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Q1(b)

Which is more significant, the principle of 'hierarchy' or the principal of difference; in inter caste relations in the present day ?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2017 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Perspectives on the study of Indian society
Perspectives on the study of Indian society: Indology (G.S. Ghurye); Structural functionalism (M.N. Srinivas); Marxist sociology (A.R. Desai).

Core demand of the question

- Which is more significant, the principle of 'hierarchy' or the principle of difference, in inter-caste relations in the present day?
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Hierarchy still ranks bodies through honour, **endogamy**, and atrocity.

Difference organises caste as political identity and rights.

Srinivas's **dominant caste** already split ritual rank from local power.

Beteille's disharmony names equality as value beside ranked practice.

Public life leans to difference; intimacy still leans to hierarchy.

Introduction

Present-day inter-caste relations run on both hierarchy and difference. Hierarchy is still the older grammar of rank and honour. Difference has become more public as identity, reservation, and vote, yet it has not erased who may eat, marry, or be touched.

Body

Hierarchy still organises everyday rank

- Louis **Dumont**'s purity-impurity axis still appears in temple access, water, and marriage, even when offices speak equality.
- **Andre Beteille** called this disharmony: the Constitution values equality while ranked honour continues.
- Atrocity, honour crime, and segregated labour show that hierarchy is not a museum piece.

Difference as a competing principle

- M. N. Srinivas's **dominant caste** already showed that local power is not the same as priestly rank, so difference of resources cuts the ladder.
- Caste associations, OBC politics, and Dalit assertion treat jati as a named difference that claims rights, not only as a rung below.
- Urban work and class can muddle who sits above whom, even while **endogamy** keeps groups discrete.

Which is more significant

- **Hierarchy remains more significant in intimacy:** food, marriage, and the body.
- **Difference is more significant in public politics:** the vote, the list, and the movement.
- The present is not a choice of one. It is hierarchy in the household and difference in the street.

Flow diagram

Hierarchy purity honour -> Marriage food body

Difference identity vote -> Reservation movements

Hierarchy purity honour -> Present inter-caste

Difference identity vote -> Present inter-caste

Conclusion

Difference now organises political claims, but hierarchy still organises honour and exclusion. Inter-caste relations today are a disharmonic mix: groups speak as equals in law and as ranked bodies in life.

Facts & figures

Dumont

Hierarchy as a purity ideology that still leaks into everyday exclusion.

Beteille

Disharmonic structure: official equality with continuing ranked relations.

Dominant caste

Srinivas's reminder that numbers and land can outweigh ritual height.

Endogamy

The practice that keeps groups discrete even when urban work mixes them.