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Q3(a)

What do you understand by discrete castes and muddled hierarchies? Substantiate your answer with suitable illustrations.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2018 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 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

- What do you understand by discrete castes and muddled hierarchies? Substantiate your answer with suitable illustrations
- Treat as a 20-mark answer

Revision summary

Discrete castes persist through **endogamy** and named identity.

Hierarchies muddle when land, class, and office do not match ritual rank.

Rampura's **dominant caste** and **Sripuram**'s three dimensions illustrate the muddle.

Urban work mixes public rank; marriage keeps groups discrete.

Caste today is bounded groups on a scrambled ladder.

Introduction

Discrete castes means jatis remain bounded groups, especially in marriage. Muddled hierarchies means it is no longer clear, in everyday public life, who sits strictly above whom. Indian sociology needs both phrases together: groups stay separate while the ladder blurs.

Body

Discrete castes

- **Endogamy** keeps jati as a marriage corporation, which **Ambedkar** named as the engine of caste.
- Surnames, networks, and association politics keep the group named even in a city.
- **Illustration:** a software professional still faces a marriage ad that lists jati; the group did not dissolve in the office.

Muddled hierarchies

- M. N. Srinivas's **dominant caste** already muddled ritual height with land and numbers in Rampura.
- Andre Beteille's **Sripuram** showed class and power parting from purity rank after land reform and the vote.
- Urban work, coalitions, and OBC assertion make a single Dumontian ladder hard to draw from top to bottom.

- **Illustration:** a numerically strong peasant caste can humble a poor Brahmin in the panchayat and still take priestly services in a wedding.

Why both, not one

- If we say only muddle, we miss honour crime and untouchability, which are still ranked.
- If we say only a clear hierarchy, we miss Mandal alliances, split tickets, and workplace mixing.
- Yogendra Singh's recombination describes cultural muddle; **endogamy** describes discreteness.

Further illustrations

- Campus and office canteens mix; hostels and housing societies may resegregate.
- Dalit middle class is class rise inside a discrete identity, a creamy-layer muddle of status.

Political meaning

- Parties treat discrete castes as vote banks while hierarchies of ritual lose public legitimacy, Beteille's disharmony.

Flow diagram

Endogamy identity -> Discrete castes
 Land vote class urban work -> Muddled hierarchies
 Discrete castes -> Present caste
 Muddled hierarchies -> Present caste

Conclusion

Discrete castes are bounded marriage and identity groups. Muddled hierarchies are the unclear, contested ranking of those groups in land, office, and street. Illustrations from Rampura, **Sripuram**, and urban work show India as separate boxes with a scrambled ladder, not as a vanished caste system.

Facts & figures

Endogamy

The practice that keeps jati discrete even when jobs mix.

Dominant caste

Srinivas's local power that already refused a pure ritual ladder.

Sripuram

Beteille's case of caste, class, and power no longer fused.

Marriage ads

Urban illustration that discreteness survives professional muddle.

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