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Q1(c)

Discuss different forms of kinship system in India

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · 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

- Discuss different forms of kinship system in India
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Karve divided Indian kinship into regional zones, not one national family type.

North India leans patrilineal, patrilocal and village-exogamous.

South India more often permits close-kin and **cross-cousin marriage**.

Matriliny exists in pockets and is not a footnote.

Kinship carries caste endogamy and gender control.

Introduction

Indian kinship is not one joint family. **Irawati Karve** mapped regions of descent, marriage, and household. Forms vary by line, residence, and who may marry whom.

Body**Karve's regional forms**

- The northern zone is largely patrilineal, patrilocal, and village-exogamous, with hypergamy and a strong seed line in Leela Dube's later gender reading.
- The southern zone allows close-kin marriage, including cross-cousin ties, and a different circle of alliance than the north.
- Eastern and central zones mix Dravidian and Indo-Aryan patterns; tribal belts add their own clans.

Descent and household

- Patriliney dominates much of the plains. Matriliny among groups such as the Nayar historically and the Khasi still organises house and inheritance differently.
- Joint household, nuclear urban household, and stem family coexist. Srinivas saw the joint family as a process, not a museum piece.

Alliance and caste

- Dumont stressed marriage as alliance that reproduces hierarchy.
- Endogamy of jati sits on all these forms, which is why kinship is also a caste machine.

Flow diagram

Karve zones -> North patrilineal village exogamy
Karve zones -> South close-kin marriage
Karve zones -> Matrilineal pockets
North patrilineal village exogamy -> Caste endogamy
South close-kin marriage -> Caste endogamy

Conclusion

Forms of kinship in India are regional systems of descent, residence, and marriage, as Karve showed. They are not a single Hindu joint family, and they remain the social net through which caste and gender travel.

Facts & figures

Irawati Karve

Mapped Indian kinship into northern, southern, eastern and central zones.

Village exogamy

Northern rule that one does not marry inside the natal village.

Cross-cousin marriage

Southern pattern that knits allied houses across generations.

Khasi matrilineal

A living matrilineal system that shows descent is not everywhere the seed line.

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