

Dominant Caste

the sociological study of Indian society, the concept of the “dominant caste” plays a critical role in understanding power dynamics, caste relations, and rural social structures. Coined by renowned Indian sociologist M.N. Srinivas, the term bridges the gap between classical caste hierarchies and evolving socio-political realities. Despite being historically placed lower in ritual status, many castes have emerged as dominant due to factors like land ownership, political influence, and numerical strength.

Who is a Dominant Caste?

The concept of “dominant caste” was first introduced by M.N. Srinivas in his ethnographic work on the village of Rampura in Karnataka. According to him, a caste group becomes dominant when it wields significant power in local affairs, irrespective of its ritual status in the traditional caste hierarchy.

Key Characteristics of a Dominant Caste

Numerical Strength: A large population in a particular region or village.

Land Ownership: Control over agricultural land and economic resources.

Political Influence: Participation in local governance, panchayats, and state politics.

Access to Education and Jobs: Dominance in government and private employment.

Social Assertiveness: Ability to influence the cultural and ritual life of the village.

Examples of Dominant Caste in India

Region Dominant Caste(s)

Tamil Nadu - Vanniyars, Gounders

Andhra Pradesh - Reddys, Kammas

Karnataka - Vokkaligas, Lingayats

Maharashtra - Marathas

Uttar Pradesh - Yadavs, Jats

Bihar - Kurmis, Yadavs

Rajasthan - Rajputs

Haryana - Jats

Punjab - Jat Sikhs

These castes may not rank high in ritual purity but dominate economically, numerically, and politically.