This text is about the *caste* system (the system of separating people into different levels of society) in *India*. There are some words in this text that you won’t see very often when you are reading but are important for this text. These words are in **bold** in the text. Look at the questions below about these vocabulary items and try to answer them. You should use a dictionary if you are unsure of the answers.

A: Pre-reading Vocabulary

1. **A caste** *(n)* & **casteism** *(n)*

   ‘*Caste* is determined by a person’s birth into a particular social group and is hereditary in nature.’

   Does *caste* mean you **are born into a specific social group** or **you eat a lot of bananas**?

2. **To be imbedded in sth** *(adj)*

   ‘In India, the caste system is **imbedded in** the Hindi religious culture.’

   Does *imbedded in* mean that it is (a) **fixed firmly as part of something** or it is (b) **asleep inside something**?

3. **A quota** *(n)*

   ‘The government has also enacted legislation that provides job **quotas** for people from low castes in politics and government jobs.’

   Is a job *quota* (a) **a level of jobs that must be reached** or (b) **the number of people who are unemployed**?

4. **To seek redress** *(v/n)*

   ‘Despite these formal legal protections, in many areas, Dalits are either unaware of their legal rights or don’t have the resources to **seek redress**.’

   If you *seek redress*, do you (a) **try to repair something/receive compensation** or do you (b) **not care about something**?
5. **Dehumanizing** (adj)

‘They suffer from dehumanizing living and working conditions, such as impoverishment, discrimination in schools and malnourishment.’

Does dehumanizing relate to (a) perfect conditions for a person to live in or (b) conditions that are unsuitable for a person to live in?

6. **An obstacle** (n)

‘Over 250 million people worldwide suffer from this form of discrimination, which is an obstacle to political, economic and cultural rights.’

Is an obstacle (a) a problem that is in your way or (b) an advantage?

7. **To reconcile sth** (v)

‘Ms Mayawati struggles to reconcile Dalit demands with those of the broader population.’

If you reconcile something, do you (a) make friends again after an argument or (b) continue to be enemies after an argument?

8. **A burden** (n)

‘Dalit women are affected by the burden of both caste and gender.’

Is a burden (a) a problem that you have to cope with or (b) an advantage?

**B: Scanning for information**

_How are you going to answer these questions?_

These are scanning questions – to answer these questions in the time available, you will have to look at the text very quickly! Remember; you are looking for names, dates or numbers.

- Allow yourself only **ninety (90) seconds** to answer these questions.

1. **What** is the population of India?

2. **Dalit movements** have been fighting casteism since **when**?

3. In **which month** of 2000 did the United Nations commission pass a resolution?
All human beings are free and equal in dignity and rights

**Case Study: Discrimination Based On Descent In India**

- In much of Asia and parts of Africa, distinct groups suffer from discrimination that is based on their descent.
- India has a total population of 1 billion people. Caste discrimination in India affects the largest number of people because 16% of the population - 160 million people - are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy.
- Despite formal protections in law societal norms continue to pose challenges to change.

**Context**

**Caste** is determined by a person’s birth into a particular social group. It is based on **descent** and is hereditary. In much of Asia and parts of Africa, caste is the basis of discrimination and exclusion of distinct groups. Over 250 million people worldwide suffer from this form of discrimination, which is an **obstacle** to the fulfillment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Communities affected by caste include the **Dalits** in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, as well as the **Buraku** people of Japan, the **Osu** of Nigeria’s Igbo people, and certain groups in Senegal and Mauritania.

**Background in India**

In India, the nearly 3,000 years old caste system is **imbedded in** the Hindi religious culture. Indian society was originally divided by categories of work or ‘**varna**’. This system developed into more complicated divisions of society - castes. **Dalits**, formerly known as ’untouchables’, are viewed by many people as separate from or below the caste system. Despite attempts during the last 100 years to break down caste barriers, the caste system is still a dominating feature of Indian society.

**Legal Framework**

Under the Indian **Constitution**, discrimination on the basis of caste is illegal. In 1989 the Indian government created legislation to combat discrimination based on caste when it passed the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. The government has also created legislation that provides **quotas** for people from low castes in politics and government jobs.

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1 *Descent* in this context means family history.
2 *A constitution* is a laws and rules made by the government of a country.
The Indian Constitution reserves a proportional number of seats in both Union and State assemblies for Scheduled Castes. Despite these formal legal protections, in many areas, Dalits are either unaware of their legal rights or don't have the resources to seek redress, thus discriminatory treatment continues. In India, Dalits, now known by the Indian government as ‘Scheduled Castes’, make up 16% of India's population.

India's Poorest

Status as a Dalit affects every dimension of an individual's life. Dalits are among the poorest of Indians. Their status is frequently the basis for violence, including land encroachment, murders, attacks, rapes and arson. They suffer from wage discrimination, infringement of the right to vote and run for elections, discrimination in schools, disproportionately high drop out rates and levels of illiteracy, dehumanizing living and working conditions, impoverishment and malnourishment.

They generally do not own land and are often relegated to separate villages or neighborhoods and to low paying and undesirable occupations such as street sweeping and removing human waste and dead animals. They are often not allowed to use the same wells or attend the same temples as higher-castes. Dalit women are affected by the burden of both caste and gender and even farther removed from legal protections.

Dalit Voices

In Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, the Dalits have a strong political presence and parties representing their interests are central to forming the state government. In May 2002, the leader of the low-caste dominated Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Mayawati Kumari, was sworn in as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. According to BBC's Ram Dutt Tripathi, for the first forty years of elected governments in Uttar Pradesh, every chief minister belonged to upper caste communities. He said, "It was only in 1977, with the election of a lower-caste chief minister, that these [Dalit] communities were able to see a link between power and decisions that directly benefited them." One Dalit voter in Uttar Pradesh claimed, "What we want is izzat" (dignity in Hindi). Now Ms Mayawati struggles to reconcile Dalit demands with those of the broader population.

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3 Committing arson is deliberately setting fire to a building. It is a crime.
4 Impoverishment means being really poor.
5 Malnourishment means not having enough to eat.
6 Human waste is a formal way of describing the things we do in a toilet.
7 Temples are the religious buildings of the Hindu religion, the equivalent of a church or a mosque.
8 A chief minister is an important person in the government.
Equality Movement

Dalit movements have been fighting casteism since the 1920s. Today the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, a movement led by Dalit human rights activists works to protect and promote the human rights of Dalits. The Campaign seeks solidarity from authorities in countries where the caste system continues to marginalize the Dalit population. It addresses the governments of particular countries as well as the International Human Rights bodies of the United Nations.

The work carried out by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, to end caste discrimination, has been significant. Despite resistance from the Indian government about putting the issue of caste on the agenda at the World Conference against Racism in Durban, the National campaign on Dalit Human Rights as well as other advocates was successful. Their contributions to the conference in Durban helped raise the international profile of the issue.

Human Rights Resolution

In August 2000, the United Nations commission on the Promotion and protection of Human Rights passed a resolution on Discrimination Based on Work and Descent. The resolution, aimed at addressing the issue of caste, reaffirmed that discrimination based on work and descent is prohibited under international human rights law. The commission also decided to further identify affected communities, examine existing constitutional, legislative and administrative measures for the abolition of such discrimination, and make concrete recommendations for the effective elimination of such practices.

Adapted from www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/features/ihavearightto/four_h/casestudy_art01.shtml

C: Comprehension Questions

1. Look at the text. These questions test your ability to analyze and understand the information that you have read.

2. For the first question you must choose the correct answer from A, B, C or D. For the other questions you must answer in your own words.

How are you going to answer these questions?

Most of these questions ask you to answer in your own words. You may find the answers in specific sentences in the text. Sometimes you may have to read a whole paragraph. Use the bold and italic key words to help you.
1. According to the text, which of the following obstacles is not caused by Caste discrimination?

A) Caste is an obstacle to the fulfillment of civil rights. ___
B) Caste is an obstacle to the fulfillment of political rights. ___
C) Caste is an obstacle to the fulfillment of economic rights. ___
D) Caste is an obstacle to the fulfillment of marital rights. ___

2. Describe the relationship between Hindi religious culture and the treatment of Dalits in the past.
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

3. What two things did the Indian government add to its legal framework (in 1989) to help prevent Casteism?
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

4. What reason is given for the Dalits' inability to seek redress?
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

5. Why do Dalit women suffer more than Dalit men?
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

6. When and how did Dalit communities first start to see a connection between power and decisions that benefited them?
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

7. What did the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights achieve at the Durban Conference?
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
D: True / False Questions

1. Look at the text. These questions test your ability to analyze and understand the information that you have read.

2. Circle true or false. If the sentence is false, you will write a correct sentence.

How are you going to answer these questions?

These questions ask you to decide if each statement is correct or incorrect. In this type of question, each statement is likely to be very similar to a part of the text, whether it is true or false. When you have found the related part of the text, read it carefully several times. If it is false, the difference may be very small!

1) The Caste system developed from a system of dividing work or ‘varna’. T F

2) Dalits suffer from murders, attacks, rapes and arson, despite being some of the wealthiest members of Indian society. T F

3) Dalit political parties play an important part in decision making in Uttar Pradesh. T F

4) The Indian government supported the decision to put the issue of caste discrimination on the agenda of the Anti-Racism Conference in Durban. T F

5) The UN resolution on Discrimination Based on Work and Descent restated that discrimination based on work and descent is illegal. T F
A: Pre-reading Vocabulary

1. Are born into a specific social group
2. Fixed firmly as part of something
3. A level of jobs that must be reached
4. Try to repair something/receive compensation
5. Conditions that are unsuitable for a person to live in
6. A problem that is in your way To reconcile sth (v)
7. Make friends again after an argument
8. A problem that you have to cope with

B: Scanning for Information

1. 1 billion people
2. The 1920s
3. August

C: Comprehension Questions

1. A, B and C are true. D is false.
2. The caste system and discrimination are imbedded in the Hindi religious culture. The system is responsible for Dalits being viewed as the lowest members of Indian society.
3. a) Legislation to combat discrimination based on caste and b) legislation that provides quotas for people from low castes in politics and government jobs.
4. Dalits are either unaware of their legal rights or don’t have the resources.
5. Dalit women not only suffer from Casteism but also suffer from sexual discrimination.
6. This happened when a lower-caste chief minister was elected in 1977.
7. It helped raise the international profile of the issue.

D: True / False Questions

1. True.
2. False – Dalits do suffer from these problems but they are not the wealthiest members of Indian society. In fact, they are the poorest.
3. True.
4. False – The issue was on the agenda despite resistance from the Indian government.
5. True.