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Q6(a)

"The village was not merely a place where people lived; it had a design in which were reflected the basic values of Indian civilization." Who said this? Elaborate

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Anthropology GS 2 · 20 marks · Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization

1.1 Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization-Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic), Protohistoric (Indus Civilization). Pre-Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan cultures. Contributions of the tribal cultures to Indian civilization.

Core demand of the question

- Identify the author of the village-as-design statement in the Indian village-studies tradition
- **Elaborate the design:** caste, agriculture, ritual, panchayat
- Show the values of **Indian civilisation** that the village was said to hold
- Qualify the myth of the unchanging village with later work and law

Revision summary

- **The statement is from the Srinivas village-studies tradition:** the village as a designed microcosm of **Indian civilisation**.

Design includes caste ecology, agrarian rank, ritual calendar and factional politics.

- **Values:** hierarchy-with-interdependence, local dharma, jati marriage, sacred geography.

Marriott, Dube and Bailey showed regional versions of the same idea.

Land reform, migration, **73rd Amendment** and PESA have rewritten the plan without erasing rank.

Introduction

The sentence that the Indian village was not merely a place where people lived, but a **design that reflected the basic values of Indian civilisation**, belongs to the **village-studies school**, and is taught in this paper as **M. N. Srinivas's** claim. **McKim Marriott, S. C. Dube, F. G. Bailey** and **Oscar Lewis** worked in the same key: the village as a microcosm, not a random scatter of huts.

Body

Who said it

Srinivas, from **Rampura** and from his essays on the Indian village, argued against the idea of the village as a mere administrative unit or a **Gandhi**-romantic republic. He also argued against the opposite caricature - a shapeless mass. The village had a **plan**: caste streets, temple and mosque, tank, fields, cremation ground, the dominant caste's houses near the centre, Dalit hamlets at the edge. That plan was social, not only architectural.

Marriott's Kishan Garhi, Dube's Shamirpet, and Bailey's Bisipara showed regional variants of the same idea: **civilisation is visible in settlement**.

The design

- **Caste ecology:** who lives where, who takes water first, whose well is separate.
- **Agrarian design:** landlord, tenant, labour, jajmani or its local form, the harvest calendar as a moral year.
- **Ritual design:** village goddess, possession, festival that includes and ranks, Little Tradition nested in Great.
- **Political design:** dominant caste, factions, panchayat, later the statutory Gram Panchayat.
- **Values said to be reflected: hierarchy with interdependence, dharma as local duty, joint family and jati marriage, sacred geography of fields and groves.** Dumont would say purity; Srinivas would say dominance and flexibility.

Qualification

The design was never frozen. **Land reform, Green Revolution, migration, panchayat reservation, Christianity and the party system** cracked streets and jajmani. **Bêteille** in Tanjore showed class splitting caste. **Jan Breman** showed footloose labour. The **73rd Amendment** and **PESA** recoded the village as a constitutional Gram Sabha, which is a new design, not Srinivas's **Rampura**.

- **The civilisation-in-the-village thesis remains useful as a method:** read settlement, rank and ritual together. It fails if it denies the **factory, the slum and the ST hamlet outside the caste village**. India's values also live in the Constitution, which the village did not design.

Flow diagram

Village design -> Caste streets
 Village design -> Fields jajmani
 Village design -> Goddess festival
 Village design -> Dominant caste panchayat
 73rd PESA migration -> Village design

Conclusion

Srinivas and the village-studies school saw the village as a designed microcosm of hierarchy, duty and sacred geography. That insight still guides ethnography. Law, labour and reservation have redrawn the plan.

Facts & figures

Rampura

Srinivas's Mysore village, source of dominant-caste ethnography and of the village as a structured whole.

73rd Amendment

Constitutional Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha, a new official design laid over the old caste geography.

Shamirpet and Bisipara

Dube's and Bailey's villages, used with Rampura as the classic trio of 1950s village studies.

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