

HSS368: Introduction to Sociology

Max Marks: 30

24 September 2025

NOTE: *Students are allowed to bring printouts of assigned readings to the exam hall. These printouts can have handwritten notes.*

Answer question 1 based on the assigned reading (*Agrarian Changes and Attached Labour: Emerging Trends in Haryana Agriculture* by Surinder Jodhka).

1. What does Jodhka mean by 'unfree' labour? (10 marks, 200-300 words, CO-2, CO-3)

Jodhka uses the term “unfree” labour to describe the specific conditions under which attached labourers in Haryana are employed. For him, “unfreedom” does not necessarily mean the hereditary bondage or outright slavery of the pre-capitalist era. Traditional, hereditary bondage of the pre-capitalist era was inter-generational and therefore passed from one generation to the next. It involved the use of outright force and caste/status-based coercion, even if this was not strictly ‘legal’, and it was closely tied to caste hierarchies. It was based on patronage, and in return for labour and ‘service’, landlords provided a minimal subsistence and security of livelihood. Therefore, this form of ‘unfreedom’ was held together by caste norms, by paternalism (co-production of loyalty and protection).

The new forms of unfreedom that Jodhka refers to is the loss of freedom and autonomy that arises when workers are compelled by debt and lack of alternatives to mortgage their labour power. Labourers take advance wages or loans (often interest-free) from big farmers for weddings, house repairs, or medical expenses (A-102). This advance ties them to a specific employer, reducing their ability to sell their labour freely in the market. There is no patronage-based guarantee of subsistence or minimal wage; rather labourers accept attachment only when in need of cash (A-104–A-105). So, it is a case of voluntary entry, but involved economic coercion. More importantly, there is no inter-generational bondage. Unlike older forms, “the ideology of patronage and loyalty has largely been eroded” (p. A-105).

2. Based on the article, what is the author arguing about the nature of 'patronage' and patronage-based relationships in Haryana's agricultural economy? Give specific

references from quotes in the article where the author suggests a change in patronage-based relationships. (5 marks, 100-150 words, CO-2, CO-3)

Jodhka argues that there is an erosion of patronage in Haryana (p. A-105). Big farmers no longer command unquestioned authority; they now complain about labourers being “untrustworthy,” while labourers openly call farmers “cheats” and “exploiters.” There is a shift from **paternalism to contractualism**. Earlier, labour contracts often carried symbolic weight and multiple witnesses from dominant castes were used to enforce submission. Now many contracts were oral, and when written, witnesses often came from the labourer’s own caste (p. A-105). This reflects the **weakening of dominant caste authority**.

- In group interviews in their *mohallas*, labourers “expressed their discontent by calling [farmers] cheats and exploiters” (p. A-105).
- One labourer narrated: “*All big farmers are cheats. They are extremely selfish... Dina, a big zamindar... slapped Joga. In reaction Joga refused to continue working... Dina is so shameless that he took away the five acre land... without paying anything for the labour.*” (p. A-105).
- Another labourer said: “*...this whole ‘kaum’ is that of cheats. They suck our blood.*” When asked if “kaum” meant caste, he clarified: “*No, all these zamindars (implying the class of big farmers).*” (p. A-105).

3. How would you use the Marxist framework to study the social formation of caste? Explain the methodology you would use. (10 marks, 200-300 words, CO-2, CO-3)

1. Caste and Ownership of Raw Materials / Means of Production

- **Land:** Historically, dominant castes (Brahmins, Rajputs, Jats, Reddys, Patidars, Marathas, etc.) controlled land, which in an agrarian economy is the *primary* means of production. Landlessness has been concentrated among Dalits and other subordinated castes.
- **Access to Raw Materials:** Traditional caste-based occupations (weaving, leather work, fishing, carpentry, blacksmithing) meant lower castes had access only to raw materials in stigmatized or low-value forms (e.g., hides for leatherwork, which were considered polluting). High-value raw materials (grain, metals) were often monopolized by dominant castes.

- **Capital in Industry/Trade:** With industrialization, caste continued to mirror ownership: merchant castes (Baniyas, Chettiars, Marwaris, Parsis) often controlled capital and trade networks, while Dalits and lower OBCs remained wage labourers.

In short, caste stratification mapped onto economic stratification: high castes owned land and capital; lower castes provided labour, often without ownership rights.

2. Caste and Social Relations of Production

In Marxist terms, *relations of production* are the social relations through which production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus take place. Caste has historically shaped these relations in India:

- **Unfree / Forced Labour:** Caste norms often locked Dalits into hereditary labour (e.g., bonded labour, begar, attached labour in agriculture). This mirrors the feudal relation of serfdom, where surplus is extracted not just economically but enforced through ritual and social exclusion.
- **Division of Labour:** Caste rigidly assigns occupations by birth — Brahmins as priests, Baniyas as traders, Shudras as cultivators, Dalits as manual and stigmatized labour. This is a social relation of production where labour power is organized by caste hierarchy, not free market choice.
- **Surplus Appropriation with Social Legitimacy:** Dominant castes extract rent and surplus from labourers but justify it through religious–ritual superiority (e.g., untouchability, dharma). Thus caste makes exploitation appear “natural” or divinely sanctioned.
- **Capitalist Transformation:** In capitalist agriculture and industry, caste relations persist. For example, even when Dalits enter wage labour, they are often confined to the most precarious, lowest-paid, and stigmatized jobs (sanitation, casual labour, construction). Dominant castes retain disproportionate control over higher-value production and managerial roles.

ADDITIONAL

3. Mirroring in Contemporary India

- **Land ownership surveys** (NSS, Socio-Economic Caste Census) show SC households own far less land and capital assets compared to OBCs and dominant castes.
- **Labour patterns** show Dalits are overrepresented in agricultural labour and sanitation work, while upper castes are concentrated in salaried jobs and business ownership.

- **Migration and urban labour markets** reproduce these patterns: caste networks control access to contracts, credit, and skilled jobs, while lower castes cluster in unorganized labour.