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Q1(a)

Elaborate on M.N. Srinivas's structural functionalist approach to the study of Indian society.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · 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

- Elaborate on M.N. Srinivas's structural functionalist approach to the study of Indian society
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Srinivas replaced a book view of India with a **field view** from villages such as **Rampura**.

Structure is observed groups; function is how custom holds them together.

Dominant caste and **Sanskritization** explain local power and mobility inside caste.

Westernization and politics add new resources without erasing the village system.

Conflict theorists say the method underplays class.

Introduction

M. N. Srinivas studied Indian society as a living structure of caste, kinship, and village, not as a book of sacred rules. His structural functionalism asks how parts fit, and how they change without the whole collapsing.

Body**Field view, not book view**

- Srinivas opposed an Indological India made only of texts. **Rampura** showed caste, faction, and ritual as observed relations.
- Structure is the network of groups and statuses. Function is the contribution of a custom to order, as in village festivals that knit patrons and clients.
- He kept Radcliffe-Brown's concern with solidarity, but he put mobility inside the structure through **Sanskritization**.

Indian tools of the method

- **Dominant caste** in **Rampura** joined land, numbers, and local office; ritual rank alone did not decide who ran the village.
- **Sanskritization is a functional path**: a jati copies the style of a higher local model and still stays inside caste, rather than leaving it.
- Westernization and the vote add new resources. The village remains a system, but the ranking of parts can shift.

Limit

- A. R. Desai and later conflict sociologists said harmony language underplays class and landlord power.
- Andre Beteille's Sripuram work kept structure but stressed inequality as disharmony, not as a smooth function.

Flow diagram

Field view Rampura -> Caste kinship village
Caste kinship village -> Dominant caste
Caste kinship village -> Sanskritization
Sanskritization -> Change inside structure

Conclusion

- **Srinivas's structural functionalism is a field method:** map groups, show what a custom does, and allow ranked change. It is strongest on caste and village, and weakest if class struggle is treated as noise.

Facts & figures

Rampura

Mysore village that supplied Srinivas's field view of caste, faction, and dominant caste.

Sanskritization

A lower jati copies the ritual and lifestyle of a locally higher model and claims a better rank.

Dominant caste

A caste that combines numerical strength, land, and political weight in a locality.

Field view

India as lived relations, against an Indological book view of texts alone.