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Q4(c)

Discuss the challenges during village studies in India.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Sociology GS 2 · 15 marks · Rural and Agrarian Social Structure

Rural and Agrarian Social Structure: The idea of Indian village and village studies; Agrarian social structure - evolution of land tenure system, land reforms.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the challenges during village studies in India
- Cover method, representation, and later critique of the village-as-India

Revision summary

Long fieldwork faces control by patrons and dominant castes.

The 1950s treated the village as India; Beteille limited that claim.

Women, Dalits and Adivasis were often under-seen.

Functional village studies underplayed class.

Migration and the state now break the closed-village method.

Introduction

- **Village studies made Indian sociology. They also faced hard challenges:** how to enter, whom to believe, whether one village is India, and how caste and gender silence the field.

Body**Access and method**

- The field view, as Srinivas practised at **Rampura**, needs long residence. Officials, patrons, and dominant castes often control the guest's map.
- Language, ritual calendar, and faction mean the ethnographer sees a season, not a society.
- **Book view versus field view remains a challenge:** Ghurye's texts and Dumont's ideology can overrule what a labourer says.

Representation

- The 1950s golden period treated the village as the keyhole to civilisation. Beteille later warned that **Sripuram** is not India, and India is also town, law, and factory.
- Women's lives, which Dube placed at the centre of kinship, were often missed in male-centred caste charts.
- Adivasi and Dalit hamlets could appear as appendices to a 'main' village of dominant castes.

Theoretical challenges

- Functional harmony underplayed class struggle that Desai insisted on.
- Sanskritization and dominant caste are powerful, yet they can freeze the village as the only engine of change.

- Planning and Community Development wanted usable leaders, which could bias studies toward headmen.

Contemporary challenges

- **Circular migration** means the village is not a closed unit; COVID reverse migration made that obvious.
- SECC, satellite land data, and elections demand methods beyond the monograph.
- Ethics of naming factions and of publishing caste maps remain live.

Flow diagram

Village studies -> Access dominant caste

Village studies -> Representation not all India

Village studies -> Harmony versus class

Village studies -> Migration and town

Conclusion

Village studies in India struggle with access, elite bias, gender blindness, and the temptation to let one **Rampura** stand for the nation. The village remains necessary. It is no longer sufficient as India's image.

Facts & figures

Rampura

Srinivas's field site that defined the field view and its village-centred strengths and limits.

Sripuram

Beteille's reminder that caste, class and power, and also extra-village India, must be distinguished.

A. R. Desai

Criticised harmony village sociology for hiding agrarian class.

Circular migration

Workers live between village and city, so a one-place monograph misses the unit of life.