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Q1(b)

Give a critical analysis of Andre Beteille's study of Tanjore village.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2018 · 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

- Give a critical analysis of Andre Beteille's study of Tanjore village
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Sripuram split caste, class, and power in a Tanjore village.

Land reform and democracy made the structure **disharmonic**.

The study corrected harmony functionalism and a fused sacred hierarchy.

Limits are Brahmin-centred fieldwork, thin gender, and one-village scale.

Use it as a method, not as all of India.

Introduction

Andre Beteille's **Sripuram** study in Tanjore treated one village as a laboratory of caste, class, and power. The analysis is strong because it broke the single sacred hierarchy. It is limited because one agraharam-centred village cannot be India.

Body

What **Sripuram** showed

- Brahmins, dominant peasants, and Adi-Dravida labour did not form one functional whole in M. N. Srinivas's harmony sense.
- **Land reform** and the vote shifted class and power even when caste identity remained.
- Harmonic hierarchy, where inequality is morally accepted, gave way to a **disharmonic** structure: equality as public value, rank as practice.

Strengths

- It separated **three dimensions** that Ghurye's civilisational caste and Dumont's purity often fused.
- It kept fieldwork without pretending the village was a closed republic.

Critiques

- The agraharam lens can over-centre Brahmins and under-see women's kinship, which Leela Dube later insisted on.
- A. R. Desai would still want a fuller colonial class history than one Tanjore snapshot.

- Generalising Tamil wet-rice agrarian change to dry or tribal India is unsafe.
- Power outside the village-parties, mills, the state-appears, but the monograph still pulls the eye inward.

Flow diagram

Sripuram Tanjore -> Caste
Sripuram Tanjore -> Class
Sripuram Tanjore -> Power
Disharmonic equality -> Sripuram Tanjore
Scale gender -> Critique

Conclusion

- **Beteille's Tanjore village is a critical classic:** caste is not class is not power, and modern India is **disharmonic**. The critique is scale, gender thinness, and the temptation to let **Sripuram** stand for the nation.

Facts & figures

Sripuram

Beteille's Tanjore village of agraharam, peasant, and labour castes.

Three dimensions

Caste, class, and power treated as related but not identical.

Disharmonic

Official equality beside continuing ranked life.

Land reform

Agrarian change that shifted class without erasing caste identity.

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