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Q2(a)

"Indian caste system is unique and has been unhealthy for the growth of sociology of India." How far do you agree with this view?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · 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

- "Indian caste system is unique and has been unhealthy for the growth of sociology of India." How far do you agree with this view?

Revision summary

Caste has distinctive features of rank, endogamy and disability.

Treating it as India's only essence stunted comparative sociology.

Colonial and Indological synecdoche displaced class and gender.

Field and Dalit scholarship grew precisely by fighting that closure.

Uniqueness is a starting problem, not a healthy monopoly.

Introduction

Caste is historically distinctive in its mix of endogamy, occupation, and sacred rank. I agree only halfway that this uniqueness made Indian sociology unhealthy. It also gave the discipline its hardest and most productive problem.

Body**Uniqueness, not exoticism**

- **Ghurye listed features that have no simple Western class twin:** commensal bans, hereditary occupation, and ritual disability.
- Dumont intellectualised that uniqueness as homo hierarchicus. The risk is India as a unique museum.
- **Field work showed uniqueness is regional:** dominant caste in Rampura, class split in Sripuram, matriliney in parts of the south-west.

Unhealthy effects

- Caste-as-synecdoche, which colonial ethnography and some Indology fed, displaced class, gender, and tribe, a worry close to Whitehead's contention.
- Book view delayed a comparative sociology of power. Everything became varna.
- Communal and nationalist uses of 'unique Hindu order' trapped scholars in civilisational apology or civilisational attack.

Healthy effects

- **Srinivas, Beteille, Dube, and Desai grew because caste forced theory:** structure, disharmony, village, class.
- Ambedkarite and Dalit sociology made uniqueness a justice problem, which is growth, not a disease.
- Comparison with race, estate, and ethnicity is now possible without denying Indian specifics.

How far I agree

- Uniqueness is a fact of historical form.
- Unhealth began when uniqueness became the only permitted object and method.

Flow diagram

Caste uniqueness -> Book view synecdoche
Book view synecdoche -> Unhealthy closure
Caste uniqueness -> Field class Dalit theory
Field class Dalit theory -> Healthy growth

Conclusion

The caste system is distinctive. That distinctiveness stunted sociology when it became India's sole essence. It also trained a world-class field tradition. The view is partly true as a warning, false as a death certificate of the discipline.

Facts & figures

Synecdoche of India

Caste standing in for the whole society in colonial and some academic writing.

Ghurye features

A catalogue that can freeze uniqueness as a checklist.

Srinivas-Beteille

Field growth that used caste to theorise power, not only ritual.

Ambedkar

Turned uniqueness into a programme of annihilation, a sociological opening.

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