

## Caste System in India

Lesson No.	Title	Activity
27	Caste System in India	Prepare a report how caste system has changed in recent years by asking elder members in your family or neighborhood.

### Summary

Caste system is an important aspect of Indian social institutions. The word caste has created confusion in the sense that it is used to denote both Varna and Jati. Sociologically, both are different to each other. Several changes have occurred in the caste system due to the processes of sanskritisation, westernization, modernization, democratic decentralization, industrialization and urbanization, etc

### Concept and Meaning of CasteSystem

- ✚ The word caste has its origin from the Spanish word 'casta', meaning 'race', or a group having hereditary quality'. The term was applied to people of India by the Portuguese to denote 'Jati'.
- ✚ M. N. Srinivas has defined caste as a hereditary, endogamous and usually localized group, having a traditional association with an occupation, and occupying a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes. Relations between castes are determined by the rules of purity and pollution and hence there are restrictions on commensality (inter-dining) and social intercourse among castes.

### Features of Caste System

Some of the important features of the caste system may be summarized as follows:

- ✚ Segmental division of society
- ✚ Hierarchy
- ✚ Restrictions on inter-dinning
- ✚ Endogamy
- ✚ Purity and pollution
- ✚ Occupational association, etc.
- ✚ Social and religious disabilities and privileges of a few sections -
- ✚ Distinction in custom, dress and speech.
- ✚ Conflict resolving mechanisms.

### Difference between Varna and Jati

- ✚ Varna and Jati: *Varna* means colour. *Varna Vyavastha* is the textual view of Indian social system whereas *Jati* is the field view.
- ✚ In other words, we find jatis in reality today and not varnas. There are only four varnas whereas there are about 4000 jatis.

### Difference between Caste and Class

- ✚ While a caste is hereditary, a class is non-hereditary in nature. A class system allows both exogamy and endogamy, permits mobility either up or down the system, and also allows an individual to remain in the status to which he was born. Thus a class is primarily based on socio-economic criteria.
- ✚ A class is more open than the caste in the sense that mobility is allowed in the class system. It is not allowed that openly in the caste system. Further, caste system is based on ritual criterion whereas, class is based on secular criterion. Ritual criterion means it is based on religious myths, secular means non-religious criterion like economic, political and social criterion.
- ✚ In changing circumstances caste is also adapting to secular criteria, Consciousness is found in the class but not necessarily in the caste. However, today castes are also changing into classes in urban areas particularly in terms of economic criterion.

### Changes in Caste System

- ✚ Several processes like Sanskritization, westernization, modernization, dominant caste, industrialization, urbanization and decentralization have made consequent changes in the caste system.
- ✚ Through sanskritisation, a few lower castes in different parts of country have changed their status into higher castes.
- ✚ In urban areas castes are gradually becoming classes. Caste system has adapted suitably to the modern practices, i.e. educating people, forming formal organisations and making people conscious about their existence.
- ✚ Introduction of Panchayati Raj has given an opportunity for the lower castes to empower themselves
- ✚ In urban areas, today people do not adhere to caste norms. The only aspect where caste comes is that during marriage they still become endogamous. However, some people have adopted to inter-caste marriage and inter religious marriages.

### **Evaluate Yourself**

- Discuss the difference between caste and Varna.
- Highlight the differences between caste and class.
- What do you understand by the process of sanskritisation?
- Describe the changes in caste system.