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Q6(b)

Analyse the nature of transition from ideology to identity politics in India.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 marks · Politics and Society

Politics and Society: Sociological theories of power; Power elite, bureaucracy, pressure groups, and political parties; Nation, state, citizenship, democracy, civil society, ideology; Protest, agitation, social movements, collective action, revolution.

Core demand of the question

- Analyse the nature of transition from ideology to identity politics in India
- Keep the analysis within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

Early independent India spoke nation, socialism, secularism, and planning.

Kothari's Congress system absorbed conflict in that idiom.

Mandal, caste associations, regionalism, and Hindutva named group identities.

- **Rudolphs:** tradition modernises as association, not only as leftover.

The shift is recognition and share, not the end of ideology.

Introduction

- **Indian politics after independence was organised around large ideologies:** nationalism, socialism, secularism, and planned development. From the late 1970s, and sharply after Mandal, mobilisation increasingly named caste, religion, region, and gender as identities. The transition is not a simple death of ideology. Identity claims carry their own programmes of recognition and share.

Body

What the ideological phase was

- The Congress system, as Rajni **Kothari** described it, absorbed conflict in a dominant-party idiom of nation and development.
- Socialist and communist parties spoke class. Hindu nationalism was present but not yet the main electoral grammar everywhere.
- Planning and a secular constitution supplied a public language of citizens rather than of jati.

What changed

- The Emergency, the decline of one-party dominance, and agrarian and OBC assertion cracked that umbrella.
- The **Mandal Commission** implementation in 1990 made OBC identity a national political fact. Caste associations became vote machines as well as status clubs.
- Communal polarisation after the 1980s, and later Hindutva electoral success, made religious identity a competing axis.

- Regional parties named language and state as identity. Dalit parties named a historically excluded self.
- Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph's "modernity of tradition" already saw caste associations as modern political actors, not leftovers.

Nature of the transition

- From universalist programmes to recognition of groups, which Charles Taylor's politics of recognition helps name.
- From class-as-ideology to caste-as-census category in bargaining with the state.
- Ideology did not vanish. Hindutva and social justice are ideologies that work through identity.
- Media and the **Census**-style counting of communities make identities more enumerative and competitive.

Critical cautions

- **Marx** would call identity a form of appearance that can hide class. Farmer and gig-worker distress still cross caste.
- Feminist politics, including SHG and legal campaigns, is identity work that also criticises the household.
- Identity politics can deepen democracy by bringing the excluded in, or it can organise majoritarian closure.

Assessment

- The nature of the shift is from a centre that spoke one nation to a field of named groups claiming the state.
- **Kothari**'s later writing on decline of the moderate centre fits. It is a reconfiguration of ideology, not its evaporation.

Flow diagram

Nation socialism secularism -> Emergency decline of Congress system
Emergency decline of Congress system -> Mandal caste associations
Emergency decline of Congress system -> Religious polarisation
Mandal caste associations -> Identity politics
Religious polarisation -> Identity politics
Identity politics -> Bargaining with the state

Conclusion

India moved from a dominant ideological language of nation, secularism, and development toward competitive identity claims of caste, religion, and region, especially after Mandal. Caste associations and religious mobilisation are the vehicles. Ideology remains inside those identities. Class and gender still cut across them.

Facts & figures

Kothari

Congress system: a dominant-party framework that later fragmented into a more identity-based field.

Mandal 1990

OBC reservation as a national identity-political turning point.

Rudolphs

Caste associations as modern interest groups, the modernity of tradition.

Census communities

Official enumeration feeds competitive identity claims on the state.

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