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Q2(b)

Discuss Andre Beteille account of the relationship between caste, class and power as a change from symmetrical to asymmetrical one.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · Sociology GS 2 · 15 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

- Discuss Andre Beteille account of the relationship between caste, class and power as a change from symmetrical to asymmetrical one
- Use **Sripuram**

Revision summary

Symmetry meant the same groups led in caste, class, and power.

Sripuram showed that land reform and democracy broke that coincidence.

Class can rise without ritual rank; office can move without land.

Caste remains, but it is no longer a perfect map of class and power.

Disharmony is this mismatch as a historical type.

Introduction

Andre Beteille argued that in a traditional setting caste, class, and power sat in a symmetrical stack: the same families ranked high on all three. Land reform, vote, and education made the stack asymmetrical.

Body**Symmetrical past**

- In older **Sripuram**-type Tanjore, Brahmins could combine ritual rank, land, and village authority.
- Dumont's encompassing purity and landlordism could look like one pyramid.

Asymmetrical present

- Caste rank did not automatically equal class after tenancy change and new occupations.
- Power shifted toward numerical dominant groups and parties, which Srinivas's dominant caste already hinted.
- A poor Brahmin, a rich non-Brahmin farmer, and a Dalit with a reserved office no longer sit on one line.

Meaning

- **This is disharmonic structure:** equality as public value, mismatch as lived fact.

- The change is not the end of caste. It is the end of a single coincidence of the three axes.

Flow diagram

Symmetrical stack -> Same families all high

Asymmetrical -> Caste class power split

Land reform vote school -> Asymmetrical

Conclusion

- **Beteille's shift from symmetrical to asymmetrical ties is the sociology of democratic India:** caste, class, and power still matter, but they no longer duplicate one another.

Facts & figures

Sripuram

Beteille's village study that staged the three-dimensional argument.

Caste, class, power

The three axes he insisted on separating analytically.

Symmetry

High correlation of the three in a traditional agrarian hierarchy.

Asymmetry

Post-reform, post-franchise mismatch among the three.

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