

CUET · SOCIOLOGY · CLASS XII · CODE 326

Social Institutions: Continuity and Change

CUET unit: Indian Society — Social Institutions: Continuity and Change (caste, tribe, family)

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Snapshot

- Three central social institutions of Indian society — **caste, tribe and family** — show continuity from the past and the changes they have undergone, especially through colonialism and post-Independence modernity.
- Caste was **transformed** (not abolished) by colonial census operations, anti-caste reformers and post-Independence state policy; how **"tribe" itself is a modern concept** whose boundary with caste is blurred; and how the **family in India is plural in form**, not uniformly "joint".
- CUET tests definitions (varna/jati, sanskritisation, dominant caste, endogamy, matriliney vs matriarchy), named persons (Risley, Srinivas, Phule, Ambedkar, Periyar, Ayyankali, Sri Narayana Guru), and quantitative facts on the tribal population.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

- Three social institutions central to Indian society — caste, tribe and family — sustain and regulate communities, transmit values across generations, and structure access to land, work and marriage (NCERT §intro, p. 36).
- The English word **"caste"** comes from the Portuguese **casta** meaning **"pure breed"**; in Indian languages two distinct terms exist — **varna** (literally "colour") naming the four-fold division of **brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya, shudra** (excluding the "outcastes" / panchamas), and **jati**, a generic term for species/kinds used most commonly for caste (NCERT §3.1 Caste in the Past, p. 36).
- The most common scholarly view treats **varna as a broad all-India aggregative classification** and **jati as a regional/local sub-classification** of hundreds or thousands of castes and sub-castes (NCERT §3.1, pp. 36–37). The same jati may map onto different varnas in different regions, and the jati hierarchy of a Tamil village is unintelligible to a Bengali villager.
- The four-varna classification is roughly **3,000 years old**; in the late Vedic period (c. 900–500 BC) the system had only four divisions, which were not elaborate, not rigid, and not determined by birth — movement across categories was possible and common; rigidity emerged only in the post-Vedic period as land and ritual specialisation crystallised (NCERT §3.1, p. 37).

- **Six defining features of caste:** (1) determined by **birth**; (2) **endogamous** (marriage within group); (3) rules on **food and food-sharing** (kachcha/pakka rules, who may receive water from whom); (4) **hierarchical ranking** of many castes; (5) **sub-divisions / segmental organisation** (sub-castes within castes); (6) **hereditary occupations** exclusively pursued by the associated caste (NCERT §3.1, p. 37).
- Theoretically caste combines two principles — **difference/separation** and **wholism/hierarchy**; the hierarchy is based on the **purity-pollution distinction** (Louis Dumont's **Homo Hierarchicus**, implied), and material/economic power tends to align with ritual status; historians believe defeated peoples were often assigned low caste status by the victors (NCERT §3.1, p. 38).
- **Colonialism reshaped caste** through ethnographic surveys and the census; the decennial census began regularly from **1881**; the **1901 Census under Herbert Risley** sought to record the social hierarchy of caste, prompting hundreds of petitions for higher rank — caste identities, earlier fluid, became more rigid once counted, listed and printed in gazetteers (NCERT §3.1 Colonialism and Caste, p. 39).
- The **Government of India Act, 1935** gave legal recognition to "schedules" of castes and tribes — origin of the terms "**Scheduled Castes**" and "**Scheduled Tribes**"; "untouchable" castes were included among SCs (NCERT §3.1, p. 40).
- **Reformers and movements cited:** **Jotirao Phule** founded **Satyashodhak Samaj (1873)**; **Ayyankali (1863–1914)** in Kerala won Dalits' right to walk public roads and access schools; **Savitri Bai Phule (1831–1897)** was the first headmistress of the country's first school for girls in Pune; **Periyar E.V. Ramasami Naickar (1879–1973)** led the Self-Respect Movement in South India; **Sri Narayana Guru (1856–1928)** in Kerala gave the slogan "**One Caste, One Religion, One God for all men**"; **B.R. Ambedkar** led the Dalit movement and chaired the Constitution Drafting Committee (NCERT §3.1, pp. 38–41).
- Post-Independence, the state abolished untouchability constitutionally (Art. 17) and operated "caste-blind" (apart from **SC/ST/OBC reservations**); urbanisation, industry and education weakened some practices, but **endogamy, recruitment networks and electoral mobilisation** kept caste resilient. Caste also entered modern domains via **caste associations** and political parties (NCERT §3.1 Caste in the Present, pp. 40–41).
- **M.N. Srinivas (1916–1999)** coined two CUET-favourite terms: "**Sanskritisation**" — a (usually middle/lower) caste raising its status by adopting ritual, domestic and social practices of a higher caste (vegetarianism, teetotalism, twice-born thread) — and "**Dominant caste**" — castes with **large numbers + land rights** granted by partial post-Independence land reforms (zamindari abolition), e.g., **Yadavs** (Bihar/UP), **Vokkaligas** (Karnataka), **Reddys and Khammas** (AP), **Marathas** (Maharashtra), **Jats** (Punjab/Haryana/W. UP), **Patidars** (Gujarat) (NCERT §3.1, p. 42).

- Paradoxically, **caste has become "invisible" for upper-caste urban middle/upper classes** (whose privilege was consolidated through education + state employment + property), while it has become **highly visible for SCs, STs and backward castes** — for whom caste is one of the few collective assets and a lifeline through reservation (NCERT §3.1, pp. 42–43). This asymmetry of visibility is itself a key feature of contemporary caste.
- **"Tribe" is a modern term** for very old communities defined **negatively** — communities that did not practice a religion with a written text, did not have a state or political form of the centralised kind, did not have sharp class divisions, and (above all) did not have caste itself (NCERT §3.2, p. 43).
- Tribes are classified by **permanent traits** (region, language, physical characteristics, ecological habitat) and **acquired traits** (mode of livelihood; extent of incorporation into Hindu society) (NCERT §3.2, pp. 43–44).
- **Tribal demography: ~85% of tribals live in "middle India"** (Gujarat/Rajasthan in the west to West Bengal/Odisha in the east; MP, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, parts of Maharashtra and AP at its heart); **>11% in North-East**; only ~3% in the rest of India. North-Eastern states (except Assam) have >30% tribal share, with Arunachal, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland between 60–95%. Linguistically tribes fall into **Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austric and Tibeto-Burman** groups (the last two are primarily tribal). Total tribal population: **~8.2% (84 million)** in 2001 Census, **~8.6% (~104 million)** per the **2011 Census** (NCERT §3.2 Permanent Traits, p. 44).
- **Biggest tribes (≥1 million):** Gonds, Bhils, Santhals, Oraons, Minas, Bodos, Mundas (NCERT §3.2, p. 44).
- The **1960s tribe-caste debate: continuum view** (tribes = less stratified caste-peasant society) vs **distinct-community view** (tribes lack purity–pollution); by the 1970s these distinctions were shown to be faulty on size, isolation, religion and livelihood criteria — many "tribes" were larger than many "castes" (NCERT §3.2 Tribe — The Career of a Concept, p. 45).
- Some scholars argue tribes are not **"pristine"** but **"secondary"** phenomena arising from colonialist/state contact; **"tribalism"** itself emerges as an ideology of self-distinction (NCERT §3.2, p. 46).
- Nehruvian-era national development (dams, factories, mines) **dispossessed tribals** of land and forests; in-migration of non-tribals has diluted tribal share — **Tripura's tribal share was halved in a single decade**, and similar pressure exists in Arunachal Pradesh; the displacement-rehabilitation deficit fuelled later movements like the **Narmada Bachao Andolan** (NCERT §3.2 National Development versus Tribal Development, pp. 46–47).
- Today **tribal identity** is shaped by interaction with the mainstream (not primordial traits); **statehood for Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh** (2000) was a positive outcome; a new educated tribal middle class is emerging, driven by reservation and

modern education (NCERT §3.2 Tribal Identity Today + Box 3.1 **Virginus Xaxa**, pp. 47–48).

- The family can be **nuclear** (one set of parents and their children) or **extended/"joint"** (more than one couple, often multiple generations); the joint family is **not** the dominant Indian form and the term itself, as **I.P. Desai (1964)** noted, is a translation of the English phrase rather than a native Indian category (NCERT §3.3 Nuclear and Extended Family, p. 49).
- Family forms vary by **rules of residence** (matrilocal vs patrilocal), **inheritance** (matrilineal vs patrilineal) and **authority** (patriarchy vs matriarchy). **Matriarchy** — societies where women exercise dominance — has **no** historical or anthropological evidence; it is a theoretical, not empirical, concept. **Matriliny** does exist (e.g., Khasis of Meghalaya, Nairs of Kerala): women inherit property from their mothers but do not control it or take public decisions — male kin (brothers, uncles) typically manage household affairs (NCERT §3.3 Diverse Forms of the Family, p. 50).
- Changes in family (e.g., **women-headed households** due to male migration from Himalayan villages; **grandparents as caregivers** for software-industry parents) reflect links between the private sphere and the political/economic/cultural public sphere (NCERT §3.3, p. 49).

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Caste	English word from Portuguese <i>casta</i> ("pure breed")	36
Varna	Four-fold division of society — brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya, shudra (literally "colour")	36
Jati	Generic term for species/kinds; commonly used for the regional caste system of hundreds/thousands of sub-groups	36
Panchamas	The "fifth category" — outcastes, foreigners, slaves, conquered peoples excluded from the four varnas	36
Endogamy	Marriage restricted to members of one's own group/caste	37
Segmental organisation	Castes having sub-castes (and sub-sub-castes) within themselves	37
Purity–pollution	Ritual division placing castes closer to/farther from the sacred; basis of caste hierarchy	38
Sanskritisation	Process whereby members of a (middle/lower) caste raise status by adopting practices of a higher caste (Srinivas)	42
Dominant caste	Castes with a large population that gained land rights through partial post-Independence land reforms (Srinivas)	42
Scheduled Castes	Legal "schedule" of formerly untouchable castes marked for special state treatment	40

Term	Definition	Page
Scheduled Tribes	Legal "schedule" of tribes marked for protection and affirmative action	40
Tribe	Modern term for old communities defined negatively — no written-text religion, no state, no sharp class divisions	43
Permanent traits (tribes)	Region, language, physical characteristics, ecological habitat	43
Acquired traits (tribes)	Mode of livelihood; extent of incorporation into Hindu society	44
Adivasi	"Original inhabitant" — self-designation of many tribal communities	43
Nuclear family	One set of parents and their children	49
Extended ("joint") family	More than one couple and often more than two generations living together	49
Matrilocal / Patrilocal	Newly married couple stays with the woman's / man's parents	50
Matrilineal / Patrilineal	Property passes mother→daughter / father→son	50
Matriarchy	Theoretical concept (no historical/anthropological evidence) of women's dominance	50
Patriarchy	Family structure in which men exercise authority and dominance	50
Satyashodhak Samaj	Society of Truth-Seekers founded by Jotirao Phule, 1873	38
Self-Respect Movement	Periyar's anti-caste rationalist movement in South India	40
"One Caste, One Religion, One God"	Sri Narayana Guru's reformist watchword	41
Caste association	Modern organisational form bringing caste members together for political/educational purposes	41

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- Ranks of varna and the excluded "panchama" category — p. 36.
- Six defining features of caste (birth, endogamy, food rules, hierarchy, sub-divisions, hereditary occupations) — p. 37.
- Portrait notes on reformers: **Ayyankali** (p. 37), **Jotirao Phule + Satyashodhak Samaj 1873** (p. 38), **Savitri Bai Phule** (p. 39), **Periyar** (p. 40), **Sri Narayana Guru** (p. 41), **M.N. Srinivas** (p. 42).
- Geographical mental-map: **85% tribals in "middle India"** (Gujarat/Rajasthan to West Bengal/Odisha) — p. 44.
- Image: "A tribal village fair" — p. 45.

- Image: "Tribal empowerment" (Source: trified.tribal.gov.in) — p. 47.
- **Box 3.1: Virginius Xaxa** quotation on the tribal middle class and the assertion of identity — p. 48.
- Family classification grid: residence (matri/patrilocal) × inheritance (matri/patrilineal) × authority (matri/patriarchy).

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- **Varna vs jati.** Varna = pan-Indian four-fold; jati = regional, hundreds/thousands of sub-groups. NTA will swap them.
- **Matriliney vs matriarchy.** Matriliney exists (inheritance through women); matriarchy does NOT have historical/anthropological evidence. NTA frequently asks this distinction.
- **Sanskritisation vs dominant caste.** Both are M.N. Srinivas's, but different — sanskritisation is **upward ritual emulation**; dominant caste is about **land + numbers + electoral power**.
- **1901 Census and Risley.** The first regular decennial census was 1881; the **caste-hierarchy exercise** was in 1901 under **Herbert Risley** — examiners mix these dates.
- **Tribal share of population.** 2001 Census = 8.2% / ~84 million; 2011 Census = 8.6% / ~104 million. Don't confuse the two.
- **"Joint family" not a native term.** I.P. Desai (1964) observed it is a translation of the English phrase, not the translation of any Indian word.
- **Government of India Act 1935** (not 1919 or 1947) gave legal recognition to SC/ST schedules.
- **"Caste" is Portuguese, "varna" is Sanskrit** — both are sometimes wrongly traced to the same root.
- **Periyar's full name** — E.V. Ramasami Naickar; he led the Self-Respect Movement, not a religious reform sect.
- **Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh** got statehood in 2000, not 1947 or 2014 — a tribal-empowerment landmark.
- **Tripura's tribal share halved in a single decade** — sharpest demographic dilution among NE states.
- **Reformers vs Acts** — Phule founded the Samaj in 1873; the GoI Act came in 1935; distractors may swap dates.

2.5 Thinkers / Theories

Thinker / Concept	Key Contribution	Page
Jotirao Phule	Founded Satyashodhak Samaj (1873); first major anti-caste reformer in Maharashtra	§3.1, p. 38

Thinker / Concept	Key Contribution	Page
Savitri Bai Phule	First headmistress of India's first girls' school in Pune	§3.1, p. 39
Ayyankali (1863–1914)	Kerala Dalit leader — right to walk on public roads and access schools	§3.1, p. 37
Periyar E.V. Ramasami Naickar (1879–1973)	Rationalist Self-Respect Movement; lower-caste mobilisation in South India	§3.1, p. 40
Sri Narayana Guru (1856–1928)	"One Caste, One Religion, One God for all men"; Ezhava reform in Kerala	§3.1, p. 41
B.R. Ambedkar (implied)	Dalit movement; chaired Constitution Drafting Committee; Art. 17 abolishing untouchability	§3.1, pp. 40–41
Herbert Risley	1901 Census Commissioner — recorded caste hierarchy	§3.1, p. 39
M.N. Srinivas (1916–1999)	Coined "Sanskritisation" and "Dominant Caste"	§3.1, p. 42
Louis Dumont (implied)	Homo Hierarchicus — purity-pollution as the structural basis of caste	§3.1, p. 38
G.S. Ghurye (implied)	Pioneering Indian sociologist of caste (referenced bibliographically)	§3.1, p. 38
Government of India Act, 1935	Legal recognition of SC/ST schedules	§3.1, p. 40
Virginius Xaxa (Box 3.1)	Emergence of an educated tribal middle class and assertion of identity	Box 3.1, p. 48
I.P. Desai (1964)	"Joint family" is an English translation, not a native category	§3.3, p. 49
Continuum / distinct-community debate (1960s)	Two rival models of the tribe-caste relationship	§3.2, p. 45
"Pristine vs secondary" tribe debate	Tribes as outcomes of colonial encounter, not primordial isolates	§3.2, p. 46

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This chapter is high-yield for CUET (UG) Sociology. Past CUET papers have drawn direct factual recall questions on varna/jati, definitions of sanskritisation and dominant caste

(Srinivas), the 1901 Risley Census, the Government of India Act 1935, examples of dominant castes, the 2011 tribal population percentage, and the matriliney–matriarchy distinction. Typically 8–12 MCQs per year are traceable to this chapter, with a mix of one-line factual recall and statement-based "Which of the following is correct?" items.

CUET 2025 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.3 (CUET 2025) What does the word 'Dwijja' imply?

- A) Double standard B) Twice-born C) Jajmani system D) Prejudice **Tests:** Varna terminology — dwija (twice-born) upper-caste category. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.7 (CUET 2025) Which of the following is an acquired trait to classify tribes in India?

- A) Language B) Livelihood C) Racial features D) Habitat **Tests:** Permanent vs acquired traits in tribal classification — livelihood is acquired. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.21 (CUET 2025) The characteristics of the caste system include: (A) Caste is an ascribed status (B) Caste groups are endogamous (C) Caste is an achieved status (D) Castes involve segmental organisation.

- A) (A), (B) and (D) only B) (A), (B) and (C) only C) (B), (C) and (D) only D) (A), (C) and (D) only **Tests:** Features of caste — ascription, endogamy, segmental organisation. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.36 (CUET 2025) The term "Dikus" refers to:

- A) Adivasis B) Dalit traders and money lenders C) Migrant workers D) Landlords **Tests:** "Dikus" — outsider traders/moneylenders in tribal areas. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2024 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.4 (CUET 2024) Match the following: (A) Varna System (B) Scheduled Castes (C) Sanskritisation (D) Resistance Tribes / (I) Process of adopting higher caste practices (II) Four-fold division of society (III) Opposed to Hindu society (IV) Recognised by Govt. of India Act, 1935.

- A) A-I, B-II, C-III, D-IV B) A-II, B-III, C-I, D-IV C) A-IV, B-II, C-I, D-III D) A-II, B-IV, C-I, D-III **Tests:** Varna fourfold division; SCs under 1935 Act; Sanskritisation; resistance tribes. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.6 (CUET 2024) Which principles are applied to maintain caste-based restrictions? (A) Birth (B) Marriage (C) Food sharing (D) Occupation

- A) A, B and D only B) A, B and C only C) A, B, C and D D) B, C and D only **Tests:** Caste rules — birth ascription, endogamy, commensality, hereditary occupation. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.7 (CUET 2024) How has national development impacted tribal development? (A) Tribal areas paid high price for development (B) Large dams and factories built in Nehruvian era

(C) Tribals displaced for hydroelectric projects (D) Developments benefited tribes at expense of others

- A) A, B, C and D B) A, C and D only C) A, B and C only D) B, C and D only **Tests:** Costs of national development for tribal communities. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.11 (CUET 2024) Which of the following arguments are correct about tribes in India?

(A) Adivasis were always oppressed (B) Tribes absorbed through Sanskritisation (C) Tribes had trade niche (forest produce, salt, elephants) (D) Adivasis sometimes dominated plains people

- A) A, B and D only B) B, C and D only C) A, B, C and D D) A, C and D only **Tests:** Complexity of tribal-mainstream relations — not unilateral oppression. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.19 (CUET 2024) Which sociologist said tribal institutions need not necessarily be democratic?

- A) Tiplut Nongbri B) Virginius Xaxa C) Verrier Elwin D) G.S. Ghurye **Tests:** Sociologists on tribal society — attribution question. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.20 (CUET 2024) Match dominant caste with region: (A) Rajputs (B) Lingayats (C) Jat Sikhs (D) Kammas / (I) Andhra Pradesh (II) Punjab (III) Karnataka (IV) Uttar Pradesh.

- A) A-IV, B-III, C-II, D-I B) A-III, B-I, C-II, D-IV C) A-I, B-IV, C-II, D-III D) A-II, B-IV, C-III, D-I **Tests:** Dominant caste examples mapped to states. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.28 (CUET 2024) In South Bihar migrant traders and moneylenders are known as:

- A) Nakarattars B) Adivasis C) Dikus D) Oraons **Tests:** "Dikus" in Adivasi context (Jharkhand/South Bihar). **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.31 (CUET 2024) Match sociologists with works: (A) Nicholas Dirks (B) Louis Dumont (C) Patricia Uberoi (D) Andre Beteille / (I) Family, Kinship and Marriage in India (II) Homo Hierarchicus (III) Castes of Mind (IV) Reproduction of Inequality.

- A) A-II, B-I, C-IV, D-III B) A-I, B-III, C-IV, D-II C) A-III, B-II, C-I, D-IV D) A-IV, B-II, C-I, D-III **Tests:** Sociologists of caste, family and inequality in India. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2023 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.7 (CUET 2023) In Khasi society which customs are practiced? A. Passing of property from mother to daughter B. Transfer of property from maternal uncle to nephew C. Making out a will D. Brother controlling his sister's property.

- A) B, C and D only B) A, C and B only C) A, B and D only D) A, D and C only **Tests:** Khasi matriliney and the role of the maternal uncle. **Answer:** Not in extracted key