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Q3(b)

Compare and contrast the approaches of M.N. Srinivas and L.P. Vidyarthi to social change in village India.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · Anthropology GS 2 · 15 marks · Indian Village

5.1 Indian Village-Significance of village study in India; Indian village as a social system; Traditional and changing patterns of settlement and inter-caste relations; Agrarian relations in Indian villages; Impact of globalization on Indian villages.

Core demand of the question

- State Srinivas's approach to social change in village India
- State Vidyarthi's approach
- Compare concepts, field, and what each treats as the motor of change
- Contrast without turning one into a hero and the other into a foil

Revision summary

Srinivas explained village change through field view, sanskritisation, westernisation and dominant caste.

Vidyarthi explained organisation and change through the **sacred complex** and the nature-man-spirit complex.

Srinivas's motor is internal rank-climbing plus Western and state resources.

Vidyarthi's motor is contact with development, mine, market and mission.

- **Use both:** caste plains and tribal-sacred landscapes are not one model.

Introduction

M. N. Srinivas and **L. P. Vidyarthi** both made the Indian village a theoretical object, but they did not ask the same question. Srinivas explained **how caste society moves** through sanskritisation, westernisation and the dominant caste. Vidyarthi explained **how a tribal and sacred landscape is organised** through the **sacred complex** and nature-man-spirit, and how development then disturbs that organisation.

Body**Srinivas: field view and mobility**

From Rampura (Mysore) and from Religion and Society among the Coorgs, Srinivas opposed the **book view** of Indology with the **field view**. Change in village India was not the death of caste but its **recasting**. **Sanskritisation** is the process by which a lower caste copies the ritual, diet and origin story of a locally higher group and claims a better rank over a generation or two. **Westernisation** is the take-up of British-derived education, dress, law and occupation, often by the same groups. The **dominant caste** - numerous, landed, with an educated elite - mediates both processes and captures panchayat and party.

Srinivas's village is a **caste system with a territory**. Factions, patrons and the vote (after 1950) are the political surface of that system. **Social change** means mobility within hierarchy, plus the new resources of the state and the market. He is closer to British structural-functionalism (Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard) than to a tribal ecology. Critics (**André Beteille**, Marxists, Ambedkarite writers) say he underplayed class, untouchability as violence, and women's labour.

Vidyarthi: **sacred complex** and tribal village

Vidyarthi's **Sacred Complex** in Hindu Gaya (and later work) used **Redfield's great and little traditions: a pilgrimage centre organises specialists, sacred geography and a hinterland of villages**. **Nature-man-spirit complex** (The **Maler**) models a hill tribe's ecology, social organisation and religion as one adaptive set. The tribal village is not first a caste ladder; it is a **forest-field-spirit system**. Change comes when mines, missions, markets and planned development break that set - the Ranchi school's development anthropology.

Vidyarthi institutionalised **tribal research** at Ranchi, worked on Chotanagpur, and trained students to see **cultural change as disruption of an integrated complex**, not only as sanskritisation. He could also describe Hindu sacred cities, so he is not "only a tribalist". Compared with Srinivas, he gave more space to **Adivasi India** and to **applied anthropology** for administration.

Compare

| Axis | Srinivas | Vidyarthi |

|---|---|---|

| Classic field | Mysore / Coorg peasant-caste village | Gaya sacred city; **Maler** and Chotanagpur tribes |

| Master concepts | Sanskritisation, westernisation, dominant caste, field view | **Sacred complex**, nature-man-spirit, tribal transformation |

| Motor of change | Internal imitation plus Western/state resources | External development, market, mine, mission meeting an ecological-religious whole |

| Hierarchy | Caste rank is central | **Tribe-Hindu civilisation** contact; sacred specialists |

| Policy mood | How the village absorbs democracy and mobility | How to plan without shattering tribal complexes |

Both rejected armchair Indology. Both used intensive fieldwork. Both can miss gender and class unless supplemented. **Srinivas** travels poorly to a Birhor or **Maler** hamlet if one only looks for a dominant caste. **Vidyarthi** travels poorly to Rampura if one only looks for a nature-man-spirit triangle and misses jati politics.

- **A full picture of village India needs both:** caste mobility in the plains and ecological-sacred disruption in the hills, with **Bailey's** tribe-caste continuum as the bridge.

Flow diagram

Srinivas -> Sanskritisation dominant caste

Vidyarthi -> Nature-man-spirit sacred complex

Sanskritisation dominant caste -> Plains caste village

Nature-man-spirit sacred complex -> Tribal and pilgrimage fields

Conclusion

Srinivas theorised social change as recast hierarchy in the caste village. Vidyarthi theorised it as transformation of sacred and ecological complexes, especially in tribal India. They are complementary regional theories, not two names for the same village.

Facts & figures

Rampura / Coorgs

Srinivas's ethnographic bases for dominant caste, sanskritisation and the living caste system.

Sacred complex

Vidyarthi's model of a Hindu pilgrimage centre as sacred geography, specialists and hinterland, drawing on Redfield.

Maler

Vidyarthi's nature-man-spirit study of a Rajmahal hill tribe, joining ecology, society and religion.