

UPSC CSE MAINS

| ANTHROPOLOGY OPTIONAL

PAPER II

Indian Civilization and Society

Notes

Part A of Paper II: the evolution of Indian culture and civilization from prehistory to the Indus and tribal contributions, palaeo-anthropological evidence and ethno-archaeology, the demographic profile of India, the traditional social system and caste, the growth of anthropology in India, and the Indian village and processes of social change, with previous year questions after every chapter.

Compiled by Arvind KrS

PREHISTORIC INDIA AND INDUS

ETHNO-ARCHAEOLOGY

PEOPLES OF INDIA

VARNA, CASTE AND JAJMANI

INDIAN ANTHROPOLOGISTS

VILLAGE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

18

Chapters

5

Units

651

Previous year questions

94

Diagrams



IN THIS BOOK

01 Evolution of Indian Culture and Civilization

02 Demographic Profile of India

03 Indian Social System and Caste

04 Emergence and Growth of Anthropology in India

05 Indian Village and Social Change



Anthropology Optional — Paper II

Part A: Indian Civilization, Society and Social Change

Mains 2027 Edition · Compiled October 2026

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UNIT 01

5 CHAPTERS

Evolution of Indian Culture and Civilization

Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization: Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic), Protohistoric (Indus Civilization). Pre-Harappan, Harappan and postHarappan cultures. Contributions of the tribal cultures to Indian civilization. Palaeo: Anthropological evidences from India with special reference to Siwaliks and Narmada basin (Ramapithecus, Sivapithecus and Narmada Man) Ethno-archaeology in India: The concept of ethno-archaeology; Survivals and Parallels among the hunting, foraging, fishing, pastoral and peasant communities including arts and crafts producing communities.

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ANTHROPOLOGY OPTIONAL

PAPER II · PART A



Indus Civilization: Pre-Harappan Roots, Harappan Cities and Post- Harappan Cultures

PYQ RADAR 38 questions · last asked 2026

This article covers the **protohistoric** part of the syllabus line: the Indus civilization with what came before and after it. The Stone Age and the Chalcolithic villages are in **1.1a**, and tribal contributions to Indian civilization in **1.1c**. Paper 1, Unit 1.8c treats the Harappan as the **Bronze Age** of South Asia (town-planning diagram, maritime trade, Rakhigarhi); this note gives the fuller Indian synthesis and cross-refers where the two meet.

SYLLABUS 1.1 Prehistoric (Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic) Protohistoric (Indus Civilization): PreHarappan, Harappan and postHarappan cultures. Contributions of tribal cultures to Indian civilization.

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03	3. The Mature Harappan Civilization	04	4. The Harappans as People: Skeletons and Ancient DNA
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ANTHROPOLOGY · PROTOHISTORIC INDIA

The Indus Civilization: Roots, Cities, Legacy

From village cultures to cities, and back to villages

TOPIC MAP

VILLAGES → CITIES → VILLAGES → NEW CITIES

A long Indian sequence, not a sudden arrival from outside

Early Harappan
3300–2600 BC



Mature Harappan
2600–1900 BC



Late Harappan
1900–1300 BC



OCP, PGW, iron
2000–600 BC

Civilization

Childe's **ten criteria**

Primary civilization

Unique: order **without kings**

Origins

Kot Diji, Sothi, Hakra cultures

Kalibangan **ploughed field**

Indigenous vs **diffusion**

Cities and economy

Dholavira, Lothal, Rakhigarhi

Rabi and kharif crops; **zebu**

Seals, **undeciphered** script

Society and belief

Mother goddess, "**Proto-Shiva**"

State or **no state**?

Continuities in later India

People

Cemeteries **R-37** and **H**

"Race" types rejected

Rakhigarhi ancient DNA

Decline and after

Droughts, rivers, trade loss

Copper Hoards, **Sanauli**

PGW iron; **megaliths**

In simple words: **South Asia's first cities grew from local villages and returned to them.**

Anthropology

01

1. Protohistory and the Idea of Civilization

IN SIMPLE WORDS

Protohistory is the stage between prehistory and history: people had begun to write, but we cannot read what they wrote, or we know them only from others' writings. The Indus civilization is protohistoric because its script is still undeciphered. A civilization is a society with cities, specialists, writing and a government, and the Indus people built the first one in South Asia.

1.1 What makes a civilization

V. Gordon Childe, the Australian-born archaeologist, listed ten criteria of the "**Urban Revolution**" (1950). The table applies them to the Harappan evidence; notice that one criterion, a visible **ruling class**, is the weakest.

CHILDE'S CRITERION	HARAPPAN EVIDENCE
Large, dense settlements	Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, Rakhigarhi, Ganweriwala and Dholavira, each of 50 ha or more
Full-time specialists	Bead-makers , shell-workers, metal-smiths , seal-cutters, potters
Surplus concentrated	Large storage halls ; standard weights; sealings on goods
Monumental public works	Platforms, walls, the Great Bath, reservoirs, the Lothal basin
A ruling class	No palaces or royal tombs ; elites inferred from house size and seals
Writing and record-keeping	About 400 signs on seals and tablets
Exact sciences	Standard weights, measuring scales, planned grids
Sophisticated art	Seal engraving, bronze "dancing girl", steatite "priest-king"
Long-distance trade	Mesopotamia , the Gulf, Central Asia
State based on residence, not kinship	Uniform rules over about a million square kilometres

The Harappan meets almost every criterion, yet **without palaces, royal burials or great temples**. This is why it is called **unique** among early civilizations:

- **Scale and uniformity:** the **largest area** of any Bronze Age civilization, with the same bricks, weights, seals and script from Makran to Haryana.
- **Civic, not royal: drains, baths and wells** for ordinary houses, but no palaces, royal tombs or war art.
- **Peaceful and trading:** few weapons, little evidence of conquest, and a society that seems to have been held together by **trade and shared ideology** rather than force.
- **Achievements:** the first **planned cities** and **sanitation** of South Asia, the world's oldest **cotton** textiles, standard **weights**, fine **bead** technology and the **plough**.
- **Primary and secondary civilizations:** a **primary** (pristine) civilization grows from its own village base without an earlier model (Mesopotamia, Egypt, the **Indus**, China, Mesoamerica, the Andes); a **secondary** one grows through contact with an existing civilization. The long Indus sequence from **Mehrgarh** (see 1.1a) makes it **primary**.
- **"The first settlement of a big civilization"?** The Indus was the **first urban civilization of South Asia** and the **largest in area** of the Bronze Age, but not the first settlement (villages were 4,000 years older) and not the world's first civilization: Mesopotamia and Egypt were slightly earlier and contemporary. India's **second urbanisation** came in the Ganga plain after about 600 BC (§6.3).

2. Pre-Harappan Cultures and the Origin of the Civilization

IN SIMPLE WORDS

Before the great Indus cities, farming villages across Baluchistan, Sindh, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat developed their own pottery styles, walls, ploughs and trade. Over about seven centuries these regional cultures grew alike and then merged into one civilization. So the cities grew from local roots rather than arriving from outside.

Example first. At **Kalibangan** in north Rajasthan, beneath the Harappan town, **B.B. Lal and B.K. Thapar** (1961–69) found an earlier walled settlement of standard mud bricks and, outside it, a **ploughed field** with criss-cross furrows, one of the oldest known, matching the way local farmers sow two crops in one field. The plough, standard bricks and walls all came **before** the cities.

2.1 The long sequence

Archaeologists **Jim Shaffer** and **Jonathan Mark Kenoyer** divide the “Indus Valley Tradition” into **eras**; the Early, Mature and Late Harappan are its **phases**.

ERA	DATE (APPROXIMATE)	CONTENT
Early Food-Producing	7000–5500 BC	Mehrgarh I: aceramic farming
Regionalization	5500–2600 BC	Ceramic Neolithic, then the Early Harappan regional cultures (3300–2600 BC)
Integration	2600–1900 BC	Mature Harappan : cities, script, weights
Localization	1900–1300 BC	Late Harappan regional cultures; cities abandoned

ANTHROPOLOGY · PROTOHISTORIC INDIA

The Indus Valley Tradition

Eras and phases from the first farmers to the second cities

TIMELINE

7000–5500 BC	Early Food-Producing era: Mehrgarh I, farming without pottery
5500–3300 BC	Regionalization begins: pottery, cotton, copper, beads at Mehrgarh
3300–2600 BC	Early Harappan: Kot Diji, Amri, Hakra, Sothi; walls, plough, first signs
2600–1900 BC	Integration (Mature Harappan): planned cities, script, seals, weights
1900–1300 BC	Localization (Late Harappan): Cemetery H, Jhukar, Rangpur; no script
2000–1500 BC	Ochre-Coloured Pottery and Copper Hoards in the Ganga–Yamuna doab; Sanauli
1200–600 BC	Painted Grey Ware: iron in common use
700–200 BC	NBPW: the second urbanisation, coins, kingdoms

Read the pattern: regional variety, then **integration** into one civilization, then a return to **regional** village cultures, and finally new cities in the **Ganga plain**.

In simple words: **the cities were one long chapter in a much longer story.**

Anthropology

2.2 The Early Harappan regional cultures

The table shows the main regional cultures and what each contributed to the later cities.

REGION	SITES AND CULTURE	WHAT IT ANTICIPATES
Baluchistan and Afghanistan	Mehrgarh III–VII, Damb Sadaat (Quetta), Mundigak, Nal, Balakot	Painted pottery, seals , copper, lapis lazuli trade with Central Asia
Sindh	Amri, Kot Diji (F.A. Khan, 1955–57)	Walls, wheel-made pottery; Kot Diji ware spread across the plains
Punjab and north-west	Harappa (Ravi and Kot Diji phases), Rehman Dheri , Sarai Khola	Planned walled town; graffiti like Indus signs; earliest Indus writing at Harappa (about 3300 BC)
Cholistan	About 40 Hakra ware sites; Ganweriwala	A settlement hierarchy with large towns
Ghaggar–Chautang	Sothi–Siswal culture: Kalibangan I, Banawali I, Rakhigarhi, Bhirrana	Plough, standard bricks, fortification
Gujarat	Anarta (north Gujarat), Padri, Dholavira I	Local pottery; shell and stone crafts

Mehrgarh shows the whole climb in one place: aceramic farming (Period I), then pottery, **cotton** and copper (II–III), wheel-made painted pottery, **seals** and bead workshops (IV–VII), and finally the neighbouring Mature Harappan town of **Nausharo**.

The pattern is **convergence**: pottery, figurines, the **horned deity** motif and weights became alike across regions, while trade with Iran and Central Asia grew. **Shaffer** and **D.A. Lichtenstein** called the civilization a **fusion** of the Bagor, Hakra and Kot Diji traditions of the Ghaggar–Hakra borderland.

2.3 The origin debate

The question is whether the cities were **planted from outside** or **grown at home**. The two views are compared below.

DIFFUSIONIST VIEW	INDIGENOUS (ENDOGENOUS) VIEW
Mortimer Wheeler : “ideas have wings”; the idea of the city came from Mesopotamia	Amalananda Ghosh (Sothi culture), M.R. Mughal (Early Harappan, 1970), Jean-François Jarrige (Mehrgarh), Walter Fairervis , Gregory Possehl
The civilization appears suddenly, already mature	Seven centuries of Early Harappan growth; a sequence from 7000 BC
Writing and cities were Sumerian inventions	Indus script and seals have no Sumerian model ; distinct weights and town plans
Contacts with Iran and Mesopotamia	Contacts were trade , not colonisation

The evidence now favours an **indigenous origin**, with **stimulus** from West Asian contact. The “sudden” appearance reflects a **rapid integration** about 2600 BC, perhaps through the rise of elites who controlled trade and craft, rather than an outside colony.

Why cities arose here. Four conditions came together: **fertile floodplains** of the Indus and Ghaggar that gave a **surplus** with the plough; **varied neighbouring regions** (hills with copper and stone, coasts with shell) that encouraged **exchange**; **craft specialists** and merchants who needed planned places to work and trade; and a shared **ideology** of order and purity that let many communities accept common rules.

COMMON CONFUSION

Pre-Harappan or Early Harappan? The older term **Pre-Harappan** suggests cultures that were merely earlier. **M.R. Mughal** (1970) proposed **Early Harappan** because the same sites (Kot Diji, Kalibangan, Harappa) show a **continuous** development into the cities. Use “Early Harappan” for the formative phase of 3300–2600 BC, and “pre-Harappan” only for earlier Neolithic levels such as Mehrgarh I.

ANTHROPOLOGY · PROTOHISTORIC INDIA

Where Did the Indus Cities Come From?

Diffusion from Mesopotamia or growth from local roots

DEBATE

Diffusionist view

Wheeler: "ideas have wings"

Cities appear **suddenly**, fully formed

Writing and towns borrowed from **Sumer**

Indigenous view

Ghosh, Mughal, Jarrige, Possehl

Seven centuries of **Early Harappan** growth

Script, seals, weights have **no Sumerian model**

EVIDENCE OF LOCAL ROOTS

SITE

WHAT IT SHOWS BEFORE THE CITIES

Mehrgarh

Farming from **7000 BC**; cotton, copper, seals, beads

Kot Diji

A **defence wall**; a pottery style that spread across the plains

Rehman Dheri

A **planned** walled town; graffiti like Indus signs

Kalibangan I

A **ploughed field**; standard mud bricks

Harappa (Ravi)

Possible earliest **Indus writing**, about 3300 BC

Verdict: an **indigenous** civilization, with **stimulus** from trade with Iran and Mesopotamia.

In simple words: **the cities were home-grown, with ideas exchanged through trade.**

Anthropology

03

3. The Mature Harappan Civilization

IN SIMPLE WORDS

Between about 2600 and 1900 BC, cities with planned streets, drains, standard bricks and weights spread over a vast area of present-day Pakistan and north-west India. Farmers fed the cities, craftsmen made beads and seals, and merchants traded as far as Mesopotamia. The people wrote on small seals in a script nobody can read yet.

3.1 Discovery, extent and the Indian sites

- **Discovery:** **Charles Masson** described the ruins of Harappa (1842); **Alexander Cunningham** published the first seal (1875); **Daya Ram Sahni** excavated **Harappa** (1921) and **R.D. Banerji Mohenjo-daro** (1922) under **John Marshall**, who announced the civilization in **1924**.

- **Extent:** from **Sutkagen Dor** on the Makran coast to **Alamgirpur** (Meerut), and from **Manda** (Jammu) to **Daimabad** (Maharashtra), with an outpost at **Shortughai** on the Oxus; over **1,500 sites**, most of them in India along the Ghaggar–Hakra and in Gujarat. Because so many lie on the Ghaggar–Hakra, which some identify with the Vedic **Sarasvati**, the name “Sindhu–Sarasvati civilization” is also used; the identification is **debated**.
- **Core cities in Pakistan: Mohenjo-daro** (Sindh), the best preserved, with the citadel, Great Bath and grid-planned lower town; **Harappa** (Punjab), the type site, with its cemeteries and workshops; **Chanhudaro**, a **bead and seal-making** town without a citadel; and **Ganweriwala** in Cholistan.

The Indian sites matter because they show the **eastern and southern** halves of the civilization.

SITE (STATE)	EXCAVATOR	SIGNIFICANCE
Rakhigarhi (Haryana)	Amarendra Nath; Vasant Shinde; ASI	Among the largest Harappan cities; Early to Mature levels; ancient DNA (§4)
Dholavira (Kutch, Gujarat)	R.S. Bisht (1990–2005)	Three-part city; stone reservoirs; signboard; UNESCO (2021)
Kalibangan (Rajasthan)	B.B. Lal, B.K. Thapar	Ploughed field; fire altars ; script direction
Lothal (Gujarat)	S.R. Rao (1955–60)	Dockyard , warehouse, bead factory
Banawali (Haryana)	R.S. Bisht	Radial streets; plough model
Surkotada (Kutch)	J.P. Joshi	Stone fort; claimed horse bones (disputed)
Bhirrana, Farmana (Haryana)	ASI; Vasant Shinde	Hakra levels; large cemetery (Farmana)
Rupar, Alamgirpur	Y.D. Sharma	Northern and eastern limits

3.2 Town planning and architecture

The planning is described with a diagram in Paper 1, Unit 1.8c; in short:

- **Two-part plan:** a raised walled **citadel** on the west and a larger **lower town** on the east; **Dholavira** adds a **middle town**, and Kalibangan and Surkotada wall both parts.
- **Grid streets** running north–south and east–west; **Banawali** is the exception with radial streets.
- **Standard bricks** in the ratio **1 : 2 : 4**, burnt in the Indus cities and mud brick in Rajasthan.
- **Sanitation:** covered **street drains** with inspection holes, house bathrooms and soak pits; about **700 wells** at Mohenjo-daro; **reservoirs** at Dholavira.
- **Water at Dholavira:** in a dry island of the Rann, the city caught **monsoon run-off** from two seasonal streams with dams and channels and stored it in a chain of **stone-cut reservoirs**, a rare Bronze Age feat of **water harvesting**.

- **Public buildings:** the **Great Bath** (about 12 × 7 m, 2.4 m deep, sealed with **bitumen**); large halls once called "**granaries**", now often read as assembly or storage halls.

Why it matters: uniform bricks, drains and grids over a vast area imply **shared rules and authority**, yet no palace or temple dominates the city. Civic order rather than royal display is the Harappan signature.

3.3 The economic basis: crops, animals, crafts and trade

Agriculture was the base. Recent **archaeobotany** (study of plant remains) shows a flexible **multi-cropping** system rather than a wheat-and-barley economy alone.

CATEGORY	EVIDENCE
Winter (rabi) crops	Wheat (bread and club wheat), six-row barley , lentil, pea, chickpea, linseed, mustard
Summer (kharif) crops	Rice (Lothal, Rangpur husks; Haryana sites), small millet s, mung, horsegram; sesame ; cotton (the oldest in the world, from Mehrgarh)
Fruits	Dates , jujube, grapes
Animals	Humped zebu cattle (dominant), water buffalo , sheep, goat, pig, dog; camel bones at Kalibangan; wild deer and fish
Debated	The horse (claimed at Surkotada, disputed); the chicken

- **How they farmed:** the **plough** (Kalibangan field, Banawali terracotta plough), **floodwater** and **monsoon** farming, **dams** (gabarbands) in Baluchistan and **reservoirs** at Dholavira; canal irrigation is not proved. **Cameron Petrie** and **Jennifer Bates** argue that summer and winter crops were grown together to cope with variable rains (2017).
- **Dairying:** lipid residues in pots from **Kotada Bhadli** (Kutch) give the earliest direct evidence of **dairy** processing in South Asia, from cattle and buffalo (Kalyan Sekhar Chakraborty and colleagues, 2020).
- **Crafts and metals:** **bronze** (copper with tin or arsenic), **lost-wax** casting, drilled **carnelian beads** (Chanhudaro, Lothal), shell bangles, **faience**; gold and silver ornaments.
- **Weights:** cubical chert weights, **binary** for small units (1, 2, 4 ... 64) and **decimal** above (160, 320, 640), with the same standard across the whole area.
- **Trade:** internally, copper from **Khetri** (Rajasthan), shell and agate from Gujarat, lapis lazuli from **Badakhshan** via Shortughai; externally with **Meluhha's** partners in Mesopotamia (Paper 1, Unit 1.8c). There was **no coinage**; exchange was by barter or standard units.
- **Imports and exports:** in came **gold** (Karnataka), **silver** and **tin** (Afghanistan, Iran), **lapis lazuli** (Badakhshan) and **turquoise** (Iran and Central Asia); out went **cotton** cloth, **carnelian beads**, shell and ivory work, timber and grain. The cities thus depended on **raw materials they did not have**, which made trade a core activity rather than a luxury.

ANTHROPOLOGY · PROTOHISTORIC INDIA

What the Harappans Grew and Kept

A flexible farming and herding economy behind the cities

EVIDENCE

Winter (rabi) crops

Wheat and six-row **barley**

Lentil, pea, chickpea

Linseed, mustard

Summer (kharif) crops

Rice (Lothal, Rangpur, Haryana)

Small **millet**s, mung, horsegram

Cotton, sesame

Animals

Humped **zebu** cattle: the main animal

Water buffalo, sheep, goat, pig, dog

Camel bones at Kalibangan

How we know

Charred grains, husks in pottery

Animal bones; seal images

Dairy fats in pots, Kotada Bhadli

Debated: the **horse** (Surkotada claim) and the chicken. **Methods:** plough, floods and monsoon, dams and reservoirs; summer and winter crops grown together (**multi-cropping**).

In simple words: **two cropping seasons and big herds fed the cities.**

Anthropology

3.4 Gujarat: protohistory and international trade

Gujarat was the **maritime and craft frontier** of the civilization.

- **Sequence:** pre-Harappan **Anarta** pottery in north Gujarat; the Harappan in **Kutch** (Dholavira, Surkotada, Kanmer, Desalpur) and **Saurashtra** (Rangpur, Rojdi, Kuntasi, Gola Dhoro, Nageshwar, Lothal), many with a local "**Sorath Harappan**" pottery style (Possehl); then post-Harappan **Lustrous Red Ware** (Rangpur) and **Prabhas** cultures.
- **Lothal:** on the old **Sabarmati-Bhogavo** channel near the Gulf of Khambhat. Its brick basin (about **222 × 37 m**) was called a **dockyard** by **S.R. Rao**; **Lawrence Leshnik** (1968) saw an **irrigation tank**. A 2024 study of satellite images and old channels (Ekta Gupta, V.N. Prabhakar and Vikrant Jain) links Lothal to a former Sabarmati course and supports the **dockyard** reading. Beside it stood a **warehouse** with about **70 sealings**, a **bead factory** and a **Persian Gulf seal**.
- **Trade links:** carnelian and agate beads (from Khambhat sources), shell from the Gulf of Kutch, and cotton went west; Gujarat sites linked the Indus to **Magan** (Oman, where Harappan pots occur at Ras al-Jinz) and **Dilmun** (Bahrain, with Indus weights). **Kuntasi** and **Gola Dhoro** were craft-and-port centres.
- **Significance:** Gujarat shows how a **peripheral region** became the civilization's **gateway** to the Arabian Sea, and how Harappan life **continued** there after the core cities declined.

3.5 Seals and the Indus script

Seals are the hallmark object. They are mostly **square steatite** stamps, about 2–3 cm, with an **animal** (most often the “**unicorn**”, also the humped bull, elephant, rhinoceros, tiger) below a short **inscription**, and a pierced boss on the back. They were **fired** to harden them.

- **Types:** **square** seals with an animal and text (most common), **rectangular** seals with text only, rare **cylinder** seals (Kalibangan), and small inscribed **copper tablets** at Mohenjo-daro.
- **Uses:** pressed on clay to **seal goods** and doors (sealings at Lothal’s warehouse); marks of **identity, office or clan**; perhaps **amulets**. Indus seals at **Ur, Susa and Kish** and Gulf-type seals at Lothal show **trade**.
- **The script:** about **400 signs** (Iravatham Mahadevan’s concordance, 1977), written mostly **right to left** (shown at **Kalibangan** by overlapping strokes), with an average of about **five signs** per text; the longest are short. Its short length and the lack of a **bilingual** inscription keep it **undeciphered**.

The views of scholars are compared below.

VIEW	SCHOLARS	ARGUMENT AND WEAKNESS
Proto-Dravidian	Asko Parpola, Iravatham Mahadevan	Fish sign read as <i>mīn</i> (“fish” and “star”); Dravidian survives in Brahui . Not proved by a reading
Indo-Aryan / Sanskrit	S.R. Rao (1982) and others	Sign values from later scripts. Conflicts with the absence of the horse and with the dating of Vedic Sanskrit
Not a language script	Steve Farmer, Richard Sproat, Michael Witzel (2004)	Texts too short ; symbols like heraldry. Opposed by Rajesh Rao and colleagues (2009), whose statistics show language-like patterns
Administrative signs	Bahata Ansumali Mukhopadhyay (2019, 2023)	Signs mostly logographic (word-signs); seals and tablets were administrative tools for taxation, trade licensing and commodity control. A functional, not phonetic, reading

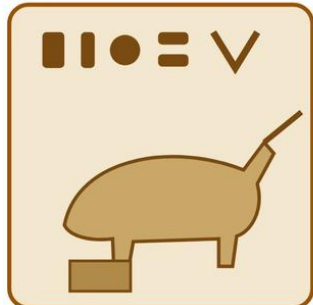
In 2025 the Tamil Nadu government announced a **US\$1 million prize** for an accepted decipherment, a sign of how open the question remains.

ANTHROPOLOGY · PROTOHISTORIC INDIA

Indus Seals and the Script

Small stamps, short texts, an unsolved writing system

EXPLAINER



feeding stand

The seal

Square **steatite**, about 2–3 cm, fired

"Unicorn" most common; bull, elephant, tiger

Pressed on clay to **seal goods**

The script

About **400 signs**; about five per textWritten **right to left** (Kalibangan)No bilingual: **undeciphered**

FOUR VIEWS ON THE SCRIPT

Dravidian

Parpola, Mahadevan

Indo-Aryan

S.R. Rao

Not language

Farmer, Sproat,
Witzel

Admin tags

Mukhopadhyay

In simple words: **the seals marked goods and status; their words are still unread.**

Anthropology

3.6 Religion and its continuities

The Harappans left **no clear temples**, so their religion is read from objects.

- **Mother goddess:** female terracotta figurines with fan-shaped headdresses; a seal from Harappa shows a plant growing from a woman, read as an **earth or fertility goddess**.
- **The "Proto-Shiva":** a seated figure with a horned headdress among four wild animals, which **John Marshall** called **Pashupati** ("lord of beasts") in a yogic posture. **Doris Srinivasan** and others warn that the horns may be a **buffalo** headdress and the posture is not certainly yogic.
- **Other cults:** **pipal** tree, **humped bull** and composite animals, cone and ring stones read as **linga and yoni** (some may be gaming pieces or architectural parts), **fire altars** at **Kalibangan, Lothal and Banawali**, and ritual **bathing** (Great Bath).
- **Burial:** extended burials with pots in cemeteries (Harappa R-37, Kalibangan, Farmana); **paired** male–female burials at Lothal.

Contributions to later Indian life. Beyond religion, the Harappans left a weight system based on **16** and its multiples, the **potter's wheel** technique, the **bullock cart** and river boats, the courtyard **house plan**, attention to **bathing and drains**, and cotton cloth.

Continuity into later Hinduism. Shiva-like and goddess cults, tree and animal worship, ritual bathing, **fire altars**, the **swastika**, the *namaste*-like posture of figurines, bangles and **sindur**-like red pigment have all been traced into later Indian religion. The anthropological caution is that **resemblance is not proof** of descent; the links are strongest for **domestic practice** (bathing, ornaments, cattle) and weakest where later texts are read back into the seals.

3.7 What kind of society? State or no state

Anthropologists define the **state** as a society with a **central authority** that has a monopoly of force, territory, taxation and **social classes** (Paper 1, Unit 4). Theories of its origin include **Karl Wittfogel's hydraulic** theory (control of irrigation), **Robert Carneiro's circumscription** theory (war over scarce land), **Elman Service's** sequence of band, tribe, chiefdom and state, and Childe's **surplus** and specialisation.

VIEW OF HARAPPAN SOCIETY	SCHOLARS	EVIDENCE
Theocracy of priest-kings	Wheeler, Stuart Piggott	Citadels , Great Bath, the "priest-king" bust
Several city-states with competing elites	Kenoyer	Distinct seals and craft guilds; no single capital
A complex society without a state	Possehl ("complexity without the state", 1998)	No palaces, royal tombs or war imagery; a shared ideology of purity and order
An early state	Shereen Ratnagar	Standard weights, planned works and trade need central control

- **Daily life:** cotton and wool clothing (spindle whorls, needles), **ornaments** of gold, carnelian, shell and faience, **bangles** for women, bronze mirrors and combs; **dice**, marbles and toy carts with movable parts; music and dance (the "dancing girl"); a diet of cereals, pulses, dairy, meat and fish.
- **Social reconstruction: stratification** (large courtyard houses beside one-room dwellings), **occupational specialisation** that some compare to later endogamous craft groups, **merchants** and ritual specialists, and a **peaceful** record with few weapons. Hydraulic and warfare theories fit poorly, since there are no great canals or battle scenes; trade and ideology fit best.

04

4. The Harappans as People: Skeletons and Ancient DNA

IN SIMPLE WORDS

Bones from Harappan graves tell us how tall people were, what diseases they had and whether they died by violence. Older studies tried to sort the skulls into "races", a method now abandoned. Today

ancient DNA shows where the Harappans' ancestors came from and how they relate to living South Asians.

- **The cemeteries of undivided Punjab: Harappa's Cemetery R-37** (Mature Harappan; extended burials with pots) and **Cemetery H** (Late Harappan; extended burials below and **pot burials** of bones above, with painted urns); **Rupar** on the Sutlej; and in present Haryana, **Farmana**, **Rakhigarhi** and **Sanauli** (116 burials, 2005–06).
- **Racial typology (now rejected): R.B. Seymour Sewell and B.S. Guha** (1931) sorted Mohenjo-daro skulls into **Proto-Australoid**, **Mediterranean**, **Alpine** and **Mongoloid** types; the Anthropological Survey of India studied the Harappa series (P. Gupta, P.C. Dutta and A. Basu, 1962). **Kenneth Kennedy**, the American physical anthropologist, showed that these "types" are **normal variation** within one population, and that the skeletons show **no break** that an invasion would produce.
- **What the bones say:** Mature Harappan people were of moderate stature and fairly healthy, with **dental caries** rising with a starchy farming diet (John Lukacs; Brian Hemphill). **Strontium isotopes** in teeth suggest that some people buried in R-37 had **grown up elsewhere**, so the city drew **migrants** (Kenoyer and colleagues, 2013).
- **The "massacre":** Wheeler's unburied skeletons at Mohenjo-daro come from **different levels** and periods (**George Dales**, "The mythical massacre at Mohenjo-daro", 1964).
- **Health and violence:** **Gwen Robbins Schug** and colleagues (2013) found that **leprosy and tuberculosis** and **violent injuries** rose at Harappa in the **post-urban** phase, most among people buried outside the cemetery: the decline had a **biological cost**, borne unequally.
- **Ancient DNA from Rakhigarhi:** the genome of a woman from the cemetery (**Vasant Shinde**, Vagheesh Narasimhan, Niraj Rai, **David Reich** and colleagues, *Cell*, 2019) combines ancestry related to **early Iranian hunter-gatherers** (separated before farming began) with **ancient South Asian hunter-gatherer** ancestry. It has **no steppe** (Yamnaya-related) and **no Anatolian or Iranian farmer** ancestry, and it matches eleven **"Indus Periphery"** individuals buried in Iran and Turkmenistan.

Why it matters: farming in South Asia grew **locally or through spread of ideas**, not by a mass migration of western farmers; **steppe ancestry** reached South Asia **after** the Mature Harappan; and the Harappan population is the **largest ancestral source** of most living South Asians.

05 5. The Decline: From Cities to Villages

IN SIMPLE WORDS

After about 1900 BC the big Indus cities were slowly abandoned. Writing, standard weights and seals went out of use, but people did not vanish: they moved east and south into smaller villages. Scholars now see a slow change caused by several pressures together, especially a drier climate and shifting rivers.

The evidence of decline: shoddy houses encroaching on streets at Mohenjo-daro, which shrank to a **small settlement**; the Great Bath and halls fell out of use; in Cholistan, settlements fell from about **174** Mature to about **50** Late Harappan sites, while sites **multiplied** in Haryana, the upper Doab and Gujarat.

The main theories are compared below, each with its weakness.

THEORY	PROPONENT	WEAKNESS
Aryan invasion ("Indra stands accused")	Mortimer Wheeler	No battle layer ; skeletons of different dates (Dales); Aryans dated after the decline
Catastrophic floods from tectonic damming	R.L. Raikes	A dam would be breached quickly (Lambrick); explains Mohenjo-daro only
Shift of the Indus away from the city	H.T. Lambrick	Explains one city , not the whole region
Drying of the Ghaggar-Hakra by river capture and aridity	D.P. Agrawal and R.K. Sood	Dating of the river changes uncertain
Ecological overuse of land and wood	Walter Fairervis	Soils stayed fertile for later farmers
Collapse of Mesopotamian trade	Several	A consequence as much as a cause
Weaker monsoon and drought	Liviu Giosan and colleagues (2012); Hiren Solanki and colleagues (2025)	Climate pressure does not by itself explain the social response

- **New climate evidence:** Solanki, Vimal Mishra and colleagues (*Communications Earth & Environment*, 2025) modelled **four river droughts**, each **over 85 years**, between about 4,450 and 3,400 years ago; the worst lasted about **164 years** and cut rainfall by about 13%. Settlements first shifted closer to the Indus, then dispersed.
- **Continuity after decline:** in Gujarat, Haryana and the doab, villages kept **Harappan crops, crafts and burial customs** for centuries, so the decline was a change of **scale** more than an end of culture.
- **Current view:** a **gradual de-urbanisation** (loss of city life), not a collapse. Drier conditions, failing rivers and lost trade made large cities hard to sustain, and people moved east to the monsoon belt, carrying crafts and beliefs into later Indian life (§6, §3.6).

ANTHROPOLOGY · PROTOHISTORIC INDIA

Why the Indus Cities Declined

Many pressures, a slow change, people moving east

THEORIES

THEORY (PROPONENT)

MAIN WEAKNESS

Aryan invasion (Wheeler)

No battle layer; "massacre" bodies of **different dates**

Floods (Raikes)

Explains Mohenjo-daro, **not the region**

River shift (Lambrick)

Explains **one city** onlyGhaggar drying
(Agrawal, Sood)Dates of river change **uncertain**Overuse of land
(Fairervis)Soils stayed **fertile**Weaker monsoon,
droughtNeeds the **social response** to explain the end

FOUR LONG RIVER DROUGHTS (2025 STUDY)

D1
88 yearsD2
101 yearsD3
164 yearsD4
114 years

Result: gradual **de-urbanisation**; Cholistan sites fell from about **174 to 50**, while villages grew in Haryana, the doab and Gujarat.

In simple words: **the cities faded slowly; the people moved and carried their culture on.**

Anthropology

06

6. Post-Harappan Cultures

IN SIMPLE WORDS

After the cities, India was a land of regional farming cultures again. Some kept Harappan traditions in a simpler form; others in the Ganga-Yamuna plain made new pottery and copper tools. Iron came in during the second millennium BC, and by 600 BC new cities grew in the Ganga plain, while in the south people built great stone tombs.

6.1 The Late Harappan regional cultures

- **Cemetery H culture** (Punjab): new **painted burial urns** at Harappa, with **peacocks** carrying small human figures, read as **souls of the dead**.

- **Jhukar** (Sindh): Harappan pottery in a **simplified** form, new **compartmented seals**.
- **Rangpur and Lustrous Red Ware** (Saurashtra): continuity of Harappan crafts in Gujarat into the late second millennium BC; and the **Late Harappan** of Haryana and western U.P. (**Bara, Alamgirpur, Hulas, Bhagwanpura**, where it overlaps the Painted Grey Ware).
- **Southward: Daimabad** in the Deccan has a Late Harappan phase beneath the Malwa and Jorwe villages (see 1.1a).

6.2 Copper Hoards, Ochre-Coloured Pottery and Sanauli

- **Copper Hoards**: caches of pure-copper objects (**anthropomorphs**, harpoons, **antenna-hilted swords**, flat and shouldered celts) found since 1822 (Bithur) at about 90 places; the largest, at **Gungeria** (Madhya Pradesh), held 424 copper objects and 102 silver plates. Copper came from the **Khetri** belt or the Singbhum region. Small **anthropomorphs** are still worshipped in places as village deities.
- **Ochre-Coloured Pottery (OCP)**: a thick red pottery with an ochre wash that rubs off, found by **B.B. Lal** at Bisauli and Rajpur Parsu (1950); over **100 sites** in the **Ganga-Yamuna doab** dated by luminescence to about **2000–1500 BC**; copper harpoon with OCP at **Saipai**; rice, barley and gram at Atranjikhhera.
- **Sanauli** (Baghpat, U.P.; S.K. Manjul, ASI, 2018): burials in **wooden coffins** with copper-sheathed lids, **antenna swords**, helmets, shields and three **two-wheeled vehicles** with copper-decorated wheels that the excavators call **chariots**, dated by radiocarbon to about **2000 BC** and attributed to the **OCP-Copper Hoard** culture. They show a **warrior elite** in the doab while the Indus cities declined; whether horses or oxen drew the vehicles is unknown.

COMMON CONFUSION

Are the Copper Hoards and the OCP one culture? Not simply. In the **Ganga-Yamuna doab** copper objects occur with OCP at **Saipai** and **Sanauli**, so there the two belong together. But Copper Hoards also occur in **Bihar, Bengal, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh** without OCP, so the term **Copper Hoard** names a type of find, while **OCP** names a pottery culture.

6.3 Black-and-Red Ware, Painted Grey Ware and the Iron Age in the Ganga plain

CULTURE	DATE (APPROXIMATE)	HALLMARKS
Black-and-Red Ware (BRW)	Mid-2nd millennium BC	Black inside, red outside from inverted firing ; between OCP and PGW at Atranjikhhera
Painted Grey Ware (PGW)	About 1200–600 BC	Thin grey ware painted black; over a thousand sites in Haryana, Punjab and the upper Ganga; Hastinapura , Ahichchhatra, Atranjikhhera, Jakhera; first common iron

CULTURE	DATE (APPROXIMATE)	HALLMARKS
Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW)	About 700–200 BC	Glossy luxury ware of the second urbanisation : fortified cities (Kaushambi), punch-marked coins

- **Iron in the Ganga region**: iron arrowheads, spearheads, sickles and hoes in PGW levels; **furnaces** at **Atranjikhhera** and **Jodhpura**; **Rakesh Tewari** reported iron from **Malhar**, **Raja Nal-ka-Tila** and **Lahuradewa** in the **early second millennium BC**, so iron-working in the middle Ganga may be older than once thought.
- **Cultural impact**: iron axes and ploughshares helped **clear the Ganga forests** and farm heavy soils, producing the **surplus** behind the *janapadas*, cities and states of the sixth century BC. This **second urbanisation** differed from the first: it was tied to **kingdoms**, **coins**, **writing that can be read** (Brahmi) and new religions (Buddhism, Jainism). **B.B. Lal** linked PGW sites with the *Mahabharata* and Later Vedic people; this remains a **hypothesis**.

6.4 The megaliths: South India and the North-East

A **megalith** ("large stone") is a monument of big stones, usually for the dead (types and diagram in Paper 1, Unit 1.8c). The south Indian megaliths are an **ancient Iron Age** practice; those of the North-East are a **living** tradition. The comparison below sets them side by side.

FEATURE	SOUTH INDIAN MEGALITHS	NORTH-EAST INDIAN MEGALITHS
Date	Iron Age, about 1200 BC to the early centuries AD	Mostly recent centuries; still erected
Sites and peoples	Brahmagiri (Wheeler, 1947), Maski, Adichanallur, Porkalam, Junapani (Vidarbha)	Khasi and Jaintia hills (Nartiang), Naga (Angami, Ao), Karbi, Garo
Forms	Cists with port-holes , dolmens, cairn circles, urns, rock-cut caves and umbrella stones (Kerala)	Menhirs (upright stones), flat table stones , alignments, stone circles; carved wooden posts among the Naga
Purpose	Secondary burial of bones with iron tools, black-and-red ware and beads	Funerary and memorial stones (S.N. Rao): ancestors, feasts of merit , village founding (Garo), clan stones (Jaintia)
Interpretation	Early chiefdoms; possible Dravidian link; origin debated	Ethnographic study by J.H. Hutton and Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf , who linked it to South-East Asian (Austroasiatic) traditions

- **Central India**: Iron Age stone circles at **Junapani** and Mahurjhari (Vidarbha) parallel the south, while the **Munda** and **Ho** of Jharkhand still lay stone slabs (*sasandiri*, often a capstone on small supports) over the bones of the dead in the clan burial ground (*sasan*) and raise upright memorial stones (*bid-diri*, also

written *birdiri*), as **S.C. Roy** recorded in *The Mundas and Their Country* (1912): a living link between ancient and modern practice.

- **Khasi example: memorial stones** (*mawbyinna*) pair tall upright **male** stones (*mawshynrang*), standing for the clan's men such as the maternal uncles, with flat **female** table stones (*mawkynthei*) for the clan ancestress. The bones themselves are gathered into the **clan ossuary** (*mawbah*) of the **matrilineal** clan, so the stones honour the mother's line.
- **Why the comparison matters:** the living north-eastern practice lets anthropologists **read** the silent southern tombs (**ethnoarchaeology**, see 1.3): feasts, rank and ancestor cults may explain monuments that excavation alone cannot. **Haimendorf** argued that the two traditions are **unconnected**, the southern one Iron Age and Mediterranean-linked, the north-eastern South-East Asian.

07 Key Terms

TERM	MEANING IN SIMPLE WORDS
Protohistory	A period with writing that cannot be read, known mainly from archaeology
Civilization	A complex society with cities, specialists, writing and government
Primary civilization	One that grew from its own village base without a model
Early Harappan	The regional cultures of 3300–2600 BC before the cities
Integration era	The Mature Harappan phase of shared cities, script and weights
Localization era	The Late Harappan phase of regional village cultures
Citadel	The raised, walled western part of a Harappan town
Sealing	A clay lump impressed with a seal to secure goods
Meluhha	The Mesopotamian name for the Indus region
Archaeobotany	The study of ancient plant remains
Multi-cropping	Growing summer and winter crops in the same year
De-urbanisation	The slow loss of city life as people move to villages
Copper Hoard	A cache of copper tools and figures from the Ganga–Yamuna region
OCP	Ochre-Coloured Pottery of the doab, about 2000–1500 BC

TERM	MEANING IN SIMPLE WORDS
PGW	Painted Grey Ware, the first common iron-using culture of the north
Megalith	A monument of large stones, usually for the dead
Ancient DNA	Genetic material recovered from old bones

08 Contemporary Developments

- **Indus droughts (2025):** Hiren Solanki, Vimal Mishra and colleagues identified four river droughts of over 85 years each between about 4,450 and 3,400 years ago, linking them to the dispersal from the cities (*Communications Earth & Environment*).
- **Lothal (2024):** satellite and old-map study links Lothal to a former course of the Sabarmati and supports the **dockyard** interpretation (*Journal of Archaeological Science*).
- **Indus script prize (2025):** at the centenary of Marshall's announcement, Tamil Nadu offered **US\$1 million** for an accepted decipherment and set up a research chair named after Iravatham Mahadevan.
- **Dholavira (2021):** inscribed as India's **40th UNESCO World Heritage Site**, the first Harappan city in India on the list.
- **Rakhigarhi:** the 2019 genome study and continuing ASI excavations have made it the key site for Harappan biology and the eastern Harappan city.

09 Diagrams to Master

1. **Topic map:** civilization, origins, cities, people, decline, post-Harappan.
2. **Phases:** **Regionalization → Integration → Localization**, with OCP, PGW and NBPW after.
3. **Origin debate:** **diffusion** vs **indigenous**, with Kalibangan, Kot Diji, Rehman Dheri and Mehrgarh.
4. **Crops and animals:** **rabi and kharif** crops, zebu and buffalo, **dairy**, the doubtful horse.
5. **Seals and script:** parts of a seal, **right-to-left** writing, four views.
6. **Decline:** theories with **weaknesses**, the **four droughts**, the eastward shift.

10 Revision Grid

SCHOLAR	WORK (YEAR)	KEY IDEA
John Marshall	<i>Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization</i> (1931)	Announced the civilization; "Proto-Shiva"

SCHOLAR	WORK (YEAR)	KEY IDEA
V. Gordon Childe	"The Urban Revolution" (1950)	Ten criteria of civilization
Mortimer Wheeler	<i>The Indus Civilization</i> (1953)	Diffusion of the urban idea; Aryan invasion
George Dales	"The mythical massacre at Mohenjo-daro" (1964)	Rejected the invasion evidence
R.L. Raikes	Flood hypothesis (1960s)	Tectonic damming and floods
B.B. Lal and B.K. Thapar	Kalibangan (1961–69)	Ploughed field; fire altars; script direction
S.R. Rao	Lothal (1955–60)	Dockyard and port
R.S. Bisht	Dholavira (1990–2005)	Three-part city and water system
Asko Parpola	<i>Deciphering the Indus Script</i> (1994)	Proto-Dravidian reading
Gregory Possehl	<i>The Indus Civilization</i> (2002)	A complex society without a visible state
J.M. Kenoyer	<i>Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization</i> (1998)	Eras; city-states with competing elites
Kenneth Kennedy	Skeletal studies (1980s–2000)	No biological break; race typology rejected
Shinde, Reich and colleagues	Rakhigarhi genome (2019)	No steppe or farmer ancestry



Previous Year Questions



2026

What are the evidences available regarding crops and domesticated animals of Indus Valley Civilization? What are the views of the scholars regarding Indus script?

2025

Write notes on: Lothal dockyard and international trade relations.

- 2024 Critically describe evidences from Rakhi Garhi and its linkages to Harappan civilization.
- 2024 Write notes on: Origin of State Societies.
- 2023 "The Indus Valley was the first settlement of the big civilization." Comment Critically.
- 2022 Make a critical appraisal of Megalithic tradition in India with special reference to North-East India.
- 2022 Describe briefly the proto-history of Gujarat. Discuss the significance of Gujarat proto-history in international trade.
- 2021 Write short notes on "Harappan seals" in about 150 words.
- 2021 Critically discuss the origin of Indus Valley Civilization. Mention the evidences of its endogenous origin from the pre-Harappan sites.
- 2019 What kind of society may be reconstructed from the archaeological evidences of Harappan culture ?
- 2017 Describe various aspects of trade and religion of Harappan civilization.
- 2016 Give a detailed appraisal of skeletal remains from Chalcolithic culture of undivided Punjab.
- 2015 Discuss the significance of Harappan Civilization sites from India.
- 2014 Describe what is known of Harappan Religion. Have some of its elements continued into later Hinduism? Discuss.
- 2011 Write a note in 150 words on Iron Age in Gangetic region.
- 2010 Write a note in 150 words on Urban planning in Harappan culture.
- 2010 Comment in detail on the socio-cultural life of the people of the Indus Valley Civilization.
- 2005 Discuss the economic basis of Indus Civilisation. What were the factors of its decline ?
- 2003 Write a note on Town planning in Indus cultures.
- 2000 Write a note on Criteria of civilization.

- 2000 Describe the geographical spread of Indus valley civilization. What were the causes of its decline ?
- 1999 Critically examine various sources of India's culture and civilization. Also distinguish between primary and secondary civilization.
- 1997 Describe the distinguishing characteristic features of South Indian Megaliths and compare these with either Central Indian or North-eastern Indian Megaliths.
- 1994 Write a note on Decline of the Indus Valley Civilization.
- 1991 Discuss the nature of urbanization in the Indus Valley Civilization. What factors led to its decline ?
- 1990 What are the important features of Indus Valley Civilization? Examine the conditions that may have led to urbanization in the Indian region.
- 1989 Write a note on Indus Valley Civilization is regarded as the beginning of urban life of India. Discuss.
- 1988 India's protohistoric civilization is unique in the world. Discuss.
- 1982 What are the main achievements of Indian civilization in the protohistoric period ?
- 1981 Write a note on the economic bases of Indus civilization. (200 words).
- 2024 Write notes on: Harappan maritime trade. Paper I.
- 2023 Write notes on: Prehistoric significance of Rakhigarhi. Paper I.
- 2023 Write notes on: Cultural impact of Iron Age. Paper I.
- 2019 Discuss with examples the Megalithic culture of India in the archaeological context. Paper I.
- 2018 Write a note in 150 words on Town Planning of Harappan Culture. Paper I.
- 2013 Bring out the distinguishing features of culture and civilization. (250 words). Paper I.
- 2000 Write a note on Copper-Bronze Age. Paper I.

1983

Civilization is a special development of culture. Elaborate. Paper I.

LOTUSARISE IAS

UNIT 03

5 CHAPTERS

Indian Social System and Caste

The structure and nature of traditional Indian social system: Varnashram, Purushartha, Karma, Rina and Rebirth. Caste system in India: Structure and characteristics Varna and caste, Theories of origin of caste system, Dominant caste, Caste mobility, Future of caste system, Jajmani system. Tribe-case continuum. Sacred Complex and Nature: Man-Spirit Complex. Impact of Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity of Indian society.

CHAPTERS

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ANTHROPOLOGY OPTIONAL

PAPER II · PART A

Caste Dynamics: Dominant Caste, Mobility, Jajmani and Tribe–Caste Continuum



PYQ RADAR 58 questions · last asked 2026

This article covers the second part of the syllabus line: how caste works as **power** in the village (dominant caste), how castes **move** (mobility), how they were tied together **economically** (jajmani), how **tribes** shade into castes (the continuum), and where caste is **heading**. The structure of caste, varna and jati, Dumont and the theories of origin are in **3.2a**. Sanskritization, Westernization and Modernization as processes of change are treated fully in **5.3a**; here they appear only as routes of caste mobility.

SYLLABUS 3.2 Caste system in India- structure and characteristics, Varna and caste, Theories of origin of caste system, Dominant caste, Caste mobility, Future of caste system, Jajmani system, Tribe caste continuum.

CONTENTS

01	1. Dominant Caste	02	2. Caste Mobility
03	3. The Jajmani System	04	4. The Tribe-Caste Continuum
05	5. The Future of Caste	06	Key Terms
07	Contemporary Developments	08	Diagrams to Master
09	Revision Grid	10	Previous Year Questions

ANTHROPOLOGY · INDIAN SOCIAL SYSTEM

Caste in Motion

Power, mobility, exchange, tribes and the future

TOPIC MAP

LAND · NUMBERS · STATUS · NETWORKS

What lets a caste dominate, rise, bind others or survive

Dominance
 who rules the village

Mobility
 how castes rise

Jajmani
 how castes exchange

Continuum
 tribe to caste
Dominant caste**Srinivas:** Rampura OkkaligasNumbers, **land**, power, ritual**Dube:** dominant factions**Caste mobility****Sanskritization**, Rajputization**Bailey:** Bisipara distillersOld in texts, new in **routes****Jajmani system****Wiser:** KarimpurIntegration or **exploitation**?**Fuller:** a constructed system**Tribe-caste continuum****Bailey:** access to land**Sinha:** Bhumij, Rajput myth**Xaxa:** tribes need not become castes**Future of caste**Decline, **transformation**, annihilationOnly about **5.8%** marry across caste

Identity without hierarchy?

State and law**Sub-classification** of SCs (2024)Caste counted in **Census 2027**

Bihar caste survey (2023)

In simple words: **the system weakens; caste identity stays.**

Anthropology

01

1. Dominant Caste

IN SIMPLE WORDS

In most villages one caste holds the land, the votes and the power to settle quarrels. Often it is not the Brahmin caste but a large peasant caste. Anthropologists call it the dominant caste, and it shapes how everyone else in the village lives and how they try to rise.

1.1 Rampura: the example

M.N. Srinivas, the Indian anthropologist who did fieldwork in **Rampura** near Mysore in 1948 and 1952, found that the village was run not by its few Brahmins but by the **Okkaligas** (Vokkaligas), a large **peasant caste** that owned most of the land. Okkaliga elders settled disputes, Okkaliga patrons had the largest followings, and lower castes copied Okkaliga ways. Srinivas first described this in "The Social System of a Mysore

Village" (1955) and gave the concept its full form in "**The Dominant Caste in Rampura**" (*American Anthropologist*, 1959).

1.2 Srinivas's definition and criteria

A caste is dominant, Srinivas wrote, when it **preponderates numerically** over other castes and also wields **preponderant economic and political power**, and it dominates most easily if its **ritual rank is not too low**. Later he added two modern elements.

- **Numerical strength:** numbers give security and, after universal franchise, **votes**.
- **Economic power:** above all **ownership of cultivable land**, which makes others dependent for work, credit and grain.
- **Political power:** control of the village and caste councils, and later of **panchayats** and party links.
- **Ritual status:** a caste need not be Brahmin, but a very low ritual rank blocks dominance.
- **Western education and administrative jobs:** educated members in government posts give access to officials and urban income.

Decisive dominance exists when one caste holds **all** these elements together. More often they are **distributed**: a ritually high caste may be poor and few, a populous caste may be poor and low. But each element tends to **bring the others**: a numerous, landed caste can buy education and, through **Sanskritization**, improve its ritual rank.

ANTHROPOLOGY · DOMINANT CASTE

Srinivas's Dominant Caste

Rampura, Mysore (1955, 1959): the Okkaligas

CONCEPT

Numbers

security and, later, votes

Land

others depend for work and grain

Political power

councils, panchayats, parties

DOMINANT CASTE

all elements together = **decisive** dominance

Ritual rank

not too low; need not be Brahmin

Western education

jobs in administration

Regional reach

kin across villages (Mayer)

What it does

Settles **disputes**; patrons and **vote banks**

Sets the **model** lower castes copy

Okkaligas, Jats, Marathas, Reddys, Patidars

Critics

Dube: dominant individuals and factions

Gardner, Oommen: elements do not hang together

Land reform and franchise **disperse** power

In simple words: **land plus numbers make a caste rule the village.**

Anthropology

1.3 What the dominant caste does

- **Settles disputes:** village quarrels go **upward** from clients to patrons; elders of the dominant caste sit on the village council and judge cases even between other castes, applying each caste's own customs.
- **Provides patrons:** members of the dominant caste have the largest **patron-client** followings; in elections these followings become what Srinivas called **vote banks**.
- **Sets the model:** lower castes imitate the **dominant caste** rather than distant Brahmins, so the model of Sanskritization may be **Kshatriya**, **Vaishya** or **peasant**, depending on who dominates locally.
- **Regional dominance:** **Adrian Mayer**, a British anthropologist, showed in Malwa ("The Dominant Caste in a Region of Central India", 1958) that dominance often extends over a **cluster of villages** linked by kinship, so even a few families of the dominant caste in a village carry weight.
- **Examples:** **Okkaligas** and **Lingayats** (Karnataka), **Reddys** and **Kammas** (Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), **Jats** (Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh), **Marathas** (Maharashtra), **Patidars** (Gujarat), **Vellalars** (Tamil Nadu) and **Rajputs** or **Thakurs** in parts of the north.

Louis Dumont read the dominant caste as the **local counterpart of the king**: it holds the land and power that the royal function held at the level of the kingdom, while the Brahmin keeps ritual precedence.

1.4 Criticisms

- **S.C. Dube**, an Indian anthropologist who studied Shamirpet near Hyderabad ("Caste Dominance and Factionalism", 1968), argued that castes are rarely **united**. Within a "dominant caste" a few **rich individuals** and **factions** hold power and exploit poorer caste-fellows too. One should speak of **dominant individuals and factions**, not a dominant caste, unless the caste acts together. Srinivas replied that the dominant individuals and factions **draw their strength** from belonging to the dominant caste.
- **Peter Gardner** ("Dominance in India: A Reappraisal", 1968) and **T.K. Oommen**, an Indian sociologist ("The Concept of Dominant Caste: Some Queries", 1970), questioned whether the elements of dominance **hang together**: numbers, land, ritual rank and political office often lie with **different** castes, and **land reforms**, **adult franchise** and new occupations have **dispersed** them further.
- **Class within caste:** land, not caste as such, is the root of power. Where a lower caste gains land (or the state redistributes it), dominance shifts.

The debate does not destroy the concept but **qualifies** it: dominance is held by **landed sections** of a caste, works through **factions and patrons**, and is **regional** rather than village-bound.

1.5 Dominant caste after reservations and democracy

- **Panchayati Raj** (73rd Amendment, 1992) reserved seats for SCs, STs and women, so a Dalit or woman can head a panchayat in a village dominated by Jats or Marathas. Dominance now works through **proxy leaders** and control of who contests.
- **Clientelism:** **Siwan Anderson**, **Patrick Francois** and **Ashok Kotwal** (*American Economic Review*, 2015) found that in Maharashtra villages where **Marathas** are the main landowners, landlords offer **insurance** in hard times to poor clients, who in return **vote** as the landlords wish; pro-poor schemes that would raise wages are **blocked**. Old patron-client dominance survives inside democratic institutions.
- **The paradox of dominant castes seeking backwardness:** dominant peasant castes have campaigned for **OBC or SEBC status**: the **Jats** (central OBC listing quashed by the Supreme Court in *Ram Singh v. Union of*

India, 2015), the **Patidars** of Gujarat (2015 agitation) and the **Marathas**, whose 2018 quota the Supreme Court struck down in **Jaishri Laxmanrao Patil (5 May 2021)**, calling them a “dominant forward class”; Maharashtra passed a new law giving them **10%** in **February 2024**. The demands show that agrarian distress has made even landed castes feel insecure, and that **numbers** now convert into political pressure.

1.6 Factionalism and caste domination

Oscar Lewis, an American anthropologist (*Group Dynamics in a North-Indian Village: A Study of Factions*, 1954), found in **Rampur** near Delhi that the dominant **Jats** were split into rival **factions**, each built around kin groups and allied with dependent families of lower castes. Factions are **vertical alliances** across castes, led by members of the dominant caste.

- **Why they matter:** factions channel **land disputes**, panchayat elections and development benefits; a faction leader delivers votes and receives patronage.
- **Caste and faction together:** caste gives the **boundary** of the leaders' group; faction gives the **line of conflict** inside it and the ties that cut across castes. The 2021 and 2025 questions on factionalism, caste domination and political power rest on this combination.

02 2. Caste Mobility

IN SIMPLE WORDS

Caste is supposed to be fixed by birth, yet whole castes have risen and fallen over centuries. A caste can change its customs, gain land or political power, form an association, convert, or use reservations. Usually the caste moves, not the individual.

2.1 An example: the Boad Distillers of Bisipara

F.G. Bailey, a British anthropologist (*Caste and the Economic Frontier*, 1957), studied **Bisipara** in the Kondmals of Odisha. A caste of **distillers** from Boad grew rich from the **liquor trade** under colonial excise rules, **bought land** from impoverished Warrior (landowning) families and then tried to raise its rank: it **gave up** practices considered low and adopted higher-caste customs. The village **resisted** at first, but wealth and land slowly brought acceptance. The untouchable **Pans**, by contrast, rose in **income and education** through government jobs and politics, yet were **blocked** when they tried to claim higher ritual status inside the village. Bailey's lesson: **economic change is the engine; ritual rank follows only if the village accepts it.**

2.2 Is caste mobility recent? Indological and empirical evidence

The 2023 question asks whether caste mobility is new. The evidence says it is **old**.

- **Indological evidence:** the **Chandogya Upanishad** tells of **Satyakama Jabala**, of unknown father, accepted as a Brahmin student for his truthfulness; **Vishvamitra**, a Kshatriya, became a Brahmin sage. The historian **K.M. Panikkar** held that the **Nandas** were the last “true” Kshatriyas and that later Kshatriyas rose by **seizing power**. Many **Rajput** clans absorbed groups of Central Asian origin; **Shivaji** was crowned in **1674** after Brahmins certified a **Kshatriya** genealogy.

- **Empirical evidence:** Srinivas on the **Coorgs** (1952) and the Okkaligas; Bailey on the Distillers; **Robert Hardgrave** on the **Nadars** of Tamil Nadu (*The Nadars of Tamilnad*, 1969), toddy-tappers who rose through trade, education and the **Nadar Mahajana Sangam** (1910); **O.M. Lynch** on the **Jatavs** of Agra (*The Politics of Untouchability*, 1969), who moved from Sanskritization to Ambedkarite politics; **Surajit Sinha** on the **Bhumij** (§4).
- **Census claims:** when the **1901 Census** under Risley ranked castes by precedence, **petitions** poured in from castes claiming higher varna status, evidence of an active market in rank.

The conclusion is that **group mobility** is an **old feature** of the caste system; what is **new** is its **routes** (education, democracy, reservation) and the fact that **individuals** can now rise without the whole caste.

2.3 Types of mobility

The 2025 question asks for the types. The table sets them out.

TYPE	MEANING	EXAMPLE
Group vs individual	A whole caste rises, or a person rises through education or a job	Nadars as a caste; a Dalit IAS officer
Upward vs downward	Rise in rank, or fall (loss of land, degrading work, outcasting)	Distillers rise; castes “fallen” in Manu’s <i>vratya</i> lists
Positional vs structural	A caste changes its place in the order, or the order itself changes	Sanskritization (positional) vs reservation and franchise (structural pressure)
Ritual vs secular	Rise in purity rank, or in wealth, power and education	Vegetarianism and sacred thread vs land and office
Intra- vs inter-generational	Change within one life, or between parents and children	First-generation graduates

Srinivas stressed that **Sanskritization** produces only **positional change**: a caste moves up, but the **hierarchy remains**. Mobility through **law, education and democracy** puts pressure on the **structure** itself.

2.4 Routes of mobility

ANTHROPOLOGY · CASTE MOBILITY

Routes of Caste Mobility

How whole castes, and now individuals, rise

PROCESS

ROUTE	HOW IT WORKS · EXAMPLE	CHANGE
Sanskritization	Copy higher-caste customs, then claim rank · Coorgs	Positional
Rajputization	Chiefs buy Rajput genealogies · Bhumij	Positional
Wealth and land	Trade profits bought land · Bisipara distillers	Positional
Westernization	English education, professions, towns	Structural pressure
De-Sanskritization	Reject Brahmanical models · Self-Respect movement	Structural pressure
Conversion	Leave Hinduism in protest · Mahars , 1956	Structural pressure
Associations, politics	Schools, lobbying, votes · Nadar Mahajana Sangam	Structural pressure
Reservation	Seats in education, jobs, legislatures · SC and OBC middle class	Structural pressure

Positional: the caste moves, the ladder stays. **Structural:** pressure on the ladder itself. Mobility is **old** (Vishvamitra, Shivaji's coronation in 1674); its **routes** are new.

In simple words: **first gain land or power, then claim rank.**

Anthropology

- **Sanskritization:** Srinivas's term (1952) for a low caste adopting the customs, rituals and beliefs of a higher, often twice-born caste, such as vegetarianism, teetotalism and the sacred thread, and then **claiming** higher status, usually over **a generation or two**. It works best when it follows **economic or political gains**. (Full treatment in 5.3a.)
- **Rajputization or Kshatriyization:** tribal and peasant chiefs claim **Rajput** descent through **genealogies** written by Brahmins (Sinha on the Bhumij, §4).
- **Westernization:** English education, professions and urban jobs open **caste-free** channels of rise.
- **De-Sanskritization:** some movements **rejected** Brahmanical models altogether, as the non-Brahmin and **Self-Respect** movement in Tamil Nadu did.
- **Conversion:** protest mobility by leaving Hinduism, as with the **Mahar** conversion to **Buddhism** led by Ambedkar (**Nagpur, 1956**), though caste labels often follow converts (3.2a).

- **Caste associations and politics:** the **Rudolphs** (*The Modernity of Tradition*, 1967) showed how **caste associations** turned castes into **interest groups**: they ran schools, lobbied for reservations and fielded candidates.
- **Reservation and protective discrimination:** seats in education, jobs and legislatures (Articles 15(4), 16(4), 330, 332) created an **SC and OBC middle class**.
- **Migration and markets:** urban and Gulf migration, business networks and the land market let castes gain wealth outside the village hierarchy.

COMMON CONFUSION

Is the tribe-caste continuum the same as Sanskritization? No. **Sanskritization** is a **cultural process** by which a caste (or tribe) copies higher-caste customs to **claim a higher rank** inside the caste order. The **tribe-caste continuum** is a **structural picture** of groups spread between two ideal poles, tribe and caste, and of the slow **absorption** of tribes into caste society through land, state formation and religion. A tribe can move along the continuum without Sanskritizing, and Sanskritization happens among castes that were never tribes.

03 3. The Jajmani System

IN SIMPLE WORDS

In the old village, families of farmers received services from families of barbers, washermen, potters, carpenters and priests. Instead of wages, they paid a share of the harvest and gifts at festivals. The ties were hereditary. Scholars still argue whether this was mutual help or a form of exploitation.

3.1 Karimpur: the example

William H. Wiser, an American missionary and sociologist, lived in **Karimpur** in Mainpuri district of Uttar Pradesh and described its exchanges in *The Hindu Jajmani System* (1936). Each **farming family** had hereditary ties with particular families of carpenters, blacksmiths, potters, barbers, washermen, water-carriers and sweepers. They served it through the year; at **harvest** each received a fixed share of grain from the threshing floor, plus food at festivals, clothes at weddings and sometimes rent-free house sites. Wiser saw a system of **mutual service** in which every caste had a place.

3.2 Terms and features

- **Jajman:** originally the patron of a **sacrifice** (*yajamana*) for whom a Brahmin performed rites; in the village, the **patron** family receiving services. The service provider is the **kamin**, **parjan** or **praja**; in Maharashtra the hereditary village servants are **balutedars**, paid in *baluta* (grain shares).
- **Hereditary and durable:** the right to serve a family is **inherited** on both sides and may be divided among sons; it can be **sold or mortgaged** in some regions.

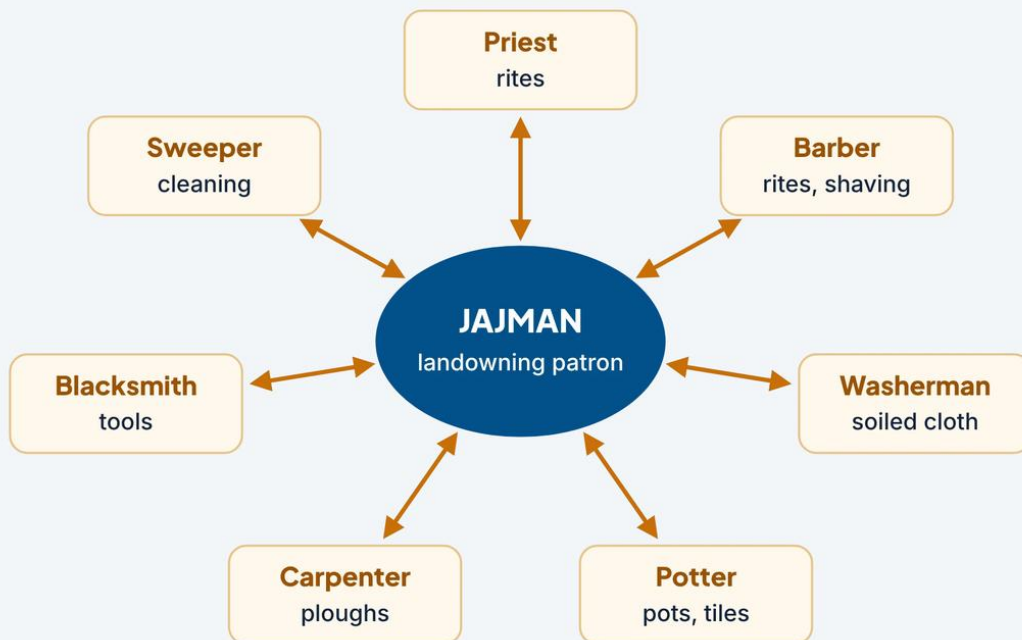
- **Pauline Kolenda** ("Toward a Model of the Hindu Jajmani System", 1963), working in Khalapur, set out these features as a general model.
- **Exclusive:** a family is supposed to deal with **one** family of each specialist, and specialists may not **poach** others' clients; caste councils enforce this.
- **Payment in kind:** grain at harvest, plus perquisites; **cash** and **barter** existed alongside it.
- **Multiplex:** ties are **economic, ritual and social**: the barber and washerman are needed at **births, weddings and deaths** to remove pollution; clients expect **protection**, loans and support in disputes; patrons expect **support in factional fights**.
- **Two kinds of specialists:** **ritual** specialists (priest, barber, washerman) whose work is tied to **purity**, and **artisans and labourers** whose work is **material**. Artisans often serve many patrons and are more independent; labourers tied to one landowner are most **dependent**.

ANTHROPOLOGY · VILLAGE ECONOMY

The Jajmani Web

Hereditary services for grain shares: Wiser's Karimpur (1936)

SYSTEM



Kamins give goods and services, many tied to **purity** · **Jajman gives** grain at harvest, gifts, house sites, protection

Integration

Wiser: mutual security

Gould: pure and impure

Dumont: a share for all

Exploitation

Lewis: power of Jat landlords

Beidelman: feudal coercion

Mencher: the view from below

Constructed

Fuller: no single system

Mayer: late 19th-century pattern

Cash and markets always existed

In simple words: **security for the poor, bought with dependence.**

Anthropology

3.3 The great debate: integration or exploitation?

The 2013 and 2026 questions ask for the debates. There are three positions.

1. Integration and reciprocity

- **Wiser** (1936): mutual services gave **security** to all and integrated the village.
- **Harold Gould**, an American anthropologist (1958; 1964), traced the pattern to the **religious opposition of pure and impure**: higher castes need lower castes to remove pollution, so the system defines the local **ritual order** as much as the economic one.

- **Dumont** (1966) saw jajmani as **distribution oriented to the whole**: everyone, down to the sweeper, received a **share of the grain heap** by right, a principle opposed to the market's logic of individual gain.
- **David Pocock** (1962) separated **ritual** services, which express hierarchy, from ordinary economic exchange.

2. Exploitation and power

- **Oscar Lewis** and **Victor Barnouw** (1956), in Rampur, found the payments **meagre**, the obligations one-sided and the landowning **Jats** able to enforce them by **force** and boycott.
- **Thomas Beidelman** (*A Comparative Analysis of the Jajmani System*, 1959) called it a **feudal** system that maintained the **power and prestige** of landowning castes; its essence was **coercion**, not reciprocity.
- **Kathleen Gough** found in Tanjore that the labouring **Pallars** and **Paraiyars** were bound in hereditary **servitude** to Brahmin landlords.
- **Joan Mencher** ("The Caste System Upside Down", 1974), working among Tamil labourers, argued that **from below** caste and jajmani look like **economic exploitation** justified by ideology.

3. A constructed "system"

- **C.J. Fuller** ("Misconceiving the Grain Heap", 1989) argued that anthropologists **fused** varied local arrangements into one "**jajmani system**", and that the image of a moneyless, non-market village economy was **misleading**: cash, markets and contract existed alongside customary shares for centuries.
- **Simon Commander** (1983) traced how the pattern **changed over two centuries**, and **Peter Mayer** ("Inventing Village Tradition", 1993) argued that the north Indian "jajmani system" described by ethnographers took shape in the **late nineteenth century**, under colonial agrarian conditions, rather than being ancient.

Evaluation: the integration view explains why the ties **lasted** and why **ritual** services persist; the exploitation view explains the **inequality** of shares and the role of **force**; the historical critique warns against treating a **colonial-era pattern** as timeless. Most scholars now see jajmani as **patron-client relations shaped by caste**, combining **security** for the poor with **dependence**, varying by region and period.

3.4 Jajmani and the market economy

The 2017 and 2019 questions ask about the impact of the market. Most jajmani ties have **declined**, but not vanished.

Causes of decline

- **Monetisation:** farmers growing **cash crops** (sugarcane, cotton) prefer to sell their harvest and pay **cash**; workers prefer **wages** to grain they must resell.
- **Factory goods:** aluminium and plastic vessels replaced the **potter's** wares; ready-made shoes and cloth undercut **leather workers** and **weavers**.
- **Mechanisation:** tractors, threshers and pumps reduced the demand for the **carpenter** and **blacksmith**, as studies of **Punjab** after the Green Revolution showed.
- **Land reforms and migration:** service castes gained small plots, moved to **towns** or found wage work; the power of landlords to **coerce** declined.

- **Democracy and law:** adult franchise, reservations and anti-untouchability laws let dependents **refuse** degrading tasks and seek **outside** help.
- **Rural employment programmes** such as **MGNREGA** (2005) gave the landless an alternative source of wages.

Continuity

- **Ritual services** survive: the **Brahmin priest** at weddings, the **barber** at rites of passage, the **washerman** after a death, often paid in cash now.
- **Patron-client ties** survive in new forms: **credit**, insurance in bad years, labour at peak seasons and **votes** (§1.5). Karve and Damle's survey of Maharashtra villages in the 1960s found many villagers still valued such ties for **security**.
- **Caste-based occupations** persist at the bottom: **manual scavenging** and sanitation work remain concentrated among Dalit castes, which is why the **2013 Act** prohibiting manual scavenging and the **2024** prison-manual reforms (3.2a) target them.

04 4. The Tribe–Caste Continuum

IN SIMPLE WORDS

Tribes and castes in India are not two separate boxes. Many tribes live beside castes, trade with them, worship some of the same gods and slowly take on caste ways, while some castes keep tribe-like customs. Scholars therefore picture a line with "tribe" at one end and "caste" at the other, with real groups spread along it.

4.1 The Bhumij: the example

Surajit Sinha, an Indian anthropologist, studied the **Bhumij** of **Barabhum** in the former Manbhum district (now Purulia, West Bengal) ("State Formation and Rajput Myth in Tribal Central India", 1962). Bhumij **chiefs** who had become landholders under a regional state **patronised Brahmins** with land grants; the Brahmins composed **genealogies** linking the chiefs to illustrious **Rajput** clans and a miraculous **origin myth**. The chiefs adopted the **sacred thread**, Brahmanical rites, Durga worship and restrictions on women, while still supporting the **old tribal gods**. Ordinary Bhumij remained closer to tribal ways. The same people thus stood at **different points** between tribe and caste.

4.2 Why a continuum? The classification problem

- **Colonial categories:** the census struggled to separate tribes from castes. **Baines** in the **1891** Census placed "forest tribes" under agricultural castes; the **1901** and **1911** Censuses classed tribal religion as "**animism**"; **1921** used "**tribal religion**"; **1931** under **Hutton** listed "**primitive tribes**". Classification rested largely on **religion**, a weak test.
- **Ghurye's objection** (*The Aborigines "So-Called" and Their Future*, 1943): tribes such as the **Bhils** and **Baigas** speak regional languages and follow Hindu practices, so the line between them and Hindu castes is **arbitrary**; tribes are "**backward Hindus**", imperfectly integrated, to be **assimilated**.

- **Elwin's opposite view:** **Verrier Elwin**, the British-born anthropologist of the Baiga and Gond (*The Aborigines*, 1943), saw tribes as **distinct societies** damaged by contact; he graded them into **four classes**, from the isolated "purest" groups to the tribal **aristocracy** that had adopted Hindu ways, and first argued for **protection**, later for integration at the tribes' own pace.
- **Today** a tribe is an **administrative category**: Scheduled Tribes are notified under **Article 342**, using the **Lokur Committee** (1965) criteria of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact and backwardness. The same community can be ST in one state and not in another: the **Santals** are STs in Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal but not in Assam.

4.3 Bailey: a structural continuum

Bailey ("Tribe, Caste and Nation", 1960; "'Tribe' and 'Caste' in India", 1961), working among the **Konds** and the caste villages of highland Odisha, argued that cultural tests (religion, diet) fail and that the distinction must be **structural**:

- **Tribe**: a **segmentary, egalitarian** society in which a man gets **direct access to land** by being a member of a clan or lineage.
- **Caste**: an **organic, hierarchical** society in which **access to land** depends on one's **position** in a ranked system of dependence; most people are **dependants** of a land-controlling caste.
- **Continuum**: "the only solution" is to postulate a **continuum**, with a wholly segmentary society with no dependants at one end and, at the other, a society in which most people act as **dependants**. Real groups are placed by the **proportion** of people with direct access to land.
- **Bailey's caution**: in modern India both tribes and castes are **merging into a different system**, the market and the state, "which is neither one nor the other".

4.4 Sinha, Bose and absorption

- **Sinha** ("Tribe-Caste and Tribe-Peasant Continua in Central India", 1965) treated tribes not as **isolated** categories but as parts of **Indian civilization**, linked to castes and peasants by **state formation**, trade and religion. Tribes move toward the caste pole through **Rajputization** of chiefs and **peasantisation** of commoners. This is the argument the 2026 question asks to appraise.
- **Nirmal Kumar Bose**, an Indian anthropologist ("The Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption", 1941), explained **why** tribes entered caste society: Hindu society offered **economic security** through a hereditary **occupational monopoly** in a wider division of labour, while leaving tribal customs largely intact and adding Brahmin priests for rites of passage. Absorption was thus **gradual** and **non-coercive** in form, though it placed tribes **low** in the hierarchy.
- **Caste-like tribes**: in the **Nilgiris**, the **Toda** (pastoralists), **Kota** (artisans and musicians), **Badaga** (cultivators) and **Kurumba** (sorcerers) were linked by hereditary exchange, and the Badagas treated the Kotas as **polluting**, as **David Mandelbaum** described. The **Apatani** of Arunachal Pradesh have hereditary **patrician** and **slave-descended** strata (Haimendorf), and the **Sherdukpen** are divided into higher **Thong** and lower **Chhao** sections. In north Bengal and Assam the **Rajbanshis** pressed **Kshatriya** claims. Many tribes, such as the **Oraons**, have jajmani-like ties with serving castes.

ANTHROPOLOGY · TRIBE AND CASTE

The Tribe–Caste Continuum

Two ideal poles, real groups in between

CONTINUUM

Tribal pole

Segmentary, egalitarian

Direct access to land through clan

Kin-based council; own gods

Caste pole

Hierarchical, organic

Dependent access to land through rank

Brahmin priests; purity rules



Bailey (1960, 1961)

The test is **access to land**, not religion

Both now merge into a **new system**

Bose and Sinha

Absorption by occupational security (1941)

Rajputization of chiefs (1962)

Critique

Xaxa: tribes become peasants or Christians, not castes

The model is **Hindu-centric**

In simple words: **tribe and caste are ends of a scale, not boxes.**

Anthropology

COMMON CONFUSION

Did Ghurye and Elwin disagree about whether tribes are different? Yes, at root. **Ghurye** held that tribes are **backward sections of Hindu society** and should be **assimilated**. **Elwin** held that tribes are **distinct peoples** whose culture contact had harmed, and first sought their **protection**. Nehru's **Tribal Panchsheel**, framed with Elwin's influence, chose a middle path of **integration** without imposition.

4.5 Relevance and critique

The table compares how the main scholars draw the line between tribe and caste.

SCHOLAR	CRITERION	POSITION ON THE CONTINUUM
Ghurye (1943)	Religion and culture	Tribes are backward Hindus ; no real line
Bose (1941)	Economy and occupational monopoly	Tribes absorbed into caste by economic security

SCHOLAR	CRITERION	POSITION ON THE CONTINUUM
Bailey (1960, 1961)	Direct vs dependent access to land	A structural continuum
Sinha (1962, 1965)	State formation and civilization	Tribe-caste and tribe-peasant continua
André Beteille (1986)	Isolation, size, language, religion	Tribes as relatively isolated societies; criteria loose
Virginus Xaxa (1999)	Tribes as societies , not stages	Tribes transform without becoming castes

The table shows a shift from **culture** (Ghurye) to **structure** (Bailey) to **history and state** (Sinha), and finally to a critique.

- **Relevance:** the continuum explains **porous** boundaries, **Kshatriya claims** of tribal chiefs, mixed groups such as the Bhumij, and why the **ST list** is constantly contested. The **Meitei** demand for ST status, and the **Manipur High Court** order of **27 March 2023** directing the state to consider it (the key paragraph deleted on review in **February 2024**), preceded ethnic conflict with Kuki-Zo tribes from **3 May 2023**: a reminder that tribe status is now a **political resource**.
- **Critique:** **Virginus Xaxa**, an Indian sociologist ("Transformation of Tribes in India: Terms of Discourse", 1999), argued that the continuum is **Hindu-centric**: it assumes tribes can only become castes. In fact many tribes became **peasants**, **Christians** or **workers** while keeping a **separate identity**, as in Jharkhand and the North-East. Bailey himself conceded the model's **limited practical value** once both tribe and caste enter the market and state.
- **Law:** in **Chinthada Anand** (2026) the Supreme Court held that **conversion alone** does not end **Scheduled Tribe** status, unlike Scheduled Caste status, because tribal identity rests on **community recognition** and customary life, not religion.

4.6 The folk–urban continuum

The idea of a continuum came from **Robert Redfield**, the American anthropologist who compared four communities in Yucatán, from the tribal village of **Tusik** to the city of **Mérida** (*The Folk Culture of Yucatan*, 1941). Moving towards the city, societies became more **heterogeneous**, **secular** and **individualised**, and less **isolated** and **kin-based**.

- **Applicability to India:** **McKim Marriott** (Kishan Garhi, 1955) and Srinivas showed that the Indian village was never an **isolated folk society**: it was tied to towns, pilgrimage centres and a **literate great tradition**. Redfield himself turned to the **peasant society** as a "part-society" of a civilization. The **tribe-caste** continuum adapted his idea to India's distinctive axis of variation. (Little and great traditions: 5.3b.)

5. The Future of Caste

IN SIMPLE WORDS

Caste has lost much of its old religious and economic hold, especially in cities. But it has gained new life in politics, marriage and identity. Scholars disagree whether it will fade, change shape or need to be deliberately abolished.

5.1 Three hypotheses

The 2009 question asks for the prevalent hypotheses on the future of caste.

HYPOTHESIS	MAIN VOICES	ARGUMENT
Decline	Modernisation theorists; the early Nehruvian view	Industry, cities, education and secular law will dissolve caste
Transformation	Rudolphs (1967), Rajni Kothari (<i>Caste in Indian Politics</i> , 1970), Srinivas , Béteille , Gupta	Caste loses its ritual system but survives as identity and interest group
Annihilation	Ambedkar (<i>Annihilation of Caste</i> , 1936)	Caste rests on religious sanction and must be destroyed by inter-caste marriage and rejection of the shastras

The evidence supports **transformation**. Srinivas wrote "**An Obituary on Caste as a System**" (2003): the **system** of ranked, interdependent, occupationally tied castes is dying, but **caste identities** are stronger than ever. Dumont called this **substantialisation**: castes stop being parts of one hierarchy and become **separate blocs** competing for resources.

5.2 What has changed and what persists

Changed

- **Commensality**: eating together in hotels, offices, hostels and trains is normal, though many people return to caste rules **at home**.
- **Occupation**: the link between caste and occupation is weak above the village level, though it persists at the bottom (**sanitation work**).
- **Power**: **André Béteille** found in **Sripuram**, Thanjavur (*Caste, Class and Power*, 1965), that Brahmin landlords had lost control as land came onto the market and non-Brahmins gained power through **parties**: caste, class and power were **separating**.
- **Ritual authority**: Brahmin precedence and **caste councils** have lost legal force; untouchability is a crime (Article 17; **Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955**; **SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989**).

- **Joint family and caste:** the joint family once transmitted caste occupation and rules; its decline and urban nuclear households weaken the **daily** practice of caste, though families still arrange **caste-endogamous** marriages.

Persists

- **Endogamy:** only about **5.8%** of marriages were inter-caste in the India Human Development Survey of **2011-12**, with no clear rise since the 1970s. **Honour killings** punish those who cross the line.
- **Politics:** parties select candidates by caste, and caste associations bargain for **reservation** and recognition. The **Rudolphs** traced three phases: **vertical** mobilisation (notables deliver the votes of dependants), **horizontal** mobilisation (caste associations and federations, such as Gujarat's **Kshatriya Sabha**, which drew Rajputs, Bariyas and Bhils together from 1946) and **differential** mobilisation (a caste splits by class, as when Rajasthan's poorer Rajputs formed the **Bhooswami Sangh** in 1954 against the great jagirdars). Caste has become a language of **democratic** competition (the 2010 and 2016 questions).
- **Social capital:** caste networks supply **jobs, credit and migration** links. **Kaivan Munshi** and **Mark Rosenzweig** (2006) showed how caste networks in Mumbai channelled boys into particular schools and jobs; the same networks can **exclude** outsiders. Caste is thus **bonding social capital**: strong within, closed to others (the 2021 question).
- **Violence and discrimination:** atrocities against Dalits, segregated settlements and bias in housing and hiring continue; caste has also travelled **abroad**: **Seattle** banned caste discrimination in **February 2023**, while **California's** bill (SB 403) was **vetoed** in **October 2023**.

5.3 The state's measures: can caste be annihilated?

The 2023 question asks whether annihilation is possible in light of the state's measures.

- **Equality and protection:** Articles **14-17**, the **PCR** and **PoA Acts**, the **Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013**, and the **Sukanya Shantha** ruling (2024) against caste in prisons.
- **Redistribution:** reservations in education, jobs, legislatures and panchayats; the **EWS** quota (103rd Amendment, 2019), upheld 3:2 in **Janhit Abhiyan** (7 November 2022).
- **Refining the categories:** **State of Punjab v. Davinder Singh** (1 August 2024), a seven-judge bench, held **6:1** that states may **sub-classify** SCs on **empirical data** of inter-se backwardness, overruling *E.V. Chinnaiah* (2004); Justice **B.R. Gavai** urged a **creamy layer** for SCs and STs; Justice **Bela Trivedi** dissented.
- **Encouraging inter-caste marriage:** the **Dr. Ambedkar Scheme for Social Integration through Inter-Caste Marriages** (2013) gives an incentive to couples where one spouse is Dalit.
- **Counting caste:** **Bihar's** caste survey (released **2 October 2023**) found **Extremely Backward Classes 36.01%**, **Backward Classes 27.12%**, **SCs 19.65%**, **STs 1.68%** and the unreserved **15.52%**; **Census 2027** will enumerate **all castes** for the first time since 1931 (3.2a).

Assessment: these measures have **weakened** caste as a **hierarchy of disabilities** and created mobility for millions, but they also make caste a **legal and political category** people have reason to retain. Annihilation in Ambedkar's sense, the end of **endogamy** and of the **religious sanction**, is far off; the more likely future is caste as **identity without hierarchy**, which still carries **inequality** wherever land, networks and marriage remain caste-bound.

Key Terms

TERM	MEANING IN SIMPLE WORDS
Dominant caste	The caste that holds most land, numbers and power in a village or region
Decisive dominance	When one caste holds all the elements of dominance together
Vote bank	A group whose votes are delivered as a block through patrons or caste leaders
Faction	A rival group inside a village, usually led by members of the dominant caste
Caste mobility	A change in the rank of a caste (or person) within the caste order
Positional change	A caste changes its place, but the hierarchy stays the same
Rajputization	Tribal or peasant chiefs claiming Rajput (Kshatriya) descent
De-Sanskritization	Rejecting Brahmanical customs as a model of status
Caste association	A modern organisation of a caste that works like an interest group
Jajman	The patron family that receives hereditary services
Kamin	The service or artisan family that serves a jajman
Balutedar	A hereditary village servant in Maharashtra, paid in grain shares
Clientelism	Exchange of protection or favours by patrons for loyalty and votes
Tribe-caste continuum	Tribes and castes seen as two ends of one scale, with groups in between
Folk-urban continuum	Redfield's scale from isolated folk villages to cities
Substantialisation	Castes turning from parts of a hierarchy into separate competing blocs
Bonding social capital	Strong ties within a group that help members but exclude outsiders
Sub-classification	Dividing a reserved category such as SCs into groups by backwardness

07

Contemporary Developments

- **Census 2027:** question 10 of the population-enumeration schedule, notified on **14 August 2026**, records "**Scheduled Caste / Scheduled Tribe / Caste**" as an open entry; data on every caste will test the "transformation" thesis with national figures for the first time since **1931**.
- **Sub-classification of SCs:** after **Davinder Singh (1 August 2024)**, states may divide the SC quota by **empirical** backwardness, a legal recognition that SCs are **internally ranked** and unequal.
- **Dominant castes and quotas:** Maharashtra's **10% SEBC** law for **Marathas (February 2024)**, passed after the Supreme Court had struck down their earlier quota in **May 2021**, shows dominant peasant castes using **backwardness** claims.
- **Conversion and status:** **Chinthada Anand (24 March 2026)** held that SC status ends on conversion out of Hinduism, Sikhism or Buddhism, but ST status does **not** end by conversion alone.
- **Caste abroad:** **Seattle** (February 2023) became the first US city to prohibit caste discrimination; **California** vetoed a similar bill (October 2023).

08

Diagrams to Master

1. **Topic map:** dominant caste, mobility, jajmani, tribe-caste continuum, future of caste.
2. **Dominant caste:** Srinivas's **five elements**, decisive and **regional** dominance, examples and the critiques of **Dube, Gardner, Oommen**.
3. **Routes of mobility:** Sanskritization, Rajputization, Westernization, de-Sanskritization, conversion, associations, reservation, migration; mark **positional** vs **structural** change.
4. **Jajmani web:** jajman at the centre, specialists around, **services** in one direction, **grain shares and protection** in the other; the three positions: **integration, exploitation, constructed system**.
5. **Tribe-caste continuum:** the two poles with **Bailey's land criterion**, the Bhumij placed in between, the processes (**Bose's absorption, Sinha's Rajputization**) and **Xaxa's critique**.

09

Revision Grid

SCHOLAR	WORK (YEAR)	KEY IDEA
W.H. Wiser	<i>The Hindu Jajmani System</i> (1936)	Karimpur; jajmani as mutual service
N.K. Bose	"The Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption" (1941)	Tribes absorbed through occupational security
Robert Redfield	<i>The Folk Culture of Yucatan</i> (1941)	Folk-urban continuum
G.S. Ghurye	<i>The Aborigines "So-Called"</i> (1943)	Tribes as backward Hindus

SCHOLAR	WORK (YEAR)	KEY IDEA
Verrier Elwin	<i>The Aborigines</i> (1943)	Four classes of tribes; protection
Oscar Lewis	Rampur factions (1954); with Barnouw (1956)	Factions; jajmani as power
M.N. Srinivas	"The Dominant Caste in Rampura" (1959)	Numbers, land, power, ritual, education
F.G. Bailey	<i>Caste and the Economic Frontier</i> (1957); 1960; 1961	Distillers' mobility; land-access continuum
T.O. Beidelman	<i>A Comparative Analysis of the Jajmani System</i> (1959)	Jajmani as feudal coercion
Surajit Sinha	1962; 1965	Rajput myth; tribe-caste and tribe-peasant continua
S.C. Dube	"Caste Dominance and Factionalism" (1968)	Dominant individuals and factions
Rudolph and Rudolph	<i>The Modernity of Tradition</i> (1967)	Caste associations; vertical, horizontal, differential mobilisation
Rajni Kothari	<i>Caste in Indian Politics</i> (1970)	Politicisation of caste
T.K. Oommen	"The Concept of Dominant Caste" (1970)	Dominance dispersed by reforms and franchise
C.J. Fuller	"Misconceiving the Grain Heap" (1989)	Jajmani as an anthropological construct
Virginus Xaxa	"Transformation of Tribes in India" (1999)	Tribes transform without becoming castes
M.N. Srinivas	"An Obituary on Caste as a System" (2003)	System dying, identity strengthening



Previous Year Questions



- 2026** What are the major debates related to the concept of jajmani system?
- 2026** Make a critical appraisal of Surajit Sinha's line of argument that tribes and castes may not be isolated social categories, but are a part of the great Indian civilization.
- 2025** Write notes on: Caste domination, factionalism and political power.
- 2025** What are the different types of caste mobility in India? Highlight the various factors responsible for it.
- 2023** Write notes on: Jajmani system: continuity and change.
- 2023** "Tribes are backward Hindus." Critically comment with reference to the contributions of G. S. Ghurye.
- 2023** Is caste mobility a recent phenomenon? Discuss in the light of Indological and Empirical context.
- 2023** Is annihilation of caste possible? Discuss the future of caste system in the light of various proactive measures taken by the Indian State.
- 2021** Write short notes on "Relevance of tribe – caste continuum" in about 150 words.
- 2021** Write short notes on "Caste and social capital" in about 150 words.
- 2021** Write short notes on "Factionalism and politics in rural India" in about 150 words.
- 2020** Write short note on the Concept of 'Dominant' caste in about 150 words.
- 2019** Write a note in 150 words on The Jajmani system and contemporary market economy.
- 2018** Based on historical and contemporary evidences, discuss the future of caste system in India.
- 2018** Explain the significance of tribe-caste continuum in the present context.
- 2017** Discuss the impact of market economy on the Jajmani system.

- 2016 Write a note in 150 words on Relevance| of caste in contemporary Indian politics.
- 2016 How is process of tribe-caste continuum different from Sanskritization? Comment.
- 2015 Critically examine the concept of tribe caste continuum and its relevance in contemporary India.
- 2015 What do you understand by dynamics of caste mobility ? How did the concept of Sanskritization contribute to its functionality ?
- 2014 Write a note in 150 words on TribeCaste continuum.
- 2014 Do you think caste persists in contemporary India ? Critically discuss.
- 2014 Define the concept 'Dominant Caste and examine its relevance in the contemporary Indian village with suitable examples.
- 2013 What is Jajmani system ? Examine the views on Jajmani system as an egalitarian as well as exploitative system. Give reasons for its decline (375 words).
- 2013 Examine the criticisms on the concept of dominant caste. (250 words).
- 2011 Discuss the relevance of the concept Dominant Caste in the context of Contemporary Indian Society.
- 2010 Examine the role of the caste system in the present political context.
- 2010 Is the present political system strengthening the caste system ? Discuss.
- 2009 Discuss the salient features of the prevalent hypotheses on the future of the caste system in India.
- 2009 Bring out the various features and the importance of the 'dominant caste'.
- 2008 Is Tribe-Caste Continuum a reality or myth ? Discuss.
- 2007 Write a note on Jajmani System.
- 2004 Write a note on Tribe-Caste Continuum.

Explain criteria for dominant caste. How far is this concept still crucial to our understanding of India's villages after implementation of reservations in democratic institutions ? Discuss. *(year not recorded in the source)*

2000

Write a note on Tribe-caste continuum.

2000

Define the Jajmani system. Analyse the changes in the relationship between caste and occupation in contemporary rural society.

1999

Write a note on Dominant Caste.

1998

Write a note on Folk-Urban Continuum.

1998

Write a note on Jajmani System.

1997

Examine the role of joint family in Hindu social system and its impacts caste system.

1994

Describe the tribe-caste continuum in India. Is this continuum relevant in Modern Indian society ?

1992

Write a note on Tribe caste continuum.

1991

What is the notion of 'folk-urban continuum' in the study of peasant society? Is it applicable to Indian conditions ?

1990

Write a note on Role of Dominant caste in the political institutions of a peasant village.

1988

Discuss relationship between "dominant caste" and economic development" in rural India.

1987

Write a note on Tribe-caste continuum.

1984

Write a note in 200 words : Distinction between tribe and caste.

1984

Examine the changes that have come about in caste system and joint family in modern India.

1982

Write a note on (200 words) : Concept of dominant caste and its relevance in the study of political processes.

- 2023** *Unit 5.3: "Sanskritization is a culture-bound concept." Critically comment to assess the strength and limitation of this concept in developing a theoretical framework to study social change.*
- 2022** *Unit 9.1: Discuss the views of G. S. Ghurye and Verrier Elwin on the approach towards tribal populations. What are the policies of the Government of India towards Indian tribal populations?*
- 2015** *Unit 4: Write a note in 150 words on Elwin Ghurye Debate on Tribes.*
- 2010** *Unit 4: Assess the contributions of M.N. Srinivas towards Indian Anthropology in general. Add a note on his understanding in the context of studying social mobility in India.*
- 1999** *Unit 5.3: Distinguish between sanskritization and desanskritization. Critically examine impact of sanskritization on social mobility in India.*
- 1998** *Write a note on Caste mobility. Paper I.*
- 1997** *Elucidate the salient differences between tribal social system and caste system giving suitable examples in support of your answer. Paper I.*
- 1991** *Unit 7.1: Evaluate the extent to which existing reservations for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have led to social mobility among them. What suggestions would you make for implementing to policy of adding an economic in extending reservation to the so-called 'forward' castes ?*
- 1988** *Unit 1.3: Write a note on "Tribe" and "Caste" as closed ethnic groups.*
- 1981** *Unit 5.3: Describe the different forms and proces of sanskritization and assess the overall impact of this phenomenon on caste structure in India.*

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