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Q1(d)

Critically examine briefly the phrase "Little 'Republics'" as used to denote India's villages

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · 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

- Critically examine briefly the phrase "Little Republics" as used to denote India's villages
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Metcalfe's little republics pictured villages as closed self-rule.

Srinivas found factions and dominant caste, not a civic assembly.

Dumont denied that the village is the true social whole.

Ambedkar treated the village as a site of Dalit unfreedom.

Panchayati raj is a modern construction, not a recovered republic.

Introduction

- **Charles Metcalfe** called Indian villages little republics: self-sufficient, self-governing, almost untouched by kings. The phrase is a colonial romance. Field sociology found factions, caste rule, and a state that was never far.

Body

The claim

- Metcalfe's republics were closed communities that paid revenue and otherwise ran themselves.
- The image fed later Gandhians who wanted the village as the moral nation.

Critique from the field

- Srinivas's **Rampura** showed dominant caste, patrons, and factions, not a harmonious citizen-assembly.
- Dumont argued that the village is not a republic because caste civilisation is trans-local; the **jajmani** web is not a town hall.
- **Ambedkar** called the village a sink of localism and a den of ignorance for Dalits, the opposite of a republic of equals.
- Beteille's Sripuram showed class and land splitting the so-called community.

What remains useful

- Local self-rule is a political project of panchayats, not a historical fact of isolation.

Flow diagram

Metcalfe little republics -> Self-sufficient harmony

Rampura Sripuram -> Faction dominant caste

Ambedkar -> Exclusion of Dalits

Faction dominant caste -> Critique of the phrase

Exclusion of Dalits -> Critique of the phrase

Conclusion

Little republics names an ideal, not the village as sociologists found it. India's villages were nested in caste, kingdom, and market. Calling them republics hides who had no vote in the lane.

Facts & figures

Charles Metcalfe

Colonial official whose little-republics phrase became a staple of village studies.

Rampura

Srinivas's case against the isolated harmonious village.

Ambedkar on village

The village as local tyranny, not as Gandhi's moral republic.

Jajmani

Service ties that look like community and work as ranked dependence.

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