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Q2(b)

Is Indian society moving from "Hierarchy" towards "differentiation" ? Illustrate your answer with suitable examples

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · 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

- Is Indian society moving from "Hierarchy" towards "differentiation"? Illustrate your answer with suitable examples
- Use Dumont, Beteille, and occupational change

Revision summary

Hierarchy is Dumont's ranked whole; differentiation splits caste, class and power.

Land reform, vote and urban work show real uncoupling.

Endogamy, honour and untouchability keep hierarchy alive.

Sripuram and **Mandal** illustrate both movement and leftover rank.

The shift is disharmonic, not a finished class society.

Introduction

- **Louis Dumont pictured traditional India as hierarchy:** a whole ranked by purity. Differentiation is the modern splitting of caste, class, power, and occupation into partly separate orders. India has moved that way, but hierarchy has not left the house.

Body

The two images

- Hierarchy, in Dumont, is a value-system in which inequality is legitimate and the parts exist for the ranked whole.
- Differentiation, in Beteille's reading of **Sripuram** and of the Constitution, is the uncoupling of ritual rank from land, office, and market.
- Yogendra Singh's modernization of tradition describes recombination, not a clean replacement of hierarchy by a Western class map.

Evidence of movement

- Land reform and **Green Revolution** recast agrarian class inside jatis; a dominant caste may still sit on top, as Srinivas saw, but wealth now splits brothers.
- Adult franchise, reservation, and parties make political power a distinct game. A low-ranked group can win a seat that the temple still denies.
- Urban occupations and education mix people at work. Marriott's interactional food rank is weaker in the office canteen than in the wedding.

Evidence of persistence

- Endogamy, honour, and atrocity keep a hierarchical spine. Matrimonial filters are modern tools of old rank.
- Untouchability in labour and housing shows purity has not become a private hobby.
- **Beteille called this disharmonic:** equality as public value, hierarchy as practice.

Illustrations

- **Sripuram:** class and caste ceased to be identical after tenancy change.
- **Mandal:** OBC identity used census differentiation to claim state resources, while social honour fights continued.
- IT campuses hire on credentials and still host caste networks in hostels and marriage.

Verdict

- The movement is real as institutional differentiation. It is incomplete as a death of hierarchy.

Flow diagram

Dumont hierarchy -> Fused rank
Beteille differentiation -> Caste class power apart
Caste class power apart -> Disharmonic order
Fused rank -> Disharmonic order

Conclusion

Indian society is moving from a relatively fused hierarchy toward differentiation of class, power, and occupation. Dumont's whole is cracked, not emptied. The honest answer is a disharmonic shift, illustrated wherever the vote and the wedding still disagree.

Facts & figures

Homo hierarchicus

Dumont's model of India as a value-system of ranked inequality.

Sripuram

Beteille's illustration that caste, class, and power can move at different speeds.

Green Revolution

Agrarian technology that differentiated rich peasants from labourers inside old jatis.

Mandal

OBC mobilisation that used a differentiated census identity inside a still ranked society.