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Q1(c)

Louis Dumont's perspective on Indian caste system

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Caste System

Caste System: Perspectives (G.S. Ghurye, M.N. Srinivas, Louis Dumont, Andre Beteille); Features of caste system; Untouchability - forms and perspectives.

Core demand of the question

- Louis Dumont's perspective on Indian caste system
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Dumont treats caste as a hierarchical ideology of purity and impurity.

Power and wealth are real but encompassed by ritual rank.

Homo hierarchicus contrasts with Western equality as a value.

Sripuram and Rampura show class and dominant caste that the ideology does not fix.

The perspective is necessary for values, insufficient for land and politics.

Introduction

Louis Dumont read caste as a whole ideology of hierarchy, not as a list of customs. **Homo Hierarchicus** places purity and impurity above power and wealth as the principle of the system.

Body**Core of the perspective**

- The encompassing Brahmanical value of purity ranks groups; the king and the merchant are powerful yet encompassed.
- **Homo hierarchicus** is the Indian person of ranked relations, against the Western **homo aequalis** of the individual.
- Separation, hierarchy, and interdependence (jajmani-type service) are expressions of one ideology.

What it explains

- Why rank can survive without matching land, which Srinivas's dominant caste then has to explain as a field correction.
- Why endogamy and commensality feel moral, not only economic.

Critiques

- Andre Beteille's **Sripuram** showed caste, class, and power coming apart; disharmony, not one sacred whole.

- M. N. Srinivas's field view and Dalit-Bahujan writing deny that purity is the lived centre for those who face atrocity.
- A. R. Desai put production and class first.

Flow diagram

Dumont -> Purity impurity
Purity impurity -> Hierarchy encompasses power
Srinivas Beteille -> Field class power

Conclusion

Dumont's caste is an ideology of purity that encompasses power. It is a strong book-view. Indian field studies keep it as one language of rank, not as the whole of the system.

Facts & figures

Homo Hierarchicus

Dumont's classic on caste as a system of ranked values, not a loose set of groups.

Encompassment

The Brahman's purity principle includes and ranks kingly power.

Homo aequalis

Dumont's label for the modern individualist value of equality.

Sripuram

Beteille's village that split caste, class, and power against a single sacred hierarchy.

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