Village Studies: The Field View Turn of the 1950s

The 2023 paper called the 1950s the golden period of village studies and asked why. The answer is a convergence: independence created a state that needed to know its countryside, community development from 1952 needed baseline data, British social anthropology's fieldwork method arrived with Srinivas, and a generation decided that Indian society was to be found in villages rather than in the Smritis.

- Why the decade and not another: planning and community development demanded empirical knowledge of the village; funding and institutional support followed; and the field view was self-consciously a revolt against Ghurye's book view by his own students.
- The canonical studies. Srinivas on Rampura, Mysore ('The Remembered Village', 1976), and the edited collection 'India's Villages' (1955) that launched the wave. S.C. Dube on Shamirpet, Telangana ('Indian Village', 1955), then 'India's Changing Villages' (1958), which found that community development benefits flowed to those already better off. Oscar Lewis on Rampur near Delhi ('Village Life in Northern India', 1958), which put factions at the centre. McKim Marriott on Kishan Garhi, UP, with universalization and parochialization. Adrian Mayer on Ramkheri, Malwa ('Caste and Kinship in Central India', 1960). D.N. Majumdar on Mohana, UP. F.G. Bailey on Bisipara, Orissa ('Caste and the Economic Frontier', 1957). Kathleen Gough on Kumbapettai and Kirippur in Thanjavur. Beteille on Sripuram, Thanjavur ('Caste, Class and Power', 1965).
- What the field view actually discovered, against the texts: thousands of jatis rather than four varnas; disputed and locally variable rank; a dominant caste that is often not Brahmin; mobility through Sanskritization; factions cutting across caste; and a jajmani order that looked less like reciprocity the longer you watched it.
- Dube's contribution specifically, asked in 2019 about Dube's villages: he refused the harmonious picture, mapping Shamirpet by stratification and internal division, and then in 'India's Changing Villages' delivered the finding that planned development reproduces existing inequality. That is village studies turning on the state that funded it.
- Lewis on factions, asked in 2020 as whether Indian rural society is faction-ridden: factions (dhar, dala) are vertical, leader-centred, shifting alliances that recruit across caste. They matter because they show the village is neither a republic nor a simple caste hierarchy, but a political arena.

- Challenges of doing village studies, asked in 2022: the fieldworker's own caste determines who talks to him and which hamlet he sleeps in, so the Dalit cheri is systematically under-observed; the upper-caste host's view becomes the village's view; language and gender close off whole domains; the single village is silently generalized to India, which is the microcosm fallacy; the method produces a static synchronic snapshot with no history and no state in it; and rapport tends to produce sympathy for the order being described. Srinivas himself wrote about being read as a Brahmin in Rampura.
- The jajmani system, which the village studies both documented and dismantled. The term comes from William Wiser's 'The Hindu Jajmani System' (1936), from Karimpur, UP. The jajman is the patron, normally the landowning dominant caste household; kamins or purjans are the service castes, barber, washerman, potter, carpenter, priest, leatherworker. The tie is hereditary, multi-stranded, ritually framed and paid in kind at harvest, not in wages.
- Wiser read jajmani as reciprocal and mutually satisfying. Beidelman's 'A Comparative Analysis of the Jajmani System' (1959) demolished that: the relation is asymmetric and exploitative, resting on the landowner's monopoly of land, and reciprocity is the ideology of a coercive arrangement. Kolenda's review (1963) added that regional variation is so large that a single 'system' may be an artefact. Dumont, characteristically, read jajmani as an expression of religious interdependence rather than economics.
- Jajmani's decline, and the reasons, in order of weight: monetization and wage labour, the market supplying goods the artisan castes made, migration and the exit option, the Green Revolution converting patrons into employers, land reform and tenancy law, education and reservation, and Dalit refusal of degrading hereditary service. What survives is the ritual segment, priests and sometimes barbers at life-cycle rites.

KEY TERMS

Jajmani — The hereditary, ritually framed exchange in which landowning patron households receive services from artisan and service castes in return for a customary share of the harvest rather than a wage.

Universalization and parochialization — Marriott's paired processes: local practices rising into the great tradition, and great-tradition elements descending and being reworked into local, little-tradition forms.

Faction — A vertical, leader-centred and shifting political grouping in the village that recruits across caste lines, documented most fully by Oscar Lewis.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- The decade of 1950 was the golden period of village studies in Indian Sociology. Explain the statement. [2023, Paper II, Q1b, 10 marks]
- Critically examine Dube's contributions to the study of Indian villages. [2019, Paper II, Q2a, 20 marks]
- Discuss the challenges during village studies in India. [2022, Paper II, Q4c, 10 marks]
- Indian rural society is a faction-ridden society. Discuss. [2020, Paper II, Q2c, 10 marks]
- Write short notes with a sociological perspective: Significance of Village Studies in Indian Sociology. [2016, Paper II, Q1b, 10 marks]

Evolution of the Land Tenure System

The colonial revenue settlements are not administrative trivia. They are the moment India's agrarian classes were made, and every peasant movement in the syllabus is a reaction to one of them. The question is always the same: who was made the owner, and what happened to everyone else.

- The common logic across all three: the colonial state converted a customary, layered set of claims on the produce of land into a single, transferable, individual property right enforced by courts, and attached a cash

demand to it. Land became a commodity, and default became dispossession.

- Zamindari or Permanent Settlement (Cornwallis, 1793): revenue collectors were converted into proprietors, the demand was fixed in perpetuity, and the Sunset Law auctioned the estate if payment was not made by sunset on the due date. Result: a rentier class with no interest in improvement, layers of subinfeudation between the zamindar and the actual tiller, and tenants with no security. The Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 conceded occupancy rights only after decades of unrest, including the Pabna agrarian leagues.
- Ryotwari (Alexander Read and Thomas Munro, spreading from the 1820s): revenue taken directly from the ryot, assessed on the field by survey, and revised periodically. In principle it made peasant proprietors. In practice the demand was pitched high and taken in cash regardless of harvest, which pushed the ryot to the moneylender and the moneylender into ownership. The Deccan riots of 1875 are the direct consequence, and they were aimed at the sowkar's bonds, not at the state.
- Mahalwari (Regulation VII of 1822, Holt Mackenzie, revised by Martin Bird from 1833): settlement with the mahal or village estate through its lambardar, with joint and several liability among co-sharers. It preserved the co-sharing brotherhood, the bhaiachara, and so preserved the dominant peasant caste body. Joint liability also meant the weak co-sharer's default fell on his neighbours, and eventually on him.
- Do not quote precise area shares for the three systems. The figures circulating in coaching material vary widely and are not worth risking. Say ryotwari covered the largest share of British India and leave it there.
- Tribal exception: the revolts forced protective tenure. Birsa Munda's Ulgulan (1899-1900) produced the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act of 1908, and the Santhal Parganas Tenancy Act followed in 1949. These laws restrict alienation of tribal land to non-tribals, and their evasion is the continuing story of tribal dispossession.
- The class structure that results, in Daniel Thorner's canonical categories from 'The Agrarian Prospect in India' (1956): maliks who own and take rent, kisans who work their own land, and mazdoors who work others' land for a wage. The three tiers are a relation to land, not a caste list, though they correlate with caste closely enough to make the point.
- Beteille's refinement, asked in 2024: the bases of agrarian class structure are ownership of land, control of land, and use of land, that is, who holds the title, who makes the decisions, and who does the work. The three separate in modern agriculture, which is why the simple owner-versus-labourer picture fails. Utsa Patnaik's labour-exploitation criterion classifies the peasantry by whether a household is a net user or net supplier of others' labour, which is the sharper Marxist instrument.

The three colonial land tenure systems

System	Where and when	Revenue paid by	Terms	Social consequence
Zamindari (Permanent Settlement)	Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, later Banaras and northern Madras; Cornwallis, 1793	The zamindar, made a proprietor	Fixed in perpetuity; Sunset Law forfeited the estate on default	A rentier landlord class, subinfeudation, absentee landlordism, tenants without occupancy rights until 1885
Ryotwari	Madras and Bombay Presidencies, Assam, Berar; Read and Munro, spreading from the 1820s	The ryot, directly to the state	Assessed by field survey, revised periodically, demanded in cash	Peasant proprietors on paper; high demand drove indebtedness and transfer of land to moneylenders, hence the Deccan riots of 1875
Mahalwari	North Western Provinces, Punjab, parts of Central India; Regulation VII of 1822, revised from 1833	The mahal or village estate, through its lambardar	Joint and several liability of co-sharers, periodically revised	Preserved the village body and the bhaiachara brotherhood, so preserved dominant peasant castes; joint liability ruined the weakest co-sharers

KEY TERMS

Subinfeudation — The stacking of intermediary rent-receiving tenures between the zamindar and the actual cultivator, each layer taking a cut of the same produce.

Maliks, kisans, mazdoors — Thorner's three agrarian classes, defined by relation to land: proprietors who take rent, working peasants, and labourers.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Examine the changing initiatives of the land tenure system in India. [2019, Paper II, Q1c, 10 marks]
- Identify different forms of inequalities associated with agrarian social structure in India. [2024, Paper II, Q8b, 20 marks]
- Write short note with a sociological perspective: Andre Beteille's definition of class. [2013, Paper II, Q1a, 10 marks]

Land Reforms and What Actually Happened

Land reform is the clearest case in Indian sociology of legislation that succeeded on paper and failed on the ground, and examiners want the diagnosis, not the list of Acts. One structural fact explains most of it: land is a State subject, so the laws were written by legislatures the landed classes sat in.

- Four legs: abolition of intermediaries, tenancy reform, ceilings on holdings, and consolidation of holdings. Bhoodan and Gramdan run alongside as the voluntary alternative.
- Abolition of intermediaries was the one success, and even it was partial. Zamindari abolition Acts from the early 1950s removed a whole rentier stratum and brought millions of erstwhile tenants into direct relation with the state. But zamindars were compensated, and they retained large areas as khudkasht or 'personal cultivation' by first evicting the tenants who worked it. The reform's chief beneficiaries were the upper tenants, who became a new dominant landowning peasantry, not the landless.
- Tenancy reform failed most comprehensively. Rent was capped and tenure secured on paper; in practice tenants were evicted before the law took effect, or recorded as having 'voluntarily surrendered', and tenancy went oral, concealed and therefore unrecorded. You cannot protect a tenant who does not exist in the record.

The two real exceptions are Kerala's Land Reforms Amendment Act of 1969, which abolished tenancy and conferred ownership on tenants and homestead rights on kudikidappukars, and West Bengal's Operation Barga from 1978, which registered sharecroppers and gave them permanent, heritable cultivation rights. Both required a mobilized peasantry and a committed state government. That is the finding.

- Ceilings failed by design as much as by evasion: limits were set high, they applied to the individual rather than the household until the 1972 national guidelines, plantations, orchards and specialized farms were exempted, and benami transfers to relatives, servants and deities absorbed the rest. Surplus land actually declared and redistributed has been a small fraction of cultivated area.
- Consolidation worked where it was tried seriously, Punjab, Haryana and western UP, and was barely attempted in the east and south. It is the least ideological leg and the most successful, which is itself an argument.
- Bhoodan, from Vinoba Bhave's walk beginning at Pochampally in 1951, and Gramdan after it, rested on donation rather than compulsion. Much of what was given was poor, litigated or unusable land, and the distributive effect was slight. It is best used in an answer as evidence for the limits of moral suasion against a material interest.
- Why it failed, ranked: absence of political will because state legislatures were dominated by the landed; land records that were incomplete, outdated and manipulable; loopholes in the definition of 'personal cultivation'; litigation that ran for decades even after the First Amendment of 1951 created the Ninth Schedule to shelter these laws; and no mobilization from below except where the left had organized one.
- What replaced land reform on the agenda: the Green Revolution from the mid-1960s, which raised output and sidestepped redistribution. It concentrated gains in the irrigated wheat belt, favoured the already-landed who could buy inputs, converted patrons into employers and tenants into labourers, and widened both regional and class inequality. The 2023 paper asked precisely for a critique of the victory narrative.
- The sociological verdict worth writing: land reform redistributed authority upward from the zamindar to the middle peasant castes without redistributing land downward to the Dalit labourer. It made a new dominant class, not an equal countryside. That is why caste and landlessness still coincide.

Land reform: intention against outcome

Measure	Intention	Outcome
Abolition of intermediaries (1950s)	End rent-receiving intermediaries; tiller in direct relation with the state	The most successful leg. Zamindars compensated and allowed to retain large 'personal cultivation' after evicting tenants. Upper tenants became the new dominant landowners; the landless gained little
Tenancy reform	Fair rent, security of tenure, right to purchase	Widely evaded through eviction and 'voluntary surrender'; tenancy went oral and unrecorded. Real only in Kerala (1969 Act) and West Bengal (Operation Barga, 1978)
Ceiling on holdings	Redistribute surplus land to the landless	Ceilings set high, applied per individual until 1972, wide exemptions, benami transfers. Surplus declared and distributed was a small fraction of cultivated area
Consolidation of holdings	End fragmentation and scattered plots	Substantially achieved in Punjab, Haryana and western UP; barely attempted in the east and south
Bhoodan and Gramdan (from 1951)	Voluntary donation of land, moral rather than legal reform	Land donated was often poor, litigated or unusable; negligible redistributive effect

KEY TERMS

Personal cultivation — The elastically defined category under which zamindars retained large holdings from abolition Acts, typically after evicting the tenants who actually farmed the land.

Operation Barga — West Bengal's drive from 1978 to register sharecroppers (bargadars) and give them permanent, heritable cultivation rights and a secured crop share.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Discuss the main features of Land Reforms in post-independence India. [2023, Paper II, Q1e, 10 marks]
- Explain how land reforms brought about desired agrarian transformation. [2022, Paper II, Q4b, 20 marks]
- Describe the impact of land reforms on the peasants of Indian society. [2014, Paper II, Q4b, 20 marks]
- Analyse the major components of Land Reform Acts. Show their effectiveness in curbing rural inequality. [2016, Paper II, Q2c, 10 marks]
- Critique the victory narratives of Green Revolution in the context of Indian society. [2023, Paper II, Q4c, 10 marks]

Studying Caste: Attributional and Interactional Approaches, and Ghurye's Features

The 2023 paper asked for the difference between attributional and interactional approaches, which is the cleanest way into this whole unit. Attributional theories rank a caste by what it is; interactional theories rank it by what it does with others. Ghurye is the great attributional list-maker, and the argument against him is that a list of properties cannot generate a hierarchy.

- Attributional approach: a caste's rank follows from its attributes, that is, diet (vegetarian or not, beef or not), occupation (clean or polluting), ritual practice, teetotalism, widow remarriage, and the pollution its work involves. Ghurye, Bougle, Hutton and, in a different and ideological register, Dumont all work this way.
- Interactional approach: rank is not a property but a position produced in transaction. McKim Marriott ranked castes in five regions by who accepted kacca and pakka food from whom, and by who gave and took

services. Rank becomes a matrix of accepted and refused transactions, which is why it varies by locality and why villagers themselves often disagree about it. Marriott and Inden's later ethnosociology takes this further, treating persons as 'dividuals' who exchange coded substance rather than as bounded individuals with fixed traits.

- The payoff of the contrast: attributional theories give a single, stable, all-India hierarchy that the field does not find. Interactional theories explain the disagreement, the local variation and the middle zone of the hierarchy where nobody agrees who outranks whom, but they need attributes to explain why particular transactions are refused. Neither works alone.
- Ghurye's six features of caste, from 'Caste and Race in India' (1932), and the only list worth memorizing: (1) segmental division of society, (2) hierarchy, (3) restrictions on feeding and social intercourse, (4) civil and religious disabilities and privileges of the different sections, (5) lack of unrestricted choice of occupation, (6) restrictions on marriage. Ghurye treats endogamy as the essence.
- Bogle's three principles ('Essais sur le regime des castes', 1908), which Dumont takes as his starting point: hereditary specialization, hierarchy, and mutual repulsion or separation. Dumont's move is to argue that all three reduce to one, the opposition of pure and impure.
- Ambedkar's account of the features, asked in 2016 against 'the mainstream treatment'. From 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development' (1916): caste is an enclosed class, and its essence is endogamy superimposed on a population that was formerly exogamous. The mechanisms that maintain endogamy solve the surplus man and surplus woman problem: sati, enforced widowhood, and girl marriage. Caste spread by imitation of the closed group by others and by excommunication.
- Ambedkar's two hammer blows, both examinable: caste is not a division of labour but a division of labourers, graded one above the other; and caste is a system of graded inequality arranged on an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt. Graded inequality is why no united revolt of the lower castes forms: each stratum has someone beneath it to defend.
- The difference from the mainstream treatment, stated plainly: Ghurye lists features and asks where caste came from; Ambedkar asks what caste does and who it does it to. Ghurye's caste is an institution to be described; Ambedkar's is a mechanism of domination to be destroyed, and his remedy in 'Annihilation of Caste' (1936) is inter-marriage, because endogamy is the mechanism, plus the destruction of the shastras' authority, because scripture is the sanction.
- Varna against jati, the distinction that must be got right: varna is the four-fold all-India scriptural model; jati is the endogamous, local, occupational unit that people actually belong to, running into the thousands. Srinivas's point is that varna supplies the vocabulary in which jati mobility is claimed, and that the varna model has distorted the picture of caste by making a fourfold, tidy, immobile system look real.

KEY TERMS

Attributional approach — Ranking a caste by its intrinsic characteristics, its diet, occupation and ritual practice, rather than by its relations with other castes.

Interactional approach — Ranking a caste by the pattern of accepted and refused transactions, especially in food and services, as in Marriott's *kacca* and *pakka* analysis.

Graded inequality — Ambedkar's term for a hierarchy arranged on an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt, in which every stratum but the last has an inferior to defend.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Analyse differences between attributional and interactional approaches in studying caste system. [2023, Paper II, Q1c, 10 marks]
- How has B.R. Ambedkar identified the features of caste system? How is it different from the mainstream treatment of caste features? [2016, Paper II, Q2a, 20 marks]
- What does Dr. B.R. Ambedkar mean by the concept of 'Annihilation of Caste'? [2021, Paper II, Q1b, 10 marks]
- What are the main features of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's views on annihilation of caste? [2013, Paper II, Q3a, 20 marks]
- What, according to you, are the factors responsible for the continuance of caste system in India? Explain. [2024, Paper II, Q1a, 10 marks]

Srinivas on Caste: The Field View, Sanskritization and Dominant Caste

Srinivas's caste is the same caste Ghurye described, seen from inside a village, and it does not behave. Groups move, rank is disputed, the ritually highest caste is not the one that runs the place, and the varna model turns out to be a language of claim rather than a map of society.

- Sanskritization: the process by which a low Hindu caste, or a tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently twice-born caste. Renamed from 'Brahminization' once Srinivas found groups modelling themselves on Kshatriya, Vaishya and locally dominant non-Brahmin castes.
- The two things that must be said about it or the answer fails: it produces positional and not structural change, so the ladder survives every climb; and the ritual claim follows the material gain rather than causing it. A group that has acquired land, numbers or political leverage then adopts vegetarianism, the sacred thread and a Kshatriya origin story, and the claim is conceded because the power is already there.
- Critiques, in the order examiners reward: Yogendra Singh says it describes without explaining and is not a theory; Harold Gould reads it as protest against low rank rather than admiration of the Brahmin; Staal objects that 'Sanskritic' is too varied to name one model; it cannot handle tribal, Muslim or Christian cases, nor de-Sanskritization; it carries a Brahmanical bias by treating the upper-caste model as the natural destination; and post-Mandal Dalit and OBC assertion has more often repudiated the upper-caste model than imitated it, which is the strongest contemporary objection.
- Dominant caste, from 'The Social System of a Mysore Village' (1955) and 'The Dominant Caste in Rampura' (1959). Criteria: numerical strength, economic power especially in land, political power, a fairly high though not necessarily highest ritual rank, and later Western education and positions in administration.
- Why this concept is the hinge of the whole caste section: it separates local power from ritual purity. Okkaligas, Lingayats, Jats, Yadavs, Marathas, Reddys, Kammas, Patidars run their regions without being Brahmin. Dumont's purity-based hierarchy cannot easily accommodate this, and Beteille's Sripuram is built on it.
- Critiques of dominant caste: it names a power situation without explaining it; Dumont objects that fusing status and power in one term destroys the very distinction his system rests on; dominance today is fragmented and contested rather than concentrated in one caste per locality; and its bases have become numerical and economic rather than ritual, which is what Green Revolution surpluses and universal franchise did to it.
- The book view against the field view on caste, asked in 2021. The book view gives four varnas, fixed rank, and no mobility. The field view gives thousands of jatis, contested rank in the middle zone, mobility through Sanskritization, and dominance without purity. The balance the question asks about: the field view corrected

the picture of a frozen society, but it took its informants from the top of the village, so it inherited part of the bias it set out to fix. Both views need the other; the model that Sanskritizing groups copy is the textual one Ghurye reconstructed.

- Caste in politics, since it is the natural extension: Rajni Kothari's 'Caste in Indian Politics' (1970) argues that it is not that politics is caste-ridden but that caste is politicized, and that entry into politics modernizes caste by making it associational. Rudolph and Rudolph's caste associations are paracommunities, and their three phases of vertical, horizontal and differential mobilization track how caste has been organized electorally. Srinivas's own contribution to this vocabulary is the term 'vote bank', from the 1955 Mysore essay.

KEY TERMS

Sanskritization — A low, tribal or other group's adoption of the customs, ritual and ideology of a higher, frequently twice-born caste, in pursuit of a higher position.

Dominant caste — A caste preponderant in numbers, land and local political power, with a reasonably high ritual rank, that controls a locality regardless of who outranks it ritually.

Substantialization — Dumont's name for modern caste turning from a relational hierarchy into competing, self-contained blocks that assert identity and interest against each other.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Critically examine the concept of Sanskritization with suitable illustrations. [2023, Paper II, Q3c, 10 marks]
- Caste System studies in India have been dominated by the 'book-view' initially. How did the entry of 'field-view' bring about a balance in the study of Indian caste system? Discuss. [2021, Paper II, Q1a, 10 marks]
- What is caste politics? Substantiate your answer with examples of how identities are defined by caste dynamics. [2019, Paper II, Q2b, 20 marks]
- What are the changes in the cultural and structural aspects of the caste system since independence? [2017, Paper II, Q2c, 10 marks]
- Is caste system changing, weakening or disintegrating in India? [2015, Paper II, Q2a, 20 marks]

Dumont: Homo Hierarchicus and Its Critics

Louis Dumont's 'Homo Hierarchicus' (1966, English 1970) is the most ambitious and most attacked account of caste ever written. Its ambition: to find the single idea that generates the whole system, and to show that India is not a deviant version of the West but its structural opposite. Its vulnerability: everything it claims about India it reads from Brahmanical texts.

- Method: structuralism from Levi-Strauss, plus Indology, organized around ideology. Dumont insists that a society must be grasped through its own ideas, not the observer's, and that the sociologist's job is to find the ideology that makes the parts a whole. He founded 'Contributions to Indian Sociology' with Pocock in 1957 on this programme.
- The single principle: the opposition of the pure and the impure. Everything else, hereditary specialization, separation, hierarchy, the whole of Bouglé's triad, follows from it. Priests are pure and rank highest; leatherworkers and scavengers handle death and waste and rank lowest; the rest fall between by the same logic.
- Binary opposition, which the 2023 paper asked for directly. Pure and impure are not two things but one relation: neither term exists without the other, they define each other, and the opposition is the system. The pure encompasses the impure, which is Dumont's 'encompassing of the contrary': the superior term contains and defines its own negation. The Brahmin needs the untouchable to be a Brahmin. This is why Dumont

says untouchability cannot be abolished piecemeal, since the impure pole is structurally necessary to the pure one.

- The second binary, and the more contested one: the disjunction of status and power. In the Brahman and Kshatriya relation, ritual status is separated from and made superior to temporal power. The priest is spiritually higher, the king is materially dominant, and the two orders are distinct. Dumont makes this the defining feature of the Indian order, against the West where wealth, power and status converge.
- Homo hierarchicus against homo aequalis: India is holistic, the whole precedes the parts, and hierarchy is a value; the modern West is individualist, the individual precedes the whole, and equality is a value. The comparison is the point of the book, not an aside. Dumont's essay 'World Renunciation in Indian Religions' (1960) supplies the qualification: the renouncer is India's individual-outside-the-world, the one position from which the whole can be refused.
- Modern change, in Dumont's own terms: substantialization. Caste ceases to be a relational hierarchy and becomes a set of competing blocks or substances, each asserting identity and interest. This is his account of caste associations and caste politics, and it is more useful than it is usually given credit for.
- The critiques, and you must carry at least four. Berreman ('Caste as Social Process', 1967), from Sirkanda fieldwork: Dumont mistakes the Brahmanical view for the Indian view; from the bottom the system is experienced as coercion and exploitation, not consensus, and the low castes do not share the ideology that ranks them. This is the single most damaging objection.
- Dipankar Gupta ('Interrogating Caste', 2000): there is no single agreed hierarchy. Every caste has its own origin myth placing itself high, hierarchies are multiple, contested and locally incompatible, and what actually organizes caste is difference rather than hierarchy. The 2018 paper's 'discrete castes and muddled hierarchies' is this argument. The 2021 paper asked whether India is moving from hierarchy towards differentiation; that is Gupta's question.
- Declan Quigley ('The Interpretation of Caste', 1993), following Hocart's 'Caste: A Comparative Study' (1938): the centre of the caste system is the king and his sacrifice, not the Brahmin and his purity. Nicholas Dirks ('The Hollow Crown', 1987; 'Castes of Mind', 2001) argues the same historically, that the king was the pivot until colonialism made caste religious. Srinivas objects that dominance is real and Dumont has no room for it. Beteille objects that status and power were fused, not disjoined, in Sripuram. Marxists object that a system of ideas floats above the land relations that actually enforce it. And the structural objection: an account built on ideology can register no dissent, because dissent is by construction outside the system.

KEY TERMS

Encompassing of the contrary — Dumont's principle that the superior term of an opposition contains and defines its negation, so the pure encompasses the impure rather than merely excluding it.

Disjunction of status and power — Dumont's claim that Indian ideology separates ritual status from temporal power and subordinates the second to the first, unlike the West where they converge.

Homo hierarchicus — Dumont's model of India as a holistic society in which the whole precedes its parts and hierarchy is a value, set against the individualist, egalitarian homo aequalis of the modern West.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Contextualize Louis Dumont's concept of 'binary opposition' with reference to caste system in India. [2023, Paper II, Q3a, 20 marks]
- Critically evaluate Louis Dumont's Homo Hierarchicus. [2013, Paper II, Q3b, 20 marks]
- Write short note with a sociological perspective: Louis Dumont's perspective on the Indian caste system. [2015, Paper II, Q1c, 10 marks]
- What do you understand by discrete castes and muddled hierarchies? [2018, Paper II, Q3a, 20 marks]
- Is Indian society moving from 'hierarchy' towards 'differentiation'? Illustrate your answer with suitable examples. [2021, Paper II, Q2b, 20 marks]
- Which is more significant, the principle of 'hierarchy' or the principle of 'difference', in inter-caste relations in the present day? [2017, Paper II, Q1b, 10 marks]

Beteille: Caste, Class and Power in Sripuram

Andre Beteille's 'Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village' (1965) is the answer to a question Dumont's system cannot ask: what happens when ritual rank, wealth and political power stop coinciding. Sripuram, in Thanjavur district, is where he watched them come apart.

- The framework is Weberian, not Dumontian: three analytically separate dimensions of stratification, caste as status, class as economic position, and power as political control. Dumont has one dimension and derives everything from it; Beteille has three and asks how they align.
- Sripuram's geography is its argument. The agraaharam is the Brahmin street, the non-Brahmin streets lie beyond it, and the Adi-Dravida cheri sits apart at the edge. Caste in this village is not an idea, it is a map, and the spatial order is the ritual order made permanent.
- The historical finding: the three dimensions were once cumulative or consistent. Brahmins ranked highest ritually, owned most of the land, and held political authority; the three reinforced one another and Dumont's picture more or less held.
- The contemporary finding: they have become dispersed or inconsistent. Land has passed to non-Brahmins, adult franchise and party politics have moved power to numerically strong non-Brahmin castes, and Brahmins have exited to urban professions. High ritual status now coexists with modest local power. Stratification has moved from cumulative to dispersed, and that movement is Beteille's central contribution.
- Harmonic and disharmonic systems, asked in 2022. The terms come from Dumont; Beteille puts them to work. A harmonic system is one in which the existing inequality is legitimated by the society's own values, so ideology and practice agree: traditional caste society, where hierarchy is openly a value. A disharmonic system is one in which the professed ideology is egalitarian while the practice remains unequal, so the two contradict each other. Modern India, with a constitutional commitment to equality and a functioning caste order, is disharmonic. The tension is not a failure of the model, it is the model.
- Beteille's definition of class, asked in 2013: an aggregate of persons sharing a relation to the means of production and therefore similar life chances. His point about Sripuram is that class is not caste's twin. Caste is closed, corporate, ritually bounded, with membership by birth and its own panchayat; class is open, has no boundary, no shared ritual, and no corporate existence. This is why he insists on holding the two apart analytically rather than collapsing caste into class as the Marxists do, or dissolving class into caste as the Indologists do.
- Bases of agrarian class structure, asked in 2024: ownership of land, control of land, and use of land. Title, decision and labour separate in modern agriculture, producing classes the simple landlord and labourer

binary cannot name.

- Beteille's later positions worth carrying: 'The Backward Classes in Contemporary India' (1992) on reservation and the backward classes; 'Inequality among Men' (1977) on the comparative sociology of inequality; and his argument in 'Race and Caste' (2001) that caste is not race and that the Durban framing confuses two different principles of exclusion. On the village, his position is that it is a real unit of settlement and identity but not a little republic and not a repository of civilizational values.
- The line to end on: Srinivas separated power from ritual rank with the dominant caste; Beteille completed the separation by adding class, and then showed the three coming apart historically. Between them they make Dumont's single-principle system unusable as a description of the contemporary village, without refuting it as an account of the traditional ideology.

KEY TERMS

Cumulative and dispersed inequality — Beteille's contrast between a structure where caste, class and power reinforce each other in the same persons, and one where they have separated and no longer coincide.

Harmonic and disharmonic systems — A harmonic system's values legitimate its inequalities; a disharmonic system professes equality while practising hierarchy, which is modern India's condition.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- In the context of the changing Indian society, how do you view Andre Beteille's conceptions of harmonic and disharmonic social structures? [2022, Paper II, Q1d, 10 marks]
- Discuss Andre Beteille's account of the relationship between caste, class and power change from symmetrical to asymmetrical one. [2016, Paper II, Q2b, 20 marks]
- Give a critical analysis of Andre Beteille's study of Tanjore village. [2018, Paper II, Q1b, 10 marks]
- Write short note with a sociological perspective: Andre Beteille's definition of class. [2013, Paper II, Q1a, 10 marks]

Untouchability: Forms and Perspectives

Untouchability has been asked in some form in 2021, 2022 and 2024, and the question is nearly always about forms, which means the examiner wants a typology and evidence, not indignation. The analytic frame that pays: untouchability is not the caste system's excess, it is its foundation, because the impure pole is what the pure pole is defined against.

- Constitutional and legal position: Article 17 abolishes untouchability and forbids its practice in any form; the Untouchability (Offences) Act 1955, renamed and strengthened as the Protection of Civil Rights Act by the 1976 amendment; the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989; and the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013. Abolition by statute and persistence in practice is the sociological problem.
- Forms, spatial: segregated hamlets, the cheri, wada, tola or basti at the village edge, downwind and downstream; separate cremation grounds; in cities, refusal of rental housing and residential clustering.
- Forms, commensal: the two-tumbler system in tea shops, separate utensils and seating, segregated seating at mid-day meals in schools, and refusal to accept water or cooked food from Dalit hands.
- Forms, water and access: denial of wells, tanks and taps. The Mahad Satyagraha of 1927 was fought over the right to drink from the Chavdar tank, and the tank was ritually purified after Dalits drank from it. That single fact tells the whole story of what access means.

- Forms, religious: denial of temple entry, refusal of priestly service, exclusion from processions and festivals. Forms, occupational: manual scavenging, disposal of dead animals, leatherwork, drumming at funerals, and the historical devadasi system.
- Forms, marital and violent: enforcement of endogamy by social boycott, khap intervention and honour killing, with inter-caste marriage the trigger in most cases. Forms, economic: denial of tenancy, wage discrimination, exclusion from markets and credit, and social boycott as punishment for assertion.
- New and covert forms, which is what recent questions are really testing: refusal of rental accommodation in cities, exclusion from kitchens and food-handling work, discrimination in campuses and institutions administered through the language of merit, caste networks in private employment, and caste abuse online. The empirical anchor to cite is the multi-state survey published as 'Untouchability in Rural India' (Shah, Mander, Thorat, Deshpande and Baviskar, 2006), which documented the practice in various forms across eleven states long after abolition. Do not quote a percentage you cannot verify.
- Perspective, Gandhi: untouchability is a blot and an excrescence on Hinduism, not integral to it; varnashrama in its pure form is a division of labour without hierarchy; the remedy is a change of heart among caste Hindus. Hence the term harijan (adopted 1933), the Harijan Sevak Sangh (1932), and the temple entry satyagrahas at Vaikom (1924-25) and Guruvayur. Reform of Hinduism from within, by its own adherents.
- Perspective, Ambedkar: untouchability is produced by caste, caste is produced by the religious sanction of the shastras, and therefore Hinduism cannot reform it away. The remedy is political power and separate representation, then annihilation. Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha (1924), Mahad and the burning of the Manusmriti (1927), the Kalaram temple entry attempt at Nashik (1930), 'Annihilation of Caste' (1936), and conversion to Buddhism at Nagpur on 14 October 1956. He rejected 'harijan' as patronizing and argued in 'The Untouchables' (1948) that untouchables were Broken Men, defeated tribesmen settled outside the village who stayed Buddhist and ate beef, and were made untouchable by Brahmanism.
- The clash, which is what 2017 and 2015 were asking about: it broke into the open over the Communal Award's separate electorates for the Depressed Classes, Gandhi's fast, and the Poona Pact of September 1932, which substituted reserved seats within joint electorates. The shift from Gandhian to Ambedkarite positions is a shift from temple entry to political power, from reform to annihilation, from the caste Hindu's conscience to the Dalit's own organization, and from harijan to Dalit as a name chosen rather than given.
- Perspective, Dumont: untouchability is structurally necessary, since purity requires an impure pole to be pure against. This is the most pessimistic reading available and the one that explains why abolition by law has not worked. Perspective, Berreman: from below it is coercion, not consensus, and the untouchable does not share the ideology that places him. Perspective, Marxist (Desai, Gough, Omvedt): untouchability secures unfree labour and a landless workforce for the landowning castes, and the ritual language is the ideology of that arrangement.
- Assertion, which is where a good answer ends: the Dalit Panthers (1972, Dhasal, Pawar, Dhale), BAMCEF (1978) and the BSP (1984) under Kanshi Ram, and the adoption of 'Dalit', meaning broken or ground down, as a political self-description rather than a religious consolation. The forms of untouchability have not disappeared; they have moved from the well to the rental market, and from open exclusion to the vocabulary of merit.

KEY TERMS

Broken Men — Ambedkar's thesis in 'The Untouchables' (1948) that untouchables descend from defeated tribesmen settled outside the village who remained Buddhist and ate beef, and were made untouchable by Brahmanism.

Dalit — Meaning broken or ground down; a name of political self-assertion popularized by the Dalit Panthers, chosen in explicit rejection of 'harijan'.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- What are the different forms of untouchability still practised in India? Discuss with suitable illustrations. [2024, Paper II, Q4c, 10 marks]
- Explain the different forms of untouchability in India. [2022, Paper II, Q3c, 10 marks]
- What are the various forms of untouchability in India? Critically examine. [2021, Paper II, Q4c, 20 marks]
- How have the struggles against untouchability changed their forms and perspectives from Gandhian to Ambedkarite positions? [2017, Paper II, Q1d, 10 marks]
- Write short note with a sociological perspective: How far Gandhi was trusted by the untouchables. [2015, Paper II, Q1d, 10 marks]
- Caste-like formations are present in Non-Hindu religious communities as well. Discuss with examples. [2021, Paper II, Q1e, 10 marks]

Last-mile revision

- Little republic: Metcalfe 1830, Maine 1871, Marx 1853 accepts it and welcomes its destruction, Dumont 1966 destroys it as a colonial construct, Srinivas 1975 rescues the village's vertical unity while conceding self-sufficiency was a myth.
- Village studies 1950s: Srinivas (Rampur), Dube (Shamirpet), Lewis (Rampur, factions), Marriott (Kishan Garhi), Mayer (Ramkheri), Bailey (Bisipara), Beteille (Sripuram), Gough (Thanjavur).
- Jajmani: Wiser 1936 calls it reciprocal; Beidelman 1959 calls it exploitation resting on land monopoly. That pair is the whole answer.
- Three tenures: zamindari 1793 Cornwallis (rentiers, subinfeudation, Sunset Law), ryotwari 1820s Munro (peasant proprietors on paper, debt in fact, Deccan riots 1875), mahalwari 1822 (village estate, joint liability, bhaiachara preserved).
- Thorner's maliks, kisans, mazdoors. Beteille's three bases: ownership, control, use of land.
- Land reform: abolition of intermediaries worked, tenancy reform failed except Kerala 1969 and Operation Barga 1978, ceilings failed by design, consolidation worked only in the northwest, Bhoodan was symbolic. Land is a State subject; the legislatures belonged to the landed.
- Ghurye's six features, endogamy the essence. Bougle's three principles: hereditary specialization, hierarchy, repulsion. Ambedkar: endogamy superimposed on exogamy; a division of labourers, not of labour; graded inequality.
- Srinivas: Sanskritization is positional change following prior material gain; dominant caste is numbers plus land plus power plus a decently high ritual rank.
- Dumont: one principle, the pure and impure binary; encompassing of the contrary; disjunction of status and power; homo hierarchicus against homo aequalis; substantialization for modern change.
- Dumont's four best critics: Berreman (Brahmanical view mistaken for the Indian view), Gupta (multiple, muddled hierarchies; difference over hierarchy), Quigley and Hocart (the king, not the Brahmin, is the centre), Srinivas and Beteille (dominance and class are real and unaccounted for).
- Beteille: caste, class and power in Sripuram move from cumulative to dispersed; harmonic system legitimates its inequality, disharmonic system professes equality and practises hierarchy, which is modern India.
- Untouchability: Article 17, PCR Act 1955/1976, Atrocities Act 1989, Manual Scavengers Act 2013. Gandhi says blot on Hinduism, remedy is a change of heart; Ambedkar says product of Hinduism, remedy is power then annihilation; Dumont says structurally necessary; Marxists say it secures unfree labour.

Common errors to avoid

- Writing that Marx called the Indian village a little republic. Metcalfe did. Marx accepted the self-sufficiency description and called those communities the foundation of Oriental despotism, which is the opposite evaluation.
- Saying the village is a myth full stop. Dumont attacked the community as a sociological unit; Srinivas's reply in 'The Indian Village: Myth and Reality' (1975) is that self-sufficiency was the myth and vertical unity is the reality. The examiner wants the exchange, not one side.
- Praising jajmani for reciprocity and stopping there. Wiser's reciprocity thesis is the position to be attacked, and Beidelman (1959) is the attack.
- Confusing mahalwari with a co-operative or egalitarian system. Joint liability protected the co-sharing brotherhood as a body and destroyed the weakest co-sharers within it.
- Quoting exact area percentages for zamindari, ryotwari and mahalwari. The circulating figures contradict each other. Say ryotwari covered the largest share and move on.
- Treating land reform as a uniform national failure. Abolition of intermediaries largely succeeded, consolidation succeeded in the northwest, and Kerala and West Bengal delivered real tenancy reform. The pattern, not the verdict, is the answer.
- Saying land reform failed because of loopholes. Loopholes were the mechanism; the cause is that land is a State subject and the state legislatures were dominated by the landed classes.
- Attributing 'purity and pollution' to Ghurye as the core principle. Ghurye lists six features with endogamy as the essence; the single-principle purity account is Dumont's, built on Bougle.
- Making Dumont's binary opposition mean simply that pure and impure are two categories. The point is that they are one relation, mutually constituting, and that the pure encompasses the impure. Without 'encompassing of the contrary' the 2023 answer is half-written.
- Treating Dumont as an empirical claim about who ranks whom. He is describing an ideology. Which is why Berreman's objection, that the ideology is the Brahmin's and not the society's, lands so hard, and why 'Dumont was factually wrong about village X' is a weak criticism.
- Reversing Beteille's direction of change. Sripuram moves from cumulative to dispersed, from consistency to inconsistency. Writing that caste, class and power have converged inverts his finding.
- Using harmonic and disharmonic loosely as good and bad. Harmonic means values and inequality agree; disharmonic means an egalitarian ideology coexists with hierarchy, which is why modern India is the disharmonic case.
- Answering a forms-of-untouchability question with history and moral condemnation. It wants a typology, spatial, commensal, water, religious, occupational, marital, economic, and the new covert urban forms, with illustrations.
- Making Gandhi and Ambedkar differ only in temperament. They differ on the cause: for Gandhi untouchability is a corruption of Hinduism, for Ambedkar it is a product of it. Every other disagreement, including the Poona Pact, follows from that.