

TEXTBOOK FOR CLASS XI

(PART 2)

SOCIAL CHANGE AND SOCIAL ORDER IN RURAL AND URBAN SOCIETY

Contestation, Crime and Violence

- *The existence of domination, power, legitimate authority and law does not imply that they always meet with obedience and conformity.*
- You have already read about the presence of *conflict and competition in society.*
- In a similar way, we need to recognise more general forms of contestation in society.
- *Contestation is used here as simply a word for broad forms of insistent disagreement.*
- Competition and conflict are more specific than this, and leave out other forms of dissent that may not be well described by such terms.
- One example is that of ‘counter cultures’ among youth or ‘youth rebellion’.
- These are protests against or refusal to conform to prevalent social norms.
- The content of these protests may involve anything from hairstyles and clothing fashions to language or lifestyle.

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- More standard or conventional forms of contestation include elections — which are a form of political competition.
- Contestations also include dissent or protest against laws or lawful authorities. Open and democratic societies allow this kind of dissent to different degrees.
- There are both explicit and implicit boundaries defined for such dissent; crossing these boundaries invites some form of reaction from society, usually from the law enforcement authorities.
- As you know very well, being united as Indians does not prevent us from disagreeing with each other.
- Different political parties may have very different agendas even though they may respect the same Constitution.

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- Belief in or knowledge of the same set of traffic rules does not prevent heated arguments on the road.
- In other words, social order need not mean sameness or unanimity.
- On the other hand, how much difference or dissent is tolerated in society is an important question.
- The answer to this question depends on social and historical circumstances but it always marks an important boundary in society, the boundary between the legitimate and the illegitimate, the legal and the illegal, and the acceptable and the unacceptable.
- Although it generally carries a strong moral charge, the notion of crime is strictly derived from the law.
- A crime is an act that violates an existing law, nothing more, nothing less.

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- The moral worth of the act is not determined solely by the fact that it violates existing law.
- *If the existing law is believed to be unjust, for example, a person may claim to be breaking it for the highest moral reasons.*
- This is exactly what the leaders of the *Freedom Movement in India* were doing as part of their ‘Civil Disobedience’ campaign.
- When Mahatma Gandhi broke the salt law of the British government at Dandi, he was committing a crime, and he was arrested for it.
- But he committed this crime deliberately and proudly, and the Indian people were also proud of him and what he stood for.
- Of course, these are not the only kinds of crime that are committed!

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- There are many other kinds of crime that cannot claim any great moral virtue.
- But the important point is that a crime is the breaking of the law — going beyond the boundary of legitimate dissent as defined by the law.
- The question of violence relates at the broadest level to the basic definition of the state.
- One of the defining features of the modern state is that it is supposed to have a monopoly over the use of legitimate violence within its jurisdiction.
- In other words, only the state (through its authorised functionaries) may lawfully use violence — all other instances of violence are by definition illegal. (There are exceptions like self defense meant for extraordinary and rare situations).

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- Thus, technically, every act of violence is seen as being directed against the state.
- Even if I assault or murder some other individual, it is the state that prosecutes me for violating its monopoly over the legitimate use of violence.
- It is obvious that violence is the enemy of social order, and an extreme form of contestation that transgresses not only the law, but important social norms.
- Violence in society is the product of social tensions and indicates the presence of serious problems. It is also a challenge to the authority of the state.
- In this sense it also marks the failure of the regime of legitimation and consent and the open outbreak of conflicts.



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