

Question: The Indian caste system has taken on new identities in recent years. Discuss the significance of and difficulties with the caste system in this context.

Answer: Caste is an endogamous group based on social hierarchy, where position of individual is ascribed by birth rather than achieved status. There are about 3,000 caste and 25,000 sub caste in India.

In recent times the caste system is assuming new identities in following ways:

- **Formation of caste-based associations/ caste panchayat like- Jaat sabha, Goswami Sammelam.**
- **Casteism on internet like- #jai bheem, #jai parsuram etc.**
- **Casteism in economic sector like- formation of Dalit Chamber of Commerce and Industry.**
- **Rise of caste based matrimonial sites and caste based matrimonial ads.**
- **Best practices: Maharashtra has recently passed a law (2016) prohibiting social boycott based on caste and other factors.**
- **Caste system has both advantages and disadvantages, the same are described as follows:**

- ***Caste has accommodated multiple communities by ensuring each of them a monopoly of a specific means of livelihood.***
- ***It has handed over the knowledge and skills of the hereditary occupation of a caste from one generation to another.***
- ***Specialization led to quality production of goods and thus promoted economic development.***
- ***It has helped the preservation of culture and ensured productivity.***
- ***It has helped maintaining racial purity through endogamy.***

However, as noted above the caste system has also its disadvantages, such as:

- ***It is a great stumbling block in the way of social reforms.***
- ***It perpetuates the exploitation of the economically weaker and socially inferior castes, especially the untouchables.***
- ***It has inflicted hardships on women through its insistence on practices like child-marriage, prohibition of widow-remarriage.***
- ***It has stood in the way of national and collective consciousness and proved to be a disintegrating rather than an integrating factor.***
- ***It undermines the efficiency of labour and prevents perfect mobility of labour, capital and***

productive effort.

Thus, there is a need for encouraging inter-caste marriages under Dr. Ambedkar scheme for social integration through inter-caste marriages.

Moreover, there is a need to depoliticize the caste-based reservation. This will help in promoting national unity and integrity.



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