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B.com-I Group-I
Paper-II

Socio political Environment

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Q6. → Explain the origin of Caste^{system} and define its characteristics?

Ans.

Caste is a group of people having a specific social rank, defined generally by descent, marriage, occupation and commensality. ... The english word "Caste" derives from the Spanish and Portuguese *casta*, which means, "race, lineage, or breed".

India's caste system which divides Hindus into rigid hierarchical groups based on their Karma (work) and dharma (the hindi word for religion, but here it means duty) is generally accepted to be more than 3,000 years old.

Manusmriti, widely regarded to be the most important and authoritative book on Hindu law and dating back to at least 1,000 years before Christ was born, "acknowledges and justifies the caste system as the basis of order and regularity of society."

The Caste system divides Hindus into four main categories - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Shudras, many believe that the groups originated from Brahma, the Hindu god of creation.

At the top of the hierarchy were the Brahmins who were mainly teachers and intellectuals and are believed to have come from Brahma's head. Then came the Kshatriyas, or the warriors and rulers, supposedly from his arms. The third slot went to Vaishyas, or the traders, who were created from his thighs. At the bottom of the heap were the Shudras, who came from Brahma's feet and did all the menial jobs.

The main castes were further divided into about 3,000 castes and 25,000 sub-castes, each based on their specific occupation.

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The Indian Social System rests on three pillars: ~~the caste~~ the Caste System, the Joint Family System and the village community. Among these, the Caste system appears to be the most significant feature of the Hindu society due to its interdependence upon the social, economic and political systems. In fact, the Hindu society has been described as the Caste society par excellence. The Caste system in India is in vogue from time immemorial.

As a traditional basis of stratification, Caste is a distinctive category in the Indian social system. Though it had its beginning in the Hindu philosophy of four Varnas corresponding to four functional divisions, it has resulted in the perpetuation of several Caste groups among the Hindus.

Every society is caste-ridden and the caste system exists even among the most advanced societies of the world, in one form or the other. But the irony is that the Caste system became so rigid in this peninsular sub-continent of India that its impact was felt even by other religious communities, such as the Muslims and the Christians, and its regeneration became a subject of criticism throughout the world.

The Caste system in India can be viewed from two angles: first, from the structural point of view and secondly, from the cultural angle. As regards the structural aspect of Caste it is explained by accepting it as a general principle of stratification and Caste, as a cultural system, is understood in terms of prominence and

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ideas of pollution-purity and notions of hierarchy, segregation and corporations. The structural view explains the stratification as a universal reality and caste is, therefore, an aspect of this reality.

A.W. Green says, "caste is a system of stratification in which mobility, movement up and down in the status ladder, at least ideally, may not occur."

* Characteristics: — It is easy to understand if we analyze its characteristics: —

(a.) Segmental division of society: — The caste system divides the whole society into various segments or sections. Each of these castes is a well developed social group, the membership of which is fixed by birth. So change from one caste to another caste is not possible.

(b.) Hierarchy: — The caste system is characterized by hierarchical order. Dumont believes that the hierarchical order of caste system is based on the concept of purity and pollution. At the top of this hierarchy are the Brahmins and at the bottom is the Shudras.

(c.) Restriction on feeding and social inter-course: —

In caste system there are several restrictions which are related to food, drink and social inter-course. The members of the upper caste cannot take food or water from the lower caste members, even not interact with the members of the other castes but the vice-versa is permissible.

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(d) Civil and religious disabilities: — In caste system, there is an unequal distribution of privileges and restrictions among its members. Generally, the higher caste people enjoy all the privileges and the lower caste people are put to all kinds of restrictions.

(e) Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation: — Under caste system, each caste has its own traditional occupation. Occupation is fixed at the time of birth and the members of a caste are forced to follow the occupation of that caste.

(f) Restriction on marriage: — In caste system the principles of endogamy is strictly followed. That means, marriage within the own caste or sub-caste is purely followed.

There are different theories regarding the origin of the caste system in India.

Brahma and the origin of caste

1. } Brahmins
 } Priests & teachers
2. } Kshatriyas
 } Warriors & rulers
3. } Vaishyas
 } Farmers, traders & merchants
4. } Shudras
 } Labourers
5. } Detail (outcastes)
 } Street sweepers, latrine cleaners