



Mains Practice Question

Q. “The caste-based discrimination in India is different from the racial discrimination in the USA”. Evaluate. (250 Words)

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Approach

- In the introduction briefly give the background of caste discrimination and racial discrimination.
- Discuss the factors behind the rise of such discrimination.
- Compare both forms of discrimination, to understand whether both are similar or different.
- Mention different legislation that deals with social discrimination.
- Conclude the answer suitably.

Introduction

- India's **caste system** is the world's one of the longest surviving vertical social hierarchies. It encompasses a complex ordering of social groups on the basis of descent.
 - The groups at the bottom like untouchables or Dalits are considered ‘lesser human beings’, ‘impure’ and ‘polluting’ to other caste groups, it involves massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.
- **Racial discrimination** occurs when a person is treated less favourably, or not given the same opportunities, as others in a similar situation, because of their race, the country where they were born, their ethnic origin or their skin colour.

Body

Factors Behind Discrimination

- **Caste Based Discrimination**
 - **Sense of caste prestige:** Feeling of own caste superiority over other castes is the main factor. It is people's strong desire to enhance caste prestige. Members of a particular caste or sub-caste have the tendency of developing loyalty to their own caste.
 - **Caste endogamy:** Caste endogamy refers to marriage within the same caste. Caste endogamy is therefore responsible for the emergence of the feeling of casteism.
 - **Belief in religious dogmas:** Due to illiteracy, people are governed by belief in religious dogmas, blind beliefs and superstitions. Due to the practice of ‘Jati Dharma’ they take interest in their own caste. It leads to caste feeling and casteism.
 - **Social distance:** Especially in rural areas, people belonging to the higher caste maintain social distance from the lower castes.
 - Dalits in rural villages are forbidden in Hindu temples and disallowed with their shoes on in higher-caste neighborhoods.
 - They maintain it through different restrictions like inter-caste marriages, Inter-dinning etc.

- The ideology of an individual is associated with his caste norms and values. This has given rise to casteism.

▪ **Racial discrimination in US**

- **Trans-Atlantic slave trade:** The European colonies imported African slaves to US, for making plantation agriculture in the Americas profitable. It led to poor economic conditions of the blacks which persists even today.
- **Systematized racism:** European Americans who participated in the slave industry tried to justify their economic exploitation of black people by creating a "scientific" theory of white superiority and black inferiority.
- **Segregation of population:** Cultural and political segregation of the public space continues to occur despite anti-segregation laws.
- **Financial distress:** Despite the emancipation of slavery system the black population faces severe problems in gaining employment and attaining standard of living.
- **Law enforcement:** Prejudiced law enforcement officials are often seen violating legal norms and being discriminatory towards black population.

Legal Measures

- **Article 17** of the constitution abolished the practice of untouchability and made its practice a punishable offence.
- The legislations focused on the discrimination and oppression of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. These include:
 - The **Untouchability Offences Act of 1955** (renamed to The Protection of Civil Liberties Act) was enacted which provided penalties for preventing a person from entering a place of worship or from taking water from a tank or well.
 - The **Scheduled Castes And the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.**
- The United Nations (UN) has declared 21 March as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.
- After the American civil war, the **Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution** abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, except as punishment for a crime.
 - In **U.S, the Civil Rights Act of 1964** prohibited discrimination in public accommodations and employment.
- The United Nations through the 1948 **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** proclaim the right of everyone to enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms, without distinction to race, colour or national origin.

Comparison of Racial and Caste Discrimination

- **Economic condition:** Various data shows one-fourth of Afro-American population is at the poverty line, which is much higher than other groups.
 - In India, the condition of Dalits has been extremely pathetic for centuries. They are mostly landless communities and forced to live in small hamlets out of the village.
- **Mob violence:** Mob violence is committed against Dalits on the name of animal slaughtering and a disproportionate number of rapes are committed against Dalit women.
 - In comparison, post-Civil War white mob violence against blacks has morphed into state-condoned violence of homicides of African Americans by police.
- Racial inequality in America has its parallel in caste inequality in India even though by definition, race and caste are not the same thing.
- According to the United Nations, **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)**, "the term "racial discrimination" shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin.
 - Caste discrimination is recognised by the United Nations as a **contemporary form of**

racial discrimination.

Conclusion

- People affected by descent-based discrimination face significant challenges with respect to their enjoyment of human rights. These challenges arise from a variety of legal, social, and structural barriers and constructs, both historic and contemporary in nature.
- To address descent-based discrimination we must tackle the broader social norms, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate and reinforce prejudices and stereotypes of hierarchy, and accompanying forms of domination and exclusion that are endemic to caste and other systems of inherited status.

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