



Mains Practice Question

Q. Why is caste identity in India both fluid and static? (Answer in 250 words, UPSC Mains 2023)

08 Jan, 2024 GS Paper 1 Indian Society

Approach

- Give a brief introduction about the caste system.
- Write features of the caste system.
- Define fluid and static features of the Indian caste system.
- Write a conclusion.

Introduction

The caste system in India is a system of **social stratification, and social restriction**, and a basis for affirmative action in India. It exhibits **both fluid and static elements** due to **social, economic, and historical** reasons.

Body

Features of the Indian caste system:

- **Caste is Innate:** The caste system in India is characterized by **absolute rigidity** and **immobility**. It is the caste that determines one's status in life.
- **Hierarchical Social Structure:** The caste structure of the society is a hierarchy or system of **subordination** held together by the relations of superiority and inferiority.

Fluid aspect of Caste Identity:

- **Inter-caste Marriages:** In recent decades inter-caste marriages have become more common, particularly in **urban areas**.
- **Urbanization and Migration:** Urbanization and migration to cities have created more **heterogeneous** and **cosmopolitan environments** overshadowing caste identities.
- **Education and employment:** Legislation like the **Right to Education (RTE)** and **affirmative action** have ensured a better educational level, as exemplified by individuals like **President Ram Nath Kovind**, who rose to the highest office in the country despite coming from a Scheduled caste background.

Static aspect of Caste Identity:

- **Historical Roots:** Caste identity in India has historical roots dating back thousands of years, and it continues to persist in the **collective conscience** of the masses.
- **Traditional Occupations:** In some rural areas, people continue to follow **hereditary occupations** associated with caste.
- **Caste Association:** Organisation based on caste still acts as a **pressure group**.

Conclusion

Thus caste in India is a **complex interplay** of fluid and static elements. To overcome caste barriers various **social awareness programmes** should be carried out along with the **legislative** and **constitutional measures**.

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