

CHAPTER 3

Social Institutions: Continuity and Change

CBSE Class 12 · Sociology · Chapter 3

CBSE · Sociology · Class 12

WHAT THIS CHAPTER DOES

A Explain caste's features + how colonialism (Census 1901) reshaped it.

B Define sanskritisation and dominant caste — and stop confusing them.

Boards prep that builds confidence, not anxiety.

TODAY'S MISSION

Today's mission

1

Explain caste's features + how colonialism (Census 1901) reshaped it.

2

Define sanskritisation and dominant caste — and stop confusing them.

3

Classify tribes by permanent + acquired traits; debate integration vs autonomy.

4

Distinguish joint/nuclear and matrilineal/patrilineal families.

5

Score 6/7 marks on this chapter's slice.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Why this chapter matters

- 1 5-7 marks every CBSE board paper — caste + Srinivas are near-certain.
- 2 Ties together Ch 1's diversity and Ch 2's demography into concrete institutions.
- 3 The one idea threaded through all three sections: CONTINUITY *and* CHANGE.

TOPIC

A

Caste and the caste system

THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT

What is caste? (defining features)

CASTE is a system of birth-ascribed, ranked, endogamous social groups, unique in its developed form to the Indian sub-continent — and it shows BOTH continuity and change.

STATEMENT

Core features: (1) membership is ASCRIBED by BIRTH and lifelong; (2) ENDOGAMY — marriage strictly within the caste/sub-caste; (3) HIERARCHY governed by notions of ritual

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Caste is the institution most distinctively Indian, and the chapter uses it to show how an ancient institution can persist in form yet transform in function under colonialism, the Constitution and democratic politics.

WATCH OUT FOR

NOTE Don't equate 'varna' (4 all-India theoretical categories) with 'jati' (thousands of real, local, named, endogamous groups). The lived system is jati; varna is the idealised frame.

TOPIC

How colonialism reshaped caste

THE COLONIAL CENSUS

Colonial rule did not invent caste but **RESHAPED** it, and the census was the sharpest tool. From 1881, and most ambitiously in the **CENSUS OF 1901** under **H.H. RISLEY**, the state tried to **RANK** every caste within a single, all-India hierarchy — an exercise pre-colonial India had never

LAND + ADMINISTRATION

Beyond counting, the colonial economy hardened caste. **LAND-REVENUE** settlements (zamindari and ryotwari) tied caste groups to fixed positions as landlords, tenants or labourers, **FUSING** the caste order with the emerging class order. The administration used caste in recruitment, law and the

UNTOUCHABILITY

UNTOUCHABILITY is the **EXTREME** and most exploitative edge of the caste system: groups placed entirely **OUTSIDE** and **BELOW** the four varnas, subjected to systematic **EXCLUSION**, **SUBORDINATION** and **SEGREGATION**. The three defining marks the textbook gives are exclusion (barred from

THE CONSTITUTION'S RESPONSE

Independent India attacked caste's worst features through law. **ARTICLE 17 ABOLISHES** untouchability and forbids its practice in any form; the **PROTECTION OF CIVIL RIGHTS ACT (1955)** and the **SC/ST (PREVENTION OF ATROCITIES) ACT (1989)** enforce it. Articles 15

TOPIC

B

Sanskritisation and dominant caste (M.N. Srinivas)

THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT

Srinivas's two concepts



M.N. SRINIVAS gave Indian sociology two concepts central to this chapter: **SANSKRITISATION** (positional mobility within the caste order) and **DOMINANT CASTE** (local secular power), both drawn from his Rampura fieldwork.

STATEMENT

SANSKRITISATION = the process by which a 'lower' caste, tribe or group changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a higher, usually 'twice-born' caste (adopting

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Together the concepts capture caste as a **LIVING**, changing institution: mobility is pursued through sanskritisation, while real local power flows through the dominant caste
- Both are favourite 5-mark targets.

WATCH OUT FOR

NOTE Two classic errors: (1) sanskritisation is **NOT** 'learning Sanskrit' or becoming pious — it is imitation of higher-caste lifestyle for status; (2) the dominant caste is **NOT** necessarily the Brahmins — it is often a numerically strong, land-owning **MIDDLE** caste.

TOPIC

Sanskritisation + dominant caste, applied

SANSKRITISATION AT WORK

Imagine a middle-ranking caste that has recently grown prosperous through trade or new farming income. To convert that wealth into STATUS, its families begin dropping meat and liquor, adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, taking on the sacred thread, and

DOMINANT CASTE AT WORK

In village after village, the caste that actually CONTROLS affairs is the one combining NUMBERS, LAND and POLITICAL clout — not the ritually purest. Srinivas called this the DOMINANT CASTE. Across regions the classic examples are JATS in the north-west,

SANSKRITISATION VS WESTERNISATION

Srinivas paired sanskritisation with WESTERNISATION — change towards Western (originally British) technology, institutions, values and lifestyle (English education, dress, ideas of equality). The two can pull in OPPOSITE directions: a family may sanskritise its rituals

WHY THE PAIRING MATTERS

Examined together, the concepts show why caste neither disappeared nor stayed frozen. Sanskritisation explains how groups MOVE within the order without abolishing it; the dominant caste explains where POWER really sits once ritual rank and secular control come

TOPIC

C

Tribal communities

THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT

Who are India's tribes? (integration vs autonomy)

TRIBES are communities historically defined as outside the caste-based Hindu mainstream, and Indian policy has long oscillated between INTEGRATING them and protecting their AUTONOMY.

STATEMENT

Tribes are officially the **SCHEDULED TRIBES (~8.6% of the population)**, concentrated in central India and the North-East. The classic policy debate: **G.S. GHURYE** viewed tribes as

WHY THIS MATTERS

- The debate is not academic: it underlies the FIFTH and SIXTH SCHEDULES, Scheduled Areas, forest and land laws, and recurring conflicts over **DISPLACEMENT** by dams and mining
- It is a textbook case of continuity and change in a whole community's status.

WATCH OUT FOR

NOTE Do not present integration and autonomy as a settled question. The chapter stresses it is an ongoing **TENSION** — protection (Schedules, PESA) coexists with assimilation pressures and displacement.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Classifying India's tribal communities

- 1** PERMANENT TRAITS — REGION: heavy concentrations in central India (Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, MP), the entire NORTH-EAST, and scattered pockets in the west (Bhils) and south (Todas, Chenchus).
- 2** PERMANENT TRAITS — LANGUAGE: tribes speak languages from four families — Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman, Dravidian and Indo-Aryan — so language cuts across, and does not neatly map onto, 'tribe'.
- 3** PERMANENT TRAITS — SIZE + physical type: from a few hundred people to several million; the largest (GONDS, SANTHALS, BHILS) each number in the millions, alongside a notional physical-racial classification.
- 4** ACQUIRED TRAITS — LIVELIHOOD: fishermen, hunter-gatherers, SHIFTING (JHUM) cultivators, settled agriculturists, and plantation/industrial labour — the most useful axis for present-day tribal economic life.
- 5** ACQUIRED TRAITS — INCORPORATION: the DEGREE to which a community has been absorbed into Hindu/mainstream society, ranging from largely autonomous groups to heavily assimilated ones.

WORKED EXAMPLE

The defining features of caste — at a glance

- 1** ASCRIPTION BY BIRTH: caste membership is determined at birth and is lifelong — you cannot choose or change it.
- 2** ENDOGAMY: marriage is strictly WITHIN one's own caste or sub-caste (jati); inter-caste marriage is traditionally prohibited.
- 3** HIERARCHY + PURITY/POLLUTION: castes are RANKED by notions of ritual purity and pollution, governing contact, food and water-sharing.
- 4** HEREDITARY OCCUPATION: occupation was traditionally fixed and passed down the family line (priest, trader, artisan, labourer).
- 5** SEGMENTAL ORGANISATION: society is divided into many discrete, named jatis, each with its own rules of conduct and council (caste panchayat).

TOPIC

D

The family and kinship

THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT

Family forms, descent and kinship

“ The FAMILY is a social institution that varies in FORM (nuclear, joint, extended) and in rules of DESCENT (patrilineal, matrilineal), and like caste and tribe it shows continuity and change.

STATEMENT

FORM: a NUCLEAR family is a couple + unmarried children; a JOINT/EXTENDED family spans several generations and/or married siblings sharing residence and property. **DESCENT:**

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Family forms reveal how kinship, gender and property are organised, and how they are shifting with education, employment, urbanisation and new laws — making the family a prime example of an institution that endures while changing.

WATCH OUT FOR

NOTE Avoid two traps: (1) assuming the nuclear family has simply replaced the joint family (forms coexist); (2) confusing matriliney (descent line) with matriarchy (rule by women).

TOPIC

Forms, descent and change

JOINT VS NUCLEAR

A NUCLEAR family consists of a married couple and their unmarried children living together as one unit. A JOINT (extended) family contains several generations and/or married siblings sharing residence, property and a common hearth under a senior head. The textbook resists the lazy

PATRILINY (THE NORM)

Most Indian communities are PATRILINEAL: DESCENT, the family NAME, and INHERITANCE pass through the FATHER'S line, and a bride typically moves to her husband's home (patrilocal residence). This system tends to value sons over daughters — they continue the line and

MATRILINY (KHASI, NAYAR)

In MATRILINEAL systems DESCENT and INHERITANCE pass through the MOTHER'S line. The KHASI of Meghalaya pass property to the youngest daughter and trace the lineage through women; the NAYAR of Kerala historically practised a matrilineal 'taravad'

FAMILY AS A GENDERED, CHANGING INSTITUTION

Sociologists such as LEELA DUBE and PATRICIA UBEROI stress that the family is not a 'natural' haven but a SOCIAL institution shaped by power and gender — kinship rules about residence, descent and inheritance systematically position women. The family is

TOPIC

Sanskritisation

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Sanskritisation means learning Sanskrit or becoming religious.

✓ **CORRECT** SANSKRITISATION (M.N. Srinivas) is the PROCESS by which a 'lower' caste, tribe or other group changes its CUSTOMS, RITUALS, IDEOLOGY and WAY OF LIFE in the direction of a higher, usually 'twice-born' caste — e.g. adopting vegetarianism, teetotalism, the sacred thread. It is a claim to upward POSITIONAL MOBILITY within the caste order, not learning the Sanskrit language and not a structural change of the system itself.

TOPIC

Dominant caste vs ritually highest caste

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** The dominant caste is always the Brahmins / the ritually highest caste.
- ✓ **CORRECT** DOMINANT CASTE (Srinivas) is the caste that holds preponderant NUMERICAL strength plus ECONOMIC (land) and POLITICAL power in a village — and is therefore decisive in local affairs. It need NOT be the ritually highest. In many regions middle/intermediate castes (Jats, Reddys, Vokkaligas, Yadavs) are dominant though not Brahmin. Ritual rank and secular dominance are different axes.

TOPIC

Colonialism and caste

TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Caste existed exactly the same before and after British rule — colonialism left it untouched.

✓ **CORRECT** Colonialism did NOT invent caste, but it RESHAPED it. Pre-colonial caste was FLUID and locally varied. The COLONIAL CENSUS (especially 1901, under H.H. RISLEY) tried to RANK every caste in a single all-India hierarchy; land-revenue settlements fixed caste-class links; this made caste more RIGID, COUNTABLE and POLITICISED. 'Continuity AND change' is the chapter's whole point.

TOPIC

Untouchability

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** Untouchability is just another name for the four-varna caste system.
- ✓ **CORRECT** UNTOUCHABILITY is the EXTREME, most exploitative end of the caste system — groups placed OUTSIDE and below the four varnas, subjected to EXCLUSION, SUBORDINATION and SEGREGATION (denied temple/well/road access, forced into 'polluting' occupations). ARTICLE 17 of the Constitution ABOLISHES untouchability; the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 enforces it. It is a specific institution, not the caste system as a whole.

TOPIC

Tribal classification

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** Tribes are classified only by their physical/racial appearance.
- ✓ **CORRECT** Tribes are classified by PERMANENT traits (region, language, physical-racial type, size) AND by ACQUIRED traits — chiefly their MODE OF LIVELIHOOD (fishing, hunter-gatherer, shifting/jhum cultivators, settled agriculturists, plantation/industrial workers) and their DEGREE OF INCORPORATION into Hindu society. Race/appearance is just one permanent trait among several, and acquired traits matter as much.

TOPIC

Matriliney = matriarchy

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** In a matrilineal society (Khasi, Nayar) women rule and hold all the power.
- ✓ **CORRECT** MATRILINY means DESCENT, INHERITANCE and often residence are traced through the MOTHER'S line — NOT that women govern. Real authority frequently still rests with men (e.g. the mother's BROTHER / maternal uncle among the Khasi and Nayar). Matriliney (line of descent) is NOT matriarchy (rule by women). The two are routinely and wrongly conflated.

TOPIC

Joint family is dying out everywhere

TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** Modernisation has destroyed the joint family; only nuclear families remain in India.
- ✓ **CORRECT** The reality is DIVERSITY and CHANGE, not simple disappearance. Family FORMS coexist — nuclear, joint (residential), extended, single-parent. Many urban families are residentially nuclear but functionally JOINT (shared finances, decisions, care across households). The chapter argues family forms vary by region, class and circumstance, and CHANGE without one form simply replacing another.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

5-mark: 'Explain how colonialism / the colonial census changed the caste system.'

- 1 SET UP CONTINUITY AND CHANGE**
1 m
Caste is an institution **UNIQUE** to the Indian sub-continent. Colonialism did **NOT** invent it but **RESHAPED** it — making it more rigid, countable and politicised. Both **CONTINUITY** (caste persists) and **CHANGE** (its form altered) must be shown.
- 2 THE COLONIAL CENSUS**
1.5 m
The **CENSUS** from 1881, and especially 1901 under H.H. **RISLEY**, tried to **RANK** every caste in a single all-India hierarchy. Pre-colonial caste was **FLUID** and **LOCALLY VARIED**; the census made it **STANDARDISED**, **COUNTABLE** and **NATIONALLY UNIFORM**. Castes began petitioning the census for higher rank — caste became a basis for **ORGANISED** claim-making.
- 3 LAND SETTLEMENTS + ADMINISTRATION**
1.5 m
LAND-REVENUE settlements (zamindari/ryotwari) tied caste groups to fixed economic positions. The colonial state used caste in recruitment and law. Together these **HARDENED** the caste-class link and turned caste into a unit of administration and, later, of **POLITICS** (caste associations, demands for representation).
- 4 POST-INDEPENDENCE CHANGE + CONCLUDE**
1 m
After 1947 the Constitution attacked caste's worst features — **ARTICLE 17** abolished untouchability, Articles 15/16/46/330/332 enabled **RESERVATION** and protection. Caste did not vanish but **TRANSFORMED** — secularised, politicised, a vehicle for both discrimination and mobilisation. So caste shows **CONTINUITY AND CHANGE**.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

5-mark: 'Explain sanskritisation and dominant caste (M.N. Srinivas) with examples.'

- 1 ATTRIBUTE THE CONCEPTS**
0.5 m
Both SANSKRITISATION and DOMINANT CASTE were coined by M.N. SRINIVAS from his fieldwork in the Mysore village of Rampura.
- 2 DEFINE SANSKRITISATION**
1.5 m
SANSKRITISATION is the process by which a 'lower' caste, tribe or group changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life towards those of a higher, usually 'twice-born' caste — adopting VEGETARIANISM, TEETOTALISM, the SACRED THREAD, Sanskritic ritual. It is a claim to POSITIONAL mobility WITHIN the system.
- 3 SANSKRITISATION — EXAMPLE + CRITIQUE**
1 m
Example: a prosperous middle caste begins claiming Kshatriya status and dropping meat/liquor to be accepted higher. CRITIQUE: it accepts (does not challenge) the hierarchy; it spreads upper-caste, often patriarchal values; and it is largely available to groups with new economic resources.
- 4 DEFINE DOMINANT CASTE + EXAMPLE**
1.5 m
DOMINANT CASTE is the caste with preponderant NUMERICAL strength + ECONOMIC (land) + POLITICAL power in a locality — decisive in village affairs even if NOT ritually highest. Examples: Jats (north-west), Reddys/Kammass (Andhra), Vokkaligas/Lingayats (Karnataka), Yadavs (Bihar/UP). Land reforms + electoral politics often STRENGTHENED such middle dominant castes.
- 5 LINK THEM**
0.5 m
Together the concepts show caste as a LIVING, changing institution — mobility is sought through sanskritisation, while real local power flows through the dominant caste. Continuity and change again.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

5-mark: 'On what bases are tribal communities classified? Discuss the integration-vs-autonomy'

1 TWO KINDS OF TRAIT
1 m

Indian tribes are classified on PERMANENT traits and ACQUIRED traits. The textbook stresses both, because race/region alone cannot capture the variety of tribal life.

2 PERMANENT TRAITS
1.5 m

PERMANENT traits: REGION (concentrations in central India — Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha; the North-East; and scattered western/southern pockets), LANGUAGE (Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman, Dravidian, Indo-Aryan families), PHYSICAL-RACIAL type, and SIZE (from a few hundred to several million, e.g. Gonds, Santhals, Bhils).

3 ACQUIRED TRAITS
1.5 m

ACQUIRED traits: chiefly MODE OF LIVELIHOOD — fishermen, hunter-gatherers, SHIFTING (JHUM) cultivators, settled agriculturists, and plantation/industrial labour — and the DEGREE of incorporation into Hindu/mainstream society. These better capture present-day tribal economic life than appearance does.

4 INTEGRATION VS
AUTONOMY +
CONCLUDE
1 m

The policy DEBATE: G.S. GHURYE saw tribes as 'backward Hindus' to be INTEGRATED; VERRIER ELWIN argued for protective AUTONOMY ('national parks'); Nehru's 'tribal panchsheel' sought a MIDDLE path. The Fifth/Sixth Schedules and SCHEDULED AREAS protect tribal land and self-rule, yet DISPLACEMENT by dams/mines (and the creation of Jharkhand, 2000) shows the tension is live.

PYQ PATTERNS

Top PYQ patterns to drill

#1	Explain how colonialism reshaped the caste system / discuss the changes in the caste system. (5 marks)	Annual
#2	Explain sanskritisation (and/or dominant caste) with examples. (5 marks)	Most years
#3	On what basis are tribal communities classified in India? (3-5 marks)	2018, 2020, 2023
#4	Distinguish between matrilineal and patrilineal family systems. (3 marks)	2019, 2022
#5	What is the difference between a joint family and a nuclear family? (3 marks)	2017, 2021, 2024

MARKS DISTRIBUTION

10-year marks distribution

10-YEAR PYQ MARKS DISTRIBUTION

Caste — features + colonial reshaping
(Census/Risley) + untouchability + Art 17



30%

Sanskritisation + dominant caste (Srinivas)



22%

Tribal communities — classification +
integration vs autonomy + Scheduled Areas



24%

Family — joint vs nuclear + change in family
forms



16%

Matriliny (Khasi/Nayar) vs patriliney



14%

RECAP · MEMORISE THESE

Recap

1 Caste — Birth + endogamy + hierarchy. Colonial census (1901, Risley) made it rigid + countable; Art 17 abolishes untouchability; reservation. Continuity AND change.

2 Srinivas — SANSKRITISATION = lower group copies higher-caste customs (positional mobility, not learning Sanskrit). DOMINANT CASTE = local numerical+land+political power, not the ritually highest.

3 Tribe + Family — Tribes: permanent (region/language/race/size) + acquired (livelihood/incorporation); Ghurye vs Elwin. Family: joint/nuclear coexist; matriliney (Khasi/Nayar) ≠ matriarchy.

WHAT'S NEXT

What's next

- Chapter 4 — The Market as a Social Institution.
- Sit the 15-MCQ Quick Drill.
- Then the full Board-Pattern Paper — 25 marks.

You've mastered caste, tribe and family.

Continuity and change — now prove it on the paper.

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