

Sociology Daily Answer Writing

Week 8 - Day 4

Model Structures

1. Examine the role of backward caste movements in the political mobility of depressed castes in India. **20**

Model Structure

Introduction

- Sociologically, the backward classes consist of a large number of the backward castes which remain above the Scheduled Castes and below the upper castes. These castes consist of intermediate castes — the cultivating castes, artisans and service castes.

Main Body

- Like Dalits, they were also victims of the caste system and social oppression. Their cause lies in the inequality of status and unjustness of the caste system. Western education, liberal polity and reformist ideology acted as catalysts in awakening the backward classes to question the supremacy of the upper castes.
- The backward classes emerged as a powerful social, economic and political block during the post-independence period in the countryside as a result of the policies of the state.
- The principal policies which impacted them included – the land reforms which consisted of the abolition of landlordism, putting ceilings on the size of the landholdings, consolidation of landholdings, and Green Revolution in the selected areas of the country, legal-constitutional measure conferring equal status, welfare schemes for the welfare of the lower backward classes and so on. Besides, the state policies, the changes which occurred from within the society – population growth, breaking down of the Jajmani system also affected them.
- On account of their numerical strength along with the control on the village land they came to control the village vote banks. All the upper backward classes are relevant examples of this change — Jats, Yadavs, Kurmies, Gujjars, Kappus, Khammas, Reddies, Lingayats, Vokaliggas, Patels, Kolis, Marathas, etc., in different regions of the country. While the intermediary castes came to control the affairs of the village society, the

artisans and the service castes joined the ranks of the marginalized groups of the wage laborers, marginal and poor farmers.

- Backward class movements like the SNDP Movement, Satyashodhak Movement, Justice Movement, and Self-respect movement played an important role in the political mobility of depressed castes in India. In the pre-independence period, such movements had the following significant effects –
 1. Occupational mobility: Increased participation in other occupations than the traditional caste-based occupations. For example, the Ezhavas of Kerala differentiated into other occupations like tailoring and cottage industries from the traditional occupation of toddy tapping.
 2. Group mobility through the initiation of the policy of reservation – The backward classes in South India questioned the domination of Brahmins in culture, administration, and politics. The Anti-Brahmin Nadar movement in Madras was one of the earliest such movements. The most effective expression of the Dravidian revolt against the Brahmin domination in the south was provided by the Self-Respect Movement led by E V Ramaswami Naicker, alias Periyar, during the 1920s and 1940s. Consequently, the policy of reservation in government jobs was first implemented in Madras. The appointment of Kaka Kalelkar and Mandal Commissions and the implementation of the latter's report were the results of the backward class mobilisation.
 3. Political mobility: The mobilisation of the backward classes in the North has been around two issues — their electoral participation and the reservation. Other issues like their mobilisation on the issues like those related to the farmers also get linked to electoral politics. In north India, they have been mobilized by Charan Singh, Socialists including Ram Manohar Lohia, Karpoori Thakur, and different political parties like Samajwadi Party and Rashtriya Janata Dal in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. They linked the social issues of the backward classes with the economic issues of the peasantry.
- Post-independence backward class movements were totally different from the pre-independence period. Many movements like SNDP, Arya Samaj institutionalized themselves. New types of movements emerged –

- I. Although the constitution rejected caste, in practice it continued. They led to various types of reactions. As a result, the Sanskritisation movement continued, but they came to an end with Mandal Commission recommendations.
- II. OBC Movement – Shudras wanted benefits similar to Dalits, however, this also lost legitimacy after Mandal Commission recommendations.
- III. There were mixed movements that also addressed the problems of backward castes also like – Naxalite Movement, women’s movement, etc.
 - The Backward class movements in contemporary India take the form of protests and agitations for greater life chances in the form of affirmative action. For example, the demand for OBC status by Marathas, Gujjars, and Patels. Backward Caste Associations have become powerful interest/pressure groups and are influencing politics both at the regional level and national level.

Conclusion

- Recently, the 102nd Amendment inserted Article 338B into the Constitution. This article provides for the establishment of a commission for the socially and educationally backward classes to be known as the National Commission for Backward Classes. The NCBC thus received a constitutional status after this amendment was passed.

2. Secularization of caste is essentially a modern phenomenon. Discuss.

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Model Structure

Introduction

- Caste system has been termed as the DNA of Indian civilization, and it has been one of the most important schemes for classification of Indian society. Caste system has undergone several changes, and the pace of these changes has increased in the last few decades.

Main Body

- Dhirubhai Sheth has argued that the caste system is undergoing a process of secularization. Changes in caste system which are leading to secularization can be observed along 2 dimensions:
 - De-ritualization, and
 - Politicization
- These changes are essentially a modern phenomenon, and this can be seen by the fact that the process of secularization has fastened with increasing modernization of India. These changes have had the following impact on the caste system:
 - They have pushed caste system out of the traditional stratification system
 - They have linked it to the new structure of representational power
 - In their cumulative impact, they have made it possible for individual members of different castes to acquire new economic interest and social-political identification and own class-like as well as ethnic type identities.
 - Thus, secularization of caste has led to **Classisation of the caste system**.
- Modernisation of India's economy and democratization of its political institutions, have released new economic and political power in the society.
- The hierarchically ordered strata of castes now function as horizontal groups, competing for power and control over resources in society. Alongside this change in the organisational structure, i.e., it's **horizontalisation**, the form consciousness takes has also changed
- **Caste consciousness is now articulated as political consciousness** of groups staking claims to power and to new places in the changed opportunity structure. The rise of such consciousness of castes has led to disruption of hierarchical relations and to increase in competition and conflict among them. Far from strengthening the caste system, the emergent competitive character of 'caste consciousness' has contributed to its systemic disintegration.
- Fundamental changes have occurred in the occupational structure of the society. A vast number of non-traditional, unbound-to-caste occupations and a new type of social relations among occupational groups have emerged. This has resulted in **breaking down the nexus between hereditary ritual status and occupation** —one of the caste-system's defining features.

- Significant structural differentiations have taken place within every caste. The **caste rules of commensality have become almost totally inoperative.**
- The role of **caste panchayats** has also reduced significantly. The ideology and organisation of the traditional caste system have thus become vastly eroded. Its description as a system of ritual status hierarchy has lost theoretical meaning.
- Examples- De-ritualization, Politicisation (Rajani Kothari), opening of temples, inter-caste marriages
- Secularisation in public sphere as rituals are getting restricted to the private sphere (Harold Gould- Study of Rikshawalah of Lucknow)
- MN Srinivas – ritual hierarchy is getting replaced by secular hierarchy

Conclusion

- In sum, while castes survive as micro-communities based on kinship sentiments and relationships, they no longer relate to each other as 'units' of a ritual hierarchy. The caste system, long conceived as a ritual status system, has imploded. Having failed to cope with the changes that have occurred in the larger society, particularly after India's decolonisation, the caste 'system' is unable to maintain itself, on the basis of its own principle of ritual hierarchy.