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Q3(a)

Critically examine Yogendra Singh's thesis on 'Modernization of Indian Tradition'.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Impact of colonial rule on Indian society

Impact of colonial rule on Indian society: Social background of Indian nationalism; Modernization of Indian tradition; Protests and movements during the colonial period; Social reforms.

Core demand of the question

- Critically examine Yogendra Singh's thesis on 'Modernization of Indian Tradition'
- Distinguish orthogenetic and heterogenetic change and test the thesis against caste, law, and inequality

Revision summary

Singh treats Indian tradition as modernizing from inside and through contact.

Orthogenetic and heterogenetic sources explain uneven cultural change.

Sanskritization, caste associations and a secular Constitution fit the thesis.

Desai, Beteille, Dube and Ambedkar show class, disharmony, gender and Dalit rupture.

Use the thesis as a cultural map, not as a full political economy.

Introduction

Yogendra Singh argued that Indian tradition is not a museum piece facing a foreign modernity. It modernizes from within and through contact. The thesis is a map of cultural change. It is weaker as a map of class power.

Body**The thesis**

- **Orthogenetic change grows from inside the civilisation:** bhakti, reform sects, and recasting of varna ethics.
- Heterogenetic change arrives through Islam, the West, colonialism, science, and the modern state.
- **Little and great traditions** interact. Elite and mass cultures do not modernize at one speed.
- **Modernization is selective:** law, industry, and vote can sit beside caste and kinship.

What it explains

- Srinivas's Sanskritization and Westernization fit as dual processes inside one society.
- The Rudolphs' modernity of tradition, caste associations, and statutory panchayats illustrate Singh's recombination.
- **Secularization in India is partial:** the state is constitutional-secular while ritual public life stays thick, which Singh's cultural sociology can hold.

Critique

- A. R. Desai would say tradition is also landlord and capitalist ideology. Modernization of values can hide incomplete land reform.
- Andre Beteille's disharmonic structure is sharper on the clash between equality and hierarchy than a smooth cultural synthesis.
- Gender, after Leela Dube, shows that seed-and-earth kinship can absorb schooling without giving daughters land.
- The thesis can sound too civilisational and underplay Dalit, Adivasi, and minority breaks with 'Hindu tradition' as **Ambedkar** insisted.
- Globalisation and informal labour after the 1990s are material shifts that cultural dualisms only partly name.

Verdict

- Keep Singh for the refusal of a tradition-versus-modernity cartoon.
- Add class, gender, and constitutional conflict so modernization is not only a value story.

Flow diagram

Orthogenetic reform -> Modernization of tradition
 Heterogenetic West Islam state -> Modernization of tradition
 Modernization of tradition -> Recombination caste vote law
 Class gender Dalit critique -> Limits of the thesis

Conclusion

Singh's thesis is right that Indian tradition modernizes rather than simply dies. It is incomplete unless land, caste atrocity, and gender are treated as contradictions, not as cultural lag waiting to be synthesised.

Facts & figures

Modernization of Indian Tradition

Yogendra Singh's book framing cultural change as recombination, not replacement.

Orthogenetic / heterogenetic

Change from within the civilisation versus change through Islam, the West, and the modern state.

Little and great traditions

Village and textual cultures interact rather than one killing the other.

Ambedkar limit

Dalit politics treats Hindu tradition as a structure of graded inequality, not only as a resource to modernize.

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