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Q6(c)

The Constitution of India is the 'cornerstone of a nation'. (Granville Austin). Analyze

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · PSIR GS 1 · 15 marks · Indian Nationalism

Indian Nationalism: Political Strategies of India's Freedom Struggle; Perspectives on Indian National Movement; Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Ambedkar, and the socialists.

Core demand of the question

- The Constitution of India is the 'cornerstone of a nation'. (Granville Austin). Analyze. (15 marks)

Revision summary

Austin called the Constitution the cornerstone of the Indian nation because it legally founded democracy, social revolution, and unity together.

He described those three as a **seamless web** produced by Assembly consensus, with **Ambedkar** as Drafting chair.

Adult franchise, Parts III and IV, and a strong Union are the institutional content of that claim.

Kesavananda's basic structure is a later judicial defence of the same identity.

The claim holds as founding analysis; Emergency, incomplete equality, and centralisation are later tests.

Introduction

Granville Austin in *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (1966) argued that the Constituent Assembly wrote a document that would hold a new people together. The Constitution is a cornerstone because it joins democracy, social revolution, and national unity in one legal structure, which Austin called a **seamless web**.

Body

What Austin meant

- Austin's title means that without this text the post-1947 political community had no agreed legal foundation.
- The Assembly's consensus, led by the Congress and including **Ambedkar** as **Drafting Committee** chair, produced adult franchise, fundamental rights, Directive Principles, and a Union strong enough to keep the territory together.
- Social revolution meant using law against caste, poverty, and landlord power, not waiting for custom to change.
- Democracy meant parliamentary government and justiciable rights, an imprint of British forms inside a written republic.
- Unity meant a strong Centre, single citizenship, and emergency powers, after Partition.

Why the claim still analyses well

- **Kesavananda Bharati** (1973) treated the Constitution's identity as not wholly at the mercy of a temporary majority, which is a judicial restatement of the cornerstone idea.
- **Ambedkar**'s constitutional morality is the habit that makes a cornerstone work in a hierarchical society.
- Linguistic States, the 73rd and 74th Amendments, and GST still use the same text as the site of bargain, which is nation-making through law.
- Compared with **Hobbes**, the cornerstone is not only a sword. Compared with **Rawls**, it is a public basic structure of liberties and of social Directives.

Limits of the claim

- Austin wrote before the Emergency, before Mandal, and before the full rise of regional parties; later history tests the web.
- **Social revolution remains incomplete:** Article 17 is law, atrocity and labour informality continue.
- A cornerstone can be used to centralise beyond federal fairness, which is the subject of the next question on Indian federalism.
- The analysis therefore accepts Austin's founding claim and adds that a cornerstone is only as real as the practice of limits, rights, and federal bargain.

Flow diagram

Austin cornerstone -> Seamless web
Seamless web -> Democracy
Seamless web -> Social revolution
Seamless web -> National unity
Seamless web -> Basic structure later

Conclusion

Austin's phrase is an analysis of the Constitution as the legal foundation of Indian nationhood: democracy, social revolution, and unity in one text. **Ambedkar**'s drafting and later basic structure confirm the claim. Incomplete social revolution and centralising practice are stresses on the stone, not a reason to deny that it still bears the public order of the republic.

Facts & figures

Austin, 1966

The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation, based on Assembly records and interviews.

Seamless web

Austin's term for the interdependence of democracy, social revolution, and national unity in the text.

Ambedkar

Chair of the **Drafting Committee**; later speeches on constitutional morality as the habit the text requires.

Kesavananda, 1973

Held that amendment cannot destroy basic structure, a judicial cornerstone doctrine.

Objective Resolution, 1946

Nehru's aims resolution that Austin treats as the political preface to the Preamble.

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