

NEXT IAS

INDIAN SOCIETY

**CIVIL SERVICES
EXAMINATION 2027**

Published by





MADE EASY Publications Pvt. Ltd.

Corporate Office: 44-A/4, Kalu Sarai
(Near Hauz Khas Metro Station), New Delhi-110016
Contact: 011-45124660, 8860378007
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Indian Society

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First Edition: 2017
Second Edition: 2018
Third Edition: 2019
Revised & Updated: 2020
Fourth Edition: 2021
Fifth Edition: 2022
Sixth Edition: 2023
Seventh Edition: Nov. 2023

Eighth Edition: Oct. 2025

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INDIAN SOCIETY: AN OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

"India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great grandmother of tradition."

— Mark Twain

India's long and sustained civilizations across the ages makes it a unique society. The very diversity on all accounts from geography to religion to language to caste to custom to cuisine to ethnicity etc., make it truly vibrant and vivid. Such myriad magnitudes of diversities pose both challenges and opportunities. Nevertheless, the very core character of Indianness such as tolerance for pluralism and multiculturalism makes it truly distinct from other civilizations.

India has been the land of immigrants and invaders from across the world which has resulted in infusion of diverse cultures to this land which in turn made India an integrated society. It can be seen in terms of its depiction as *"Cultural Mosaic Model"* unlike *"Melting pot"* of the western society. The call of *"Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam"*, *"Sarva Dharma Sambhavah"* and "golden mean" in all dealing make Indian society most welcoming when there is increasing case of *"clash of civilization"* across the globe.

India despite a glorious past has now become a *"Prismatic society"* (sandwiched between traditional and modern). There is simultaneous existence of poverty and opulence, ascetic spiritualism and filthy materialism. Indian society being in transition bears impact of external forces like globalization differentially.

Indian society comprises of people living in rural, urban, tribal settings and all sections who carry the ethos of Indianness. As India itself is a multi-colored canvas of multiple identities, diverse custom, costume, cuisine, color, creed, caste etc. Bound by another "C" called consensus, whose societal feature would be filled with peculiarities.

No matter how people in the USA start out-Cuban, African American, Chinese - once they have been in the USA for a



while they become 'American' and lose their individual identity.

People have a choice about whether they wanted to be either an 'American' or to keep their own identity.



tribe of Andaman Nicobar living in primitive area to ultra-modern coterie of metropolitan Mumbai. People living in hill areas may have distinctly different societal set up than patriarchal big swath of rural setting. Such idiosyncrasies make Indian society very complex.

Nevertheless, prominent features across the societal spectrum can be highlighted as following:

- Caste System
- Religious Diversity
- Linguistic Diversity
- Ethnic and Racial Diversity
- Orthodoxy/Superstition
- Transitional Society
- Family and Kinship
- Tribal Society
- Art and Culture
- Geography as a unit of diversity
- Philosophical/Ideological diversity
- Tolerance, love and compassion
- Interdependence

1.2.1 Caste System

Out of two main forms of social stratification in the Indian society-caste and class – caste was the prominent agency of social structure. It decides largely the position that a man occupies in society. It is so entrenched in the Indian psyche that it is one of the lead determiners of one's sociopolitical as well as economic position.

Ironically the term '*Caste*' itself is not an Indian one, coming from the Portuguese '*Casta*' meaning, '*race*' or '*pure stock*'. Indians, themselves, have no single term for describing the caste system as a whole but use a variety of words referring to different aspects of it, the two main ones being Varna and Jati.

A caste is an endogamous group, or collection of endogamous groups, bearing a common name, membership of which is hereditary imposing on its members certain restrictions in the matters of social intercourse either following a common traditional occupation or claiming a common origin and generally regarded as forming a single homogeneous community.

Although it started as natural division of occupational groups, it eventually upon receiving the religious sanction, became solidified into the caste system. It is closely bound with the Hindu belief in rebirth individuals who fail to abide by the rituals and duties of their caste, it is believed, will be reborn in an inferior position in their next incarnation.

1.2 Salient Features of Indian Society

Indian society is a sum total of all microcosmic societies existing in its lap which may be as diverse as an Islandic

Characteristics of Caste System

This system had some characteristic elements, which are as follows:

- **Rigidity:** Its first distinguishing feature is its absolute rigidity and immobility. People who follow the caste system believe that an individual dies in the same caste in which he/she is born and it is the caste that determines his/her status in life. e.g. untouchable remain pre-occupied with manual scavenging.
- **Hierarchical:** The caste structure of the Indian society is hierarchical or system of subordination held together by the relations of superiority and inferiority. At the apex of which are Brahmins and at the lowest rung are the Shudras.
- **Hereditary Occupations:** A person born in a caste performs the occupation particular to that caste group irrespective of Merit.
- **Restrictions on Commensality:** The caste system survived for millennia due to its injunctions on commensality (eating and drinking) among people of different castes. This restriction was upheld by religious scriptures. E.g. Brahmin can't take food from untouchables
- **Endogamy:** The practice of marrying within the same caste, is another important element which helped its sustenance over the years. The practice is so entrenched in the psyche of people in India that inter-caste marriages are still a rarity in the present times. E.g- prevalence of matrimonial ads. The violation of the rule of endogamy often leads to ostracism, loss of caste and honour killings. less than 5% marriages are intercaste (India Human Development Survey).
- **Untouchability:** The most abominable feature of the caste system was the practice of untouchability people belonging to Shudras/Ati-shudras groups were forced to maintain distance from the people of the higher castes e.g. Shudras were not allowed to take water from the same well in a village.

Historical Trajectory of Caste

- **Ancient Period:** The four Varna classification is roughly three thousand years old. However, the 'caste system' stood for different things in different time periods, so that it is misleading to think of the same system continuing for three thousand years. In its earliest phase, in the late Vedic period roughly between 900 – 500 BC, the caste system was really a Varna system and consisted of only four major divisions. These divisions were not very elaborate or very rigid, and they were not determined by birth. Movement across the categories seems to have been not only possible but quite common. It is only in the post Vedic period that caste became the rigid institution that is familiar to us from well known definitions.
- **Colonial Times:** The present form of caste as a social institution has been shaped very strongly by both the colonial period as well as the rapid changes that have come about in independent India.

Initially, the British administrators began by trying to understand the complexities of caste in an effort to learn how to govern the country efficiently. Some of these efforts took the shape of very methodical and intensive surveys and reports on the 'customs and manners' of various tribes and castes all over the country.

Firstly begun in the 1860s, the census became a regular ten-yearly exercise conducted by the British Indian government from 1881 onwards. The 1901 Census under the direction of Herbert Risley was particularly important as it sought to collect information on the social hierarchy of caste –i.e., This effort had a huge impact on social perceptions of caste and hundreds of petitions were addressed to the Census Commissioner by representatives of different castes claiming a higher position in the social scale and offering historical and scriptural evidence for their claims. This kind of direct attempt to count caste and to officially record caste status changed the institution itself. Before this kind of intervention, caste identities had been much more fluid and less rigid once they began to be counted and recorded, caste began to take on a new life.

Secondly, the land revenue settlements and related arrangements and laws served to give legal recognition to the customary (caste-based) rights of the upper castes. These castes now became land owners in the modern sense rather than feudal classes with claims on the produce of the land, or claims to revenue or tribute of various kinds.

Apart from this, for the welfare of downtrodden castes, the Government of India Act of 1935 was passed which gave legal recognition to the lists or '*schedules*' of castes and tribes marked out for special treatment by the state. This is how the terms '*Scheduled Tribes*' and the '*Scheduled Castes*' came into being. Castes at the bottom of the hierarchy that suffered severe discrimination, including all the so-called 'untouchable' castes, were included among the Scheduled Castes.

However caste system also got a dent with modern education, occupational diversity, urbanization, transfer of land uniform modern legal system. A number of socio-religious reform movements were initiated to eradicate the social menace of untouchability like Self Respect Movement, Satya Shodhak Samaj, Mahad Satyagrah.

Further caste considerations had inevitably played a role in the mass mobilisations of the nationalist movement. Efforts to organise the "depressed classes" initiative taken from both ends of the caste spectrum – by upper caste progressive reformers as well as by members of the lower castes such as Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar in western India, Mahatma Ayyankali, Sri Narayana Guru, Iyothee Thass and Periyar (E.V. Ramaswamy Naickar) in the South. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar began organising protests against untouchability from the 1920s onwards. Anti-untouchability programmes

became a significant part of the Congress agenda so that, by the time Independence was on the horizon, there was a broad agreement across the spectrum of the nationalist movement to abolish caste distinctions. The dominant view in the nationalist movement was to treat caste as a social evil and as a colonial ploy to divide Indians (*Communal Award/MacDonald Award*). But the nationalist leaders, above all, Mahatma Gandhi, were able to simultaneously work for the upliftment of the lower castes, advocate the abolition of untouchability and other caste restrictions, and, at the same time, reassure the landowning upper castes that their interests, too, would be looked after.

Post Independence

The post-Independence Indian state inherited and reflected these contradictions. On the one hand, the state was committed to the abolition of caste and explicitly wrote this into the Constitution (*Untouchability is abolished under Article 17*). Further reservation for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is provided for their empowerment. On the other hand, the state was both unable and unwilling to push through radical reforms which would have undermined the economic basis for caste inequality. In other words, in the decades immediately after Independence, the state did not make sufficient effort to deal with the fact that the upper castes and the lower castes were far from equal in economic and educational terms.

The development activity of the state and the growth of private industry also affected caste indirectly through the speeding up and intensification of socio-economic change. Modern industry created all kinds of new jobs for which there were no caste rules. Urbanisation and the conditions of collective living in the cities made it difficult for the caste-segregated patterns of social interaction to survive. At a different level, modern educated Indians were attracted to the liberal ideas of individualism and meritocracy. They began to abandon the more extreme caste practices. On the other hand, it was remarkable how resilient caste proved to be recruitment to industrial jobs, whether in the textile mills of Mumbai (then Bombay), the jute mills of Kolkata (then Calcutta), or elsewhere, continued to be organised along caste and kinship-based lines.

Not surprisingly, it was in the cultural and domestic spheres that caste has proved strongest, endogamy or the practice of marrying within the caste, remained largely unaffected by modernisation and change.

Perhaps, the most eventful and important sphere of change has been that of politics in form of *"castization of politics and politicization of caste"*. From its very beginnings in independent India, democratic politics has been deeply conditioned by caste. Since the 1980s we have also seen the emergence of explicitly caste-based political parties. In the early general elections, it seemed as though caste solidarities are decisive in winning elections.

Contemporary Trends

The caste system in its attempts to adjust itself to the changed conditions of life, in the present times has assumed new roles. Besides, industrialization and urbanization, other factors such as Westernization, Sanskritisation, reorganization of Indian states. Spread of education, Socio-religious reforms, Spatial and occupational mobility and Growth of market economy have greatly affected the caste system.

- **Caste Consciousness:** Caste-consciousness of the members of caste groups has been increasing. Every caste wants to safeguard its interests. To achieve this end, castes have begun organizing themselves on the model of labor unions or caste association like jat mahasabha for demand of reservation.
- **Political Influence:** Caste and politics have come to affect each other. Caste has become an inseparable aspect of our politics. In fact, it is tightening its hold on politics. Elections are fought more often on the basis of caste. It is often said that "One doesn't cast their vote but votes their caste". Selections of candidates, voting analysis, selection of legislative party leaders, distribution of ministerial portfolios etc., are very much based on caste. Politics of each state in India is virtually the politics of confrontation of its 'dominant castes'. E.g social engineering in election
- **Constitutional Safeguards:** The Constitutional safeguards to Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) have given a new lease of life to caste. These provisions have allowed certain sections to develop vested interests to permanently reap the benefits of reservation. The spurt in demand for reservation by various castes can be traced to these provisions and their effectiveness. e.g. Demand for reservation in promotion within government services.

Reasons for Change in Caste System

The caste system has undergone vast changes in modern times. Factors that contribute to the changes in the caste system are briefly examined here.

- **Uniform Legal System:** The British government introduced a uniform legal system, which was continued by democratic government after independence. The Constitution of India assures equality to all and declares the practice of untouchability, an intrinsic element of the caste system, unlawful (Article 17).
- **Modern Education:** The British introduced modern secular education in a uniform way throughout India. After independence educational facilities were extended to all the citizens, irrespective of their castes which has eroded the legitimacy of the caste system. E.g our ex. President Ramnath Kovind was a dalit lawyer.
- **Industrialization and Urbanization:** Due to industrialization number of non-agricultural job opportunities were created which has weakened the hold of land holding upper castes. People of different castes, classes and religions work together in factories,

offices, workshops etc. which was unthinkable two centuries ago. Growth of cities has drawn people of all castes together and compelled them to stay together ignoring many of their caste restrictions.. eg. Formation of DICCI by milind kamble and the rise of dalit capitalism.

- **Modern Transport and Communication System:** Modern means of transport such as train, bus, ship, airplane, trucks etc, have been of great help for the movement of men and materials. Modern means of communication, such as, newspapers, post, telegraph, telephone, radio, television etc., have helped people to come out of the narrow world of caste.
- **Freedom Struggle and Democracy:** The freedom struggle waged against the British brought people from all the castes together to fight for a common cause. Moreover, establishment of Democratic form of government soon after Independence gave yet another blow to the caste by extending equal socioeconomic and political opportunities to all without any discrimination. e.g article 15 talks about equality in public employment. *73rd and 74th constitutional amendment reserves seat for scheduled caste in local bodies.*
- **Non-Brahmin Movement:** A movement against the Brahmin supremacy was launched by leaders like Jyotirao Phule in 1873. Similarly self respect movement by E. V. Ramasamy became popular in course of time particularly in the South. It created awareness among the lower castes and instilled in them the feeling of "self-respect".

Jajmani System

India has a remarkable tradition of inter-dependence which has kept it united for centuries, and this is despite the fact that ours is a caste ridden society where there is practices of social stratification. Such example is the Jajmani System or functional interdependence of various castes. Jajman or Yajman is the recipient of certain services. This system initially developed in the villages between the food producing families and the families which supported them with other goods and services.

The entire gamut of social order developed with Jajmani links with multiple types of payments and obligations. None of the caste was self sufficient and it depended for many things on other castes. Thus, each caste worked as a functional group and was linked with other caste via the mechanisms of Jajmani system.

Though Jajmani system represented the inter-linking of Hindu caste yet, in practice this system crossed the boundary of religion and provided linkages between different religions also, for example, Hindu's dependence on Muslim weaver or washer man or Muslim's dependence on Hindu trader / tailor / Goldsmith etc. is a manifestation of that mechanism only, though not called so.

However, various development like westernization, Globalisation, dilution of caste system, expansion of education and in turn employment have metamorphed Jajmani system transcending the traditional base of interdependence.

Dominant Caste

'Dominant caste' is a term used to refer to those castes which had a large population and were granted landrights by the partial land reforms effected after Independence. The land reforms took away rights from the erstwhile claimants, the upper castes who were 'absentee landlords' in the sense that they played no part in the agricultural economy other than claiming their rent. They frequently did not live in the village either, but were based in towns and cities. These land rights now came to be vested in the next layer of claimants, those who were involved in the management of agriculture but were not themselves the cultivators. These intermediate castes in turn depended on the labour of the lower castes including specially the 'untouchable' castes for tilling and tending the land. However, once they got land rights, they acquired considerable economic power. Their large numbers also gave them political power in the era of electoral democracy based on universal adult franchise. Thus, these intermediate castes became the 'dominant' castes in the country side and played a decisive role in regional politics and the agrarian economy. Examples of such dominant castes include the Yadavs of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the Vokkaligas of Karnataka, the Reddys and Khammas of Andhra Pradesh, the Marathas of Maharashtra, the Jats of Punjab, Haryana.

Sanskritisation and Westernization

Two important trends witnessed in caste system - the process of Sanskritisation and Westernization. The former refers to a process by which the lower castes tend to imitate the values, practices and the life-styles of some dominant upper castes, e.g., eschewing meat-eating, drinking liquor and animal sacrifice to their deities, in the belief that it would allow them to claim higher caste status. While the latter denotes a process in which the upper-caste people tend to mould their life-styles on the model of Westerners. According to M.N. Srinivas, "Westernisation" refers to "the changes brought about in the Indian society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule and the term subsumes changes occurring at different levels - technology, institutions, ideology and values."

1.2.2 Religious Diversity

In a general sense religion is a set of beliefs, feelings, dogmas and practices that define the relations between human being and the sacred or divinity. India, over the centuries, has witnessed the evolution of a number of religious tenets and people of various faiths from across the world have made it their homeland. Thus, it is a quintessential land of religious diversity where almost all the major religions of the world are practiced by their respective followers.

Among the major religions in India are: Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism. Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Bahaism are the religions with lesser following. At the same time the country is home to several indigenous faiths which have survived the influence of major religions for centuries and are holding the ground firmly. Regional co-existence of diverse religious groups in the country makes it really unique.

The Constitution of India recognizes the religious diversity of India and thus proclaims it to be a secular republic, guaranteeing freedom of practice and propagation of religion to all its citizens without any distinction (Article 25).

However, this religious diversity has posed constant challenges to the country in the form of communalism and communal violence. Beginning during the British period, communalism is one of the greatest challenges to the country's unity.

1.2.3 Linguistic Diversity

India is a polyglot country. There are around 1600 plus reported languages in India which are spoken as mother tongue. Many of them are tribal speeches spoken by less than one percent of the total population. According to a report of the Census Directorate, there are 22 scheduled languages and 100 non-scheduled languages in the country, which are spoken by a large number of people — one lakh or more.

The constitutionally recognized languages belong to two linguistic families: 'Indo-Aryan and Dravidian'. Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu are the four major Dravidian languages. The languages of Indo-Aryan family are spoken by 75 percent of India's total population while the languages of Dravidian family are spoken by 20 percent.

This linguistic diversity notwithstanding, we have always had link languages, though it has varied from age to age. In ancient times it was Sanskrit, in medieval age it was Arabic or Persian and in present times we have Hindi and English.

Language is one of the principal powerful symbols of identity in India. States in the Indian Union are majorly demarcated on the basis of the principal language spoken. People are identified with certain linguistic, ethnic, religious or cultural groups through ones mother tongue. Moreover, language has been basis for many of the ethnic movements in the country.

This linguistic diversity, however, poses a lot of challenges which keep surfacing in the form of demand of new states based on language, regionalism, linguistic chauvinism and prominently Hindi has been found to be the eye of storm since Independence.

1.2.4 Ethnic and Racial Diversity

Ethnicity is defined as a collectivity of people of a distinct nature in terms of race, descent and culture. Thus, an ethnic group is a social collectivity having certain shared historicity and common attributes, such as race, tribe, language, religion, dress, diet, etc.

Ethnicity is not a static or pre-ordained category; it is a manifestation of the common economic, political, social and cultural interests and their protection by certain members in a plural society. Thus, ethnicity, at times, is used as an instrument of mobilization for realizing social, economic and political goals.

Ethnicity is a cultural phenomenon, and as such no culture is superior or inferior. Culture belongs to a people, and they endear it like any other people.

Ethnic Conflicts

- At times, ethnic groups tend to operate as diametrically opposed groups due to clash of their real or supposed interests. Such a clash of interests may also take the form of communalism.
- Some groups may take undue advantage of their large numbers or of superior social origins to corner a major share of the national resources. The other communities with smaller populations may feel deprived of what they feel are their '**legitimate claims**'. Situations of mutual distrust, disaffection and distance may arise between various ethnic groups. One perspective is that 'relative deprivation' is the root cause of all ethnic strife. The lack of distributive justice, differential accessibility to resources and cultural differences has been considered the main reasons of ethnic problems.
- Sometimes ethnic conflict is due to the distinction made between 'outsiders' and 'insiders'. 'We'(insiders) against 'they' (outsiders) is an attitude found in all societies. Immigrants are treated as 'foreigners'. Such a problem arises when people speaking Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Oriya, Hindi, Kashmiri, Punjabi, Urdu, Marathi and Sindhi consider each other different in the national context.
- As such ethnic groups may be referred as 'primordial collectivities'. Members belonging to one state often consider members from other states as outsiders. They would not like them to seek employment in their state. Sub-regions, cities, towns and even villages are often used for drawing a line between the insiders and the outsiders.

Racial Diversity

A race is a group of people with a set of distinctive physical features such as skin colour, type of nose, form of hair, etc. Prominent racial types in India are :

- **Negrato:** Negratos are the people who belong to the black racial stock as found in Africa. In India some of the tribes in South India, such as the Kadar, and the Paniyan.

- **Proto-Australoid:** Consist of an ethnic group, which includes the Australian aborigines and other peoples of southern Asia and Pacific Islands. Some of these tribes are the Ho of Singhbhum, Jharkhand and the Bhil of the Vindhya ranges, MP.
- **Mongoloid:** are a major racial stock native to Asia, including the peoples of northern and eastern Asia. In India, the North Eastern regions have tribes of Mongoloid strain.
- **Nordic:** belong to the physical type characterized by tall stature, long head, light skin and hair, and blue eyes. In India, they are found in different parts of north of the country, especially in Punjab and Rajputana.

All such racial differentials have implication in terms collective identity which is asserted to have hand on “political pie”. This in turn does create conflict, however, race based conflict is not so stark. Nevertheless, episode of Nido Tania, a resident of Arunachal Pradesh beaten to death in Delhi on account of racial outrage, puts Article 15 of Indian constitution in poor light. **Bezbaruah committee** constituted thereafter for assessing the problems of North Easterns vis a vis such racial discrimination is a positive move.

1.2.5 Orthodoxy/Superstition

Life in India is suffused in superstition of various kinds, from the most bizarre to the innocuous. India being a diverse country carries multiple values which are primitive as well as modern. Some primordial values are so entrenched that even in present times they seem to be determine the societal norms. These values are reflected in the superstitions which mostly negatively impact the sociocultural lives of people.

The flip side of such orthodoxy or superstition is discrimination with women, disabled, few animals, conflict in society, clash of religion and even personal harm owing to practice of old rituals.

Women are alleged to be witches and bad omen in rural areas which in many cases become reason for their ostracization from the village and even misbehavior, naked parade, violence against them.

Also, desire for son child, who is believed to be performing rites for his parents, also put girl child at margin, so the practice of female infanticide, female foeticide and a gamut of discrimination, subjugation are perpetuated to women which is reflected in neglect for their education, health etc.

Customs and traditions suppress reason leading to obscurantism?

1. **The practice of child marriage**, prevalent in certain societies **impacts the reproductive life of the women** and is against the health aspect of both mother and child. Thus customs are going against reason and rationality.
2. **Clothing practices:** *Parada, Burqa, Hijab, etc.* are considered by several feminist thinkers as **externally imposed control** by patriarchal customs and traditions, going against reason.
3. **Customs and traditions becoming the basis of law:** Traditionally **women have a lesser say in the land and property rights** of their family which is also reflected in property laws that have no rationale.

4. **Social practices:** The Practices of **Sati and Jauhar** in medieval times were completely against reason and rationality, yet socially acceptable and traditionally validated.
5. **Exclusion from Temple entry:** Customary practice of **restricting temple entry to menstruating women** also goes against the reason leading to obscurantism. Eg: In Sabarimala temple.
6. **Religious practices:** Practices like *Santhara* in Jainism, the caste system, the **concept of purity and pollution in Hinduism, Nikah halala and Triple talaq in Islam**, and the practice of **female genital mutilation in Dawoodi Bohra** community go against reason and rationality.

MANY CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS ARE BASED ON REASON AND RATIONALITY

1. Our ancient traditions like **yoga, medicinal systems like unani, Siddha**, are finding resonance even with western societies, because of their effectiveness and less side effects.
2. Customary practice of **tribals worshiping certain trees and areas in the village, i.e. sacred groves**, help in the conservation of forests and assists in achieving sustainable development.
3. Customary practice of **conserving Blackbucks by the Bishnoi** community is based on the reason of biodiversity conservation and maintaining ecological balance.

Customs and traditions must evolve constantly to meet the changing requirements of time and social development.

1.2.6 Transitional Society

India is called a “**prismatic society**” or a society in transition which is undergoing a lot of change. Here, there is confluence of modernity as well as primordial values. It is a developing society where modern values like secularism, pluralism etc. as well as traditional values based on caste, language, region, religion are coexisting.

Here, democracy based on popular election having ethos of people as sovereign as well as institutions like “**Khap Panchayat**” exist together. Such heterogeneity add diversity to Indian life. Nevertheless, India is moving fast with modern values which have regard for human rights, respect for women, equality, socioeconomic justice etc.

Agents of social change are also used to practice traditional values sometime like internet for e-darshan of deity, Kundali Matching.

1.2.7 Family and Kinship Family in Indian Society

A family is the basic unit of society. It is the first and the most immediate social environment to which a child is exposed. It is in the family a child learns language, the behavioral Patterns and social norms in his childhood.

In some way or the other the family is a universal group. It exists in tribal, rural and urban communities and among the followers of all religious and cultures. It provides the most enduring relationship in one form or other.

In spite of the universal and permanent nature of the family one can also see vast difference in its structure in different societies. In tribal and agrarian societies people of several generations live together. These societies have large and 'joint families'. In the industrial society the family is limited to husband, wife and their children which is referred as "nuclear family".

Characteristics of Family

The Family has the following features:

- Universality
- Social environment which Influence the Individual's early life.
- Affective basis, emotionality
- Limited size
- Central position in social structure
- Sense of responsibility among the members.
- Social regulation of behavior.
- Economic cooperation

Diverse Forms of Family

- With regard to the rule of residence, some societies are matrilineal in their marriage and family customs while others are patrilineal. In the first case, the newly married couple stays with the woman's parents, whereas in the second case the couple lives with the man's parents.
- With regard to the **rules of inheritance**, matrilineal societies pass on property from mother to daughter while patrilineal societies do so from father to son.
- With regards to **authority and dominance** a patriarchal family structure exists where the men exercise authority and dominance, and matriarchy where the women play a similarly dominant role. However, matriarchy – unlike patriarchy – has been a theoretical rather than an empirical concept. There is no historical or anthropological evidence of matriarchy – i.e., societies where women exercise dominance. However, there do exist matrilineal societies, i.e., societies where women inherit property from their mothers but do not exercise control over it, nor are they the decision makers in public affairs. e.g., Khasis of Meghalaya.

Joint Family vs Nuclear Family

Features of Joint Family

- Authoritarian structure-decision making in the hands of patriarch
- Familistic organization-individual interest are subordinated to the interests of the family as a whole
- Status of members is determined by their age and relationship
- Filial and fraternal relationship gets preference over conjugal relationship
- Family functions on the ideal of joint responsibility-son pays father's loan
- All members get equal attention-rich son and poor son are equally treated

- The authority in the family is determined on the principle of seniority

Features of Nuclear Family

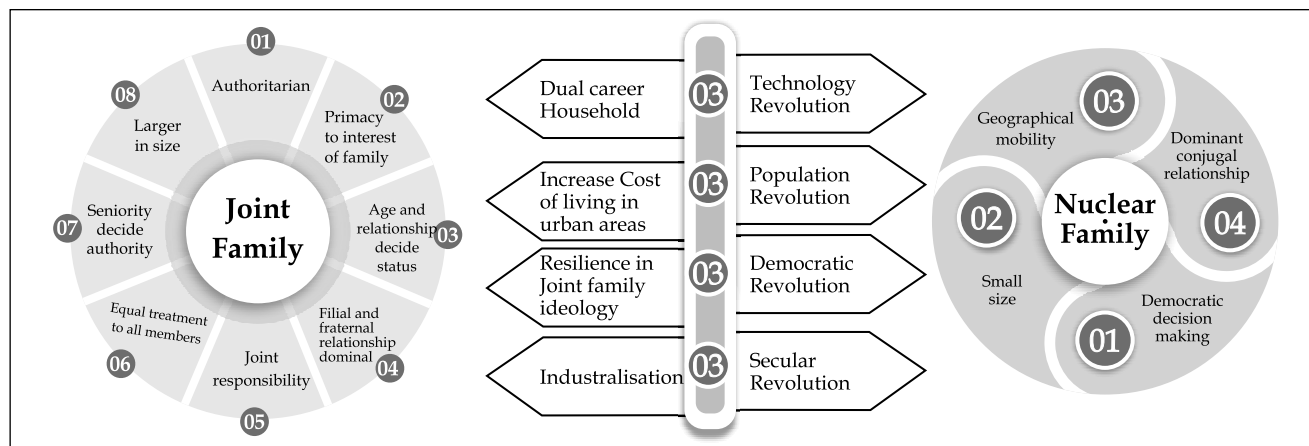
- Democratic decision making
- Small size
- High geographical mobility
- Conjugal relationship is dominant

Factors Promoting Nuclearisation of Family

- **Population Revolution:** Shift from agricultural to manufacturing and service, migration from rural to urban areas, decrease in birth and death rates, increase in average expectation of life and availability of elderly persons in family etc.
- **Technological Revolution:** Modern transport and communication like internet, mobile, social media has increased mobility as well as avenues to keep in touch. Further mechanisation of agriculture has led to reduced need of joint family members.
- **Democratic Revolution:** Ideals of democracy at family level include demand of rights by women, emancipation of children from patriarch's authority, willingness to approach decision making through decision making through democratic process etc.
- **Secular Revolution:** Shift away from religious values to rational values. Change in wife's attitude towards husband, demand for divorce on maladjustment, children's reluctance to support parents in old age etc.

Factors Reinforcing the Joint Family

- **Dual-Career Households:** Today many couples are working in service sectors like in banking and insurance find very little time for child care. In such cases old parents take care of children
- **Increasing Cost of Living in Urban Areas:** With problem of finding accommodation and limited space available for living in cities, similarly, rising cost of living in urban areas especially in slums force the people to share residence among other family members.
- **Resilience in Joint Family Ideology:** Families which have migrated to cities still retain their bonds to joint family in village and town. This is evident from the physical presence of relatives at a time of events like birth, marriage, death, illness. Sometimes members of the families living in cities go to the village for these events. The joint family ethic is very much evident in the performance of certain role obligations. A family in the city has the duty to give shelter to all immigrants from the rural family, (Young men in pursuit of education or work, or relatives seeking medical treatment).
- **Industrialization:** Industrialization serves to strengthen the joint family because an economic base has been provided to support it as kin can help one another in the striving for upward mobility. Similarly, joint families continue to be the norm among industrial entrepreneurs.



Kinship System in India

Man does not live alone in society. From birth till death he is surrounded by a number of people. He is bound to all these people who are related to him either on the basis of blood or marriage. The bond of blood or marriage which binds people together in groups is called kinship. Further, the social relationships deriving from blood ties (real and supposed) and marriage are collectively referred to as kinship.

Kinship system represents one of the basic social institutions. Kinship is universal and in most societies plays a significant role in the socialization of individuals and the maintenance of group solidarity, It is supremely important in the primitive societies and extends its influence on almost all their activities – social, economic, political, religious, etc.

Variations in Kinship System

SOUTH INDIA	NORTH INDIA
No clear cut distinction between the family of birth (i.e family of orientation) and family of marriage (i.e family of procreation) cross cousin marriage or preferential marriage.	No member from ego's family of orientation (i.e. of father, mother, brother and sister) can also become a member of his family of marriage; but this is possible in the south
Marriage does not symbolize women's separation from her father's house	A woman becomes a casual visitor to her parent's family
Bride giver is at similar level with bride taker	Bride giver –inferior to bride takers

1.2.8 Tribal Society

Among the diversified population a significant portion is comprised of the tribal people, the original inhabitants of the land. The tribal culture of India and their traditions and practices pervade almost all of the aspects of Indian culture and civilization. Tribal people in India are called Adivasi. Adivasi is an umbrella term for a heterogeneous set of ethnic and tribal groups considered the “aboriginal “population of India. Although terms such as vanavasi (“forest dwellers”), or girijan (“hill people”) are also used for the tribes of India, Adivasi carries the specific meaning of being the original.

Characteristics of Tribal Society

- **Definite Common Topography:** Tribal people live within a definite topography and it is a common place for all the members of a particular tribe occupying that region. In absence of a common but definite living place, the tribals will lose other characteristics of a tribal life, like common language, way of living and community sentiment etc.
- **Sense of Unity:** Sense of unity is an invariable necessity for a true tribal life. The very existence of a tribe depends upon the tribal’s sense of unity during the times of peace and war.
- **Endogamous Group:** Tribal people generally do not marry outside their tribe and marriage within the tribe is highly appreciated and much applauded
- **Common Dialect:** Members of a tribe exchange their views in a common dialect. This element further strengthens their sense of unity.
- **Protection Awareness:** Tribal people always need protection from intrusion and infiltration and for this a single political authority is established and all the powers are vested in this authority.
- **Common Culture:** Common culture of a tribe springs out from the sense of unity, common language, common religion, common political organization.
- **Importance of Kinship:** Kinship forms the basis of tribal social organization. Most tribes are divided into exogamous clans and lineages. The marriage among tribals is based on the rule of tribal endogamy. Marriage is viewed as a contract and there are no prohibition on divorce and remarriage.
- **Egalitarian Values:** There are no institutionalized inequalities like the caste system or sex based inequalities. Thus men and women enjoyed equal status and freedom. However, some degrees of social inequality may be found in case of tribal chiefs or tribal kings who enjoy a higher social status, exercise political power and posses wealth.
- **Rudimentary Religion:** Tribes believe in certain myths and a rudimentary type of religion

Uniqueness of tribal knowledge system

Tribal Knowledge and cultural system

1. Tribal knowledge system still depends on natural ecosystem services like forest and marine resources. Most tribal societies produce food for sustenance.
2. The knowledge systems of tribal societies are based on experiences, observations, myths, folk songs, etc which are passed from generation to generation and generally followed without any questioning.
3. Society is still based on community, Joint family. Tribal culture has set examples to be emulated by modern societies by following matriarchal norms. Eg: Khasis are one of the last existing matrilineal societies in the world.
4. It believes in recycling and reuse principles that are environmentally sustainable. Eg: The Naga traditional practice of prudent use of forest resources for a sustainable livelihood, resisting commercialization of forest produce.
5. With primitive lifestyles and proximity to natural flora, they have developed their own medicinal system mainly from naturally available herbs. Eg: Garasia tribes have extensive knowledge about the ethnomedicinal plants. Through these traditional medicine systems all sorts of ailments cannot be treated, but they have minimum side effects.
6. Ownership of knowledge is communal in nature and shared by all those who are part of that tribe. These knowledge systems are passed from one generation to another without any restrictions.

1.2.9 Art and Culture

The Cultural unity in diversity of India is generally denoted with the phrase “*Ganga-Jamuni Tahjeeb*” or India’s composite culture. Despite of diversity, there are numerous cultural elements and factors that have shaped India’s composite culture and made India culturally distinct.

Indian Music

The best example of India’s composite culture is our music, particularly the Hindustani Classical Music. It has ancient origins, yet emergence of a highly developed and enriched music of northern India could not have been possible without Islam contributions and its patronage.

Emergences of Khayal from Dhrupad, Tabla from Pakhawaj / Mridangam are some of the key examples. Indian Veena and Persian Tambura merged to emerge as Sitar. Similarly, Ghazals and Qawwalis have played a unifying factor among the people of Indian sub-continent.

Painting

Coming from nook and corner portraying the lives of people ranging from court to tribal to local folklore depict the richness, diverseness and idiosyncrasies of Indian sociocultural lives. Madhubani, Manjusha paintings of Bihar to Rajput painting of Rajasthan to Thanjavur painting of chola empire etc. portray life style, famous act, practices etc of the respective regions.

Similarly, Puppetry, Theatre, Nukkad- Natak, Circus etc. being performed in various part of corner have their important role reflecting diverse way of Indian life.

Literature: Lingua Legacy

Different regions of India contributed to the promotion of literature and higher learning to the composite culture of India. For example, Vedas were developed in North-West, Yajurveda and Brahmana in Kuru-Panchal region, Rajatarangini in Kashmir, Upanishads in Magadha, Gita Govinda in Bengal, Charyapadas in Odisha, West Bengal and Assam, Mahakavyas and dramas of Kalidasa in Ujjaini, Bhavbhut’s works in Vidarbha, Dasakumarcharita of Dandin in Deccan, Sangam Literature in South and so on.

All these texts portray the diverse socioeconomic, cultural and political set up as per their own geographical and historical set up.

Similarly, Taxila, Nalanda, Varanasi, Vallabhi, Amaravati, Nagarjunkonda, Kanchi, Madurai and Odantapuri are shining examples of seats of higher learning in India. These institutions have been bringing the intellectual churning in the society.

1.2.10 Geography as a Unit of Diversity

Spanning across an area of 3.28 million square kilometre. India is a vast country with great diversity of physical features like dry deserts, evergreen forests, lofty mountains, perennial and non-perennial river systems, long coasts and fertile plains.

In addition to the above described forms of diversity, India also has diversity of many other types like that of settlement patterns - tribal, rural, urban, marriage and Kinship patterns along religious and regional lines and so on.

1.2.11 Philosophical/Ideological Diversity

Indian Philosophy refers to philosophical traditions of the Indian subcontinent. There are six major schools of vedic Philosophy-Nyaya, vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā and Vedanta and five major heterodox (Sramanic) schools-Jain, Buddhist, Ajivika, Ajñāna, and Charvaka.

The Indian traditions subscribed to diverse philosophies significantly disagreeing with each other as well as orthodox Indian philosophy and its six schools of Hindu philosophy.

Bhakti and Sufi movement: Bhakti movement dissolved the separate religions identities to a great extent and provides a great contribution to India’s composite culture. It gave a rude shock to Brahmanical influence over Hinduism as well as religious bigotry in Islam.

The value preached by the Bhakti saints coincided with the Islamic ideas of equality and brotherhood preached by Sufi saints. Together, these saints called for unity between Hindus and Muslims.

The various Indian Philosophies contain such a diversity of views, theories and systems that it is almost impossible to single out characteristics that are common to all of them.

1.2.12 Tolerance, Love and Compassion

According to former President Pranab Mukherjee tolerance for pluralism, compassion for all and love for the motherland are core civilisation values of India where hundreds of languages and all major religions live under one system.

Despite the diversity in which we live, we enjoy, we celebrate but don't ignore individuality when we are talking of great confluence coming from different parts of the world in various streams.

1.2.13 Interdependence

India has a remarkable tradition of inter-dependence which has kept it united for centuries. And, this is despite the fact that ours is a caste ridden society where there are practices of societal stratification. Such example is the Jajmani System or functional interdependence of various castes.

Prevalent social structure like joint family, diverse geographical regions with different resources (coal of Gondwana land and food grains of Northern plains) further strengthens interdependent nature of Indian society.

1.3 Unity in Diversity

As we have just seen in the foregoing discussion that India is a land of diversity (i.e. variety of races, of religions, of languages, of castes and of cultures). However, despite such variety it exhibits a sense of oneness, a sense of wholeness, which holds the members of the society together. This has earned it the moniker "Unity in Diversity".

The Indian society has bonds of unity underlying all this diversity located in a certain underlying uniformity of life as well as in certain mechanisms of integration. Around the world this diversity gets accommodated in 3 ways. Let's discuss some of the bonds of unity of the Indian society.

1.3.1 Geographical Diversity and Unity

- **Geographic Diversity:** India has diverse geography. At broadest level, the country can be divided into several regions viz. Himalaya, Northern plains, Plateau of Central India and Deccan, Western and Eastern Ghats, Thar Desert etc. Each of them has different climate, temperature, vegetation, fauna, people and so on. Such diversity in turn create a sense of functional economic dependency because of different resources every geographical location gives.
- **Geography as Source of Unity:** Despite this diversity, India has been defined as a distinct geographical unit since ages. A sloka in Vishnu Purana defines Bharata as the land which is south of snowy mountains and north of ocean. The country was time and again unified by different imperialist forces taking into consideration its geographical distinctness and trade and commerce.
- **Geography as a Source of Conflict:** Geography in itself does not act as a divisive element. However, when combined with the ideology of aggressive regionalism, it will act as a divisive factor. For example, **son of the soil**

movement in maharashtra is targeted towards people of particular region, Naga Insurgency.

1.3.2 Ideological Diversity and Unity

- **Ideological Diversity:** Indian philosophy, the systems of thought and reflection that were developed by the civilizations of the Indian subcontinent. They include both orthodox (astika) systems, namely, the Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Purva-Mimamsa (or Mimamsa), and Vedanta schools of philosophy, and unorthodox (nastika) systems, such as Buddhism and Jainism.

Indian thought has been concerned with various philosophical problems, significant among which are the nature of the world (cosmology), the nature of reality (metaphysics), logic, the nature of knowledge (epistemology), ethics, and the philosophy of religion.

- **Ideology as a Source of Unity:** Such philosophical diversity has given way for tolerance, righteousness, love, recognition of various differences, **Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam and Sarva Dharma Sambhavah** like notions.

This is well reflected in our soft power diplomacy and good will at global level. Coexistence of Indian society despite of innumerable fundamental differences can be owed to only such ideological resilience.

- **Ideology as a Source of Conflict:** Intolerance to other's ideology is the real source of conflict .e.g religious fundamentalism- the belief of an individual or a group of individuals in the absolute authority of a sacred religious text or teachings of a particular religious leader, prophet, and / or God. Today many Islamic terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, and ISIS, also hold fundamentalist attitudes, and regard Western civilization as the symbol of the secular modernization that is a threat to the traditional Islamic values.

1.3.3 Religious Diversity and Unity

- **Religious Diversity:** India has no state religion, it is a secular state. It is the land where almost all the major religions of the world are practiced by their respective followers.
- **Religion as a Source of Unity:** Every religion when interpreted in liberal form preaches Religious pluralism and Tolerance, Love and Compassion.

Tolerance, love and compassion as integral part of Indian religious system

- Tolerance, the ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with, has been one of the prime reasons for sustenance and continuity in the Indian society over the millennia. This tolerance was coupled by love and compassion, for both the humans and animals, as preached by some the religions that evolved on its land, especially Buddhism and Jainism.

- Ashoka, the Mauryan King, preached tolerance towards people of all religion and forsook war in the 3rd century BC. He was followed by other tolerant kings like Samudragupta and Harshvardhana. During the Medieval ages the Bhakti and Sufi saints preached tolerance, love and compassion. Akbar, the Mughal ruler of the 16th century, also deserves mention for his tolerance for people of all religion.

Thus, the present Indian society is a result of ages of tolerance, love and compassion among the people, who lived and made this country their homeland.

Religion as a Source of Conflict

Nevertheless the religious diversity has been a major source of disunity and disharmony in the country. This is because in India religious affiliation appears to be overemphasized and many a time people seem to forget the national unity and express their loyalty more towards their own religion. This religious diversity has posed constant challenges to the country in the form of communalism and communal violence. Beginning during the British period, communalism is one of the greatest challenges to the country's unity. This has ultimately led to Partition of our country due to the development of the two nation theory.

1.3.4 Linguistic Diversity and Unity

Linguistic Diversity: Language is one of the principal powerful symbols of identity in India. States in the Indian Union are demarcated on the basis of the principal language spoken. People are identified with certain linguistic, ethnic, religious or cultural groups through ones mother tongue.

- **Language as a Source of Unity:** The variety of our languages was an important component of *Nehru's* characterisation of Indian culture as unity in diversity. *Mahatma Gandhi* also held our linguistic pluralism high in importance, which he recommended to be the corner stone of children's education in India.

At different points of time, some languages were used as lingua franca or trans-regional languages e.g., Sanskrit, The regional languages, including innumerable tribal languages without script not only did not vanish but went on flourishing as they produced high quality literary expressions, both oral and written.

The heroic epics of Bhils of Gujarat or the lyrical poetry of Mundas and Santals are in no way inferior to the achievements of evolved literacy traditions. Bilingualism and multilingualism has characterised our history throughout.

The linguistic reorganisation of Indian states in post-Independence India was a positive recognition of this fact.

- **Language as a Source of Conflict:** Language has been basis for many of the ethnic movements in the country. Before and after Independence, struggles for political recognition of regional languages have contributed to the political liberation of people from the language of the oppressor. For instance, when

fierce struggles were waged for unification of different Kannada-speaking regions during Karnataka Unification Movement (Karnataka Ekikarana), the basic reason was the marginalisation inflicted on the majority Kannada-speakers in regions of Hyderabad, Madras and Bombay Karnataka.

Saliency of 'sect' in Indian society vis-a-vis caste, region, and religion.

Sect or panth refers to a group of people who share a common set of beliefs, practices, and rituals that distinguish them from other groups.

SECT AND CASTE

1. Caste has traditionally been a primary marker of identity in Indian society. Sects often emerge within specific castes, with members sharing particular religious or cultural practices. Eg: The Lingayat sect in Karnataka, the Kabir Panthi sect is associated with the weaver community.
2. The significance of a sect within a caste is often related to the role of religion and spirituality in the caste system. For example, some sects within the Dalit community have emerged as a response to the discrimination and marginalization faced by Dalits. Eg: Ravidassia panth emerged from the Sikh religion.

SECT AND REGION

1. Sectarian identity can also be tied to particular regions, with different sects emerging in different parts of the country. For example, the Baul sect is associated with the Bengali-speaking regions of West Bengal and Bangladesh.
2. The relationship between sect and region can be influenced by the linguistic and cultural diversity of different regions of India. For example, the Bhakti movement emerged in South India as a response to the Sanskritization of Hinduism and the need to create a more accessible and inclusive form of worship for the common people.

SECT AND RELIGION

1. Sects can emerge within different religious traditions, with members sharing particular beliefs, practices, or rituals. For example, the Ahmadiyya sect emerged within the Muslim tradition.
2. The relationship between sect and religion can be influenced by the historical and cultural context of a particular religious tradition. For example, the Sufi sects within Islam emerged as a response to the rigid legalism and formalism of orthodox Islam.

The recent struggles for constitutional recognition by speakers of non-mainstream languages are actuated by similar reasons. Put another way, the struggle for linguistic supremacy is closely intertwined with the struggle for the language-speakers' need for social and political justice.

Languages, which at one point of time can become symbols of peoples' unity, can at a later time become images of oppression in the eyes of linguistic minorities in those regions. In Assam, a state characterised by rich ethnic diversity, the speakers of tribal languages like Rabha and Bodo now feel that the state language Ahomia is a threat to their ethnic self-assertion in a situation of unequal exchange between the mainstream and tribal communities.

Even in the Hindi heartland, there are murmurs of discontent. The languages like Garhwali and Kumaoni are looked at by the advocates of Hindi as dialects though the differences between them and Hindi are as significant as that between, say, Hindi and Gujarati which enjoys the status of an independent language. There have also been dissident voices in Bihar which claim that Bhojpuri and Maithili are independent languages, not just dialects of Hindi. The pro-Meitei section of Manipur are struggling to do away with the Bengali script which, according to them, was imposed by the invading culture of outsiders.

1.3.5 Political Diversity and Unity

Indian society shows political diversity in various ways. In terms of ideology, the ideas of capitalism and socialism are being manifested in the concept of democratic socialism and mixed economy. Similarly the very existence of multi party democracy and the rise of cooperative federalism indicate the dynamic relation between federal units of the country.

Polity as a Source of Unity: Post-independence, unity is being promoted through constitutional measures like inter state council, single citizenship, integrated judicial system etc. similarly constitutional ideals manifested in preamble through words like democracy, secularism, socialism, liberty, equality and justice gave india a sense of political and administrative unity

1.4 Conclusion

While the diversity and the underlying bonds of unity in the country has sustained the Indian society over the ages, fissiparous tendencies, like regionalism, communalism and casteism among others keep emerging posing people against each other. Hence, it is the duty of every Indian to lift oneself up above these parochial tendencies and work towards national unity and integrity. As our honorable Prime Minister has rightly said that *“Unity in diversity is India’s strength. There is simplicity in every Indian. There is unity in every corner of India. This is our strength”*.



TRY SOME MAINS PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

1. The ethos of civil service in India stand for the combination of professionalism with nationalistic consciousness – Elucidate. (Write in 150 Words) **(2025)**
2. Critically analyse the proposition that there is a high correlation between India’s cultural diversities and socio-economic marginalities. (Write in 250 Words) **(2024)**
3. Inter-caste marriages between castes which have socio-economic parity have increased, to some extent, but this is less true of interreligious marriages. Discuss. (Write in 150 Words) **(2024)**
4. Do you think marriage as a sacrament is loosing its value in Modern India? (Write in 150 Words) **(2023)**
5. Why is caste identity in India both fluid and static? (Write in 250 Words) **(2023)**
6. Given the diversities among the tribal communities in India, in which specific contexts should they be considered as a single category? (Write in 150 Words) **(2022)**
7. Analyze the salience of ‘sect’ in Indian society vis-a-vis caste, region, and religion. (Write in 250 Words) **(2022)**
8. Examine the uniqueness of tribal knowledge system when compared with mainstream knowledge and cultural systems. (Write in 150 Words) **(2021)**
9. How does Indian society maintain continuity in traditional social values? Enumerate the changes taking place in it. (Write in 250 Words) **(2021)**
10. Has caste lost its relevance in understanding the multi- cultural Indian Society? Elaborate your answer with illustrations. (Write in 150 Words) **(2020)**

11. Customs and traditions suppress reason leading to obscurantism. Do you agree? (Write in 250 Words) **(2020)**
12. What makes Indian society unique in sustaining its culture? Discuss. (Write in 150 Words) **(2019)**
13. Do we have cultural pockets of small India all over the nation? Elaborate with examples. (Write in 250 Words) **(2019)**
14. "Caste system is assuming new identities and associational forms. Hence, caste system cannot be eradicated in India." Comment (Write in 150 Words) **(2018)**
15. In the context of diversity of India, can it be said that the regions form cultural units rather than the States? Give reasons with examples for your viewpoint. (Write in 150 Words) **(2017)**
16. What are the two major legal initiatives by the State since Independence, addressing discrimination against Scheduled Tribes (STs)? (Write in 150 Words) **(2017)**
17. The spirit of tolerance and love is not only an interesting feature of Indian society from very early times, but it is also playing an important part at the present. Elaborate. (Write in 250 Words) **(2017)**
18. Has the formation of linguistic States strengthened the cause of Indian Unity? (Write in 200 Words) **(2016)**
19. Why are the tribals in India referred to as the Scheduled Tribes? Indicate the major provisions enshrined in the Constitution of India for their upliftment. (Write in 150 Words) **(2016)**
20. Describe any four cultural elements of diversity in India and rate their relative significance in building a national identity. (Write in 150 Words) **(2015)**
21. How do you explain the statistics that show that the sex ratio in Tribes in India is more favorable to women than the sex ratio among Scheduled Castes? (Write in 200 Words) **(2015)**
22. The life cycle of a joint family depends on economic factors rather than social values. Discuss. (Write in 150 Words) **(2014)**