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Q1(d)

In the context of changing Indian society, how do you view Andre Beteille's conceptions of harmonic and disharmonic social structures ?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · 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

- In the context of changing Indian society, how do you view Andre Beteille's conceptions of **harmonic** and **disharmonic** social structures?
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Harmonic structure legitimates inequality in its own values.

Disharmonic structure proclaims equality while inequality continues.

Sripuram showed this clash after land reform and democracy.

- **Changing India lives in disharmony:** law versus ranked honour.

The tension is the field of politics, not a temporary error.

Introduction

Andre Beteille used **harmonic** and **disharmonic** to name two ways a society relates inequality to its public values. Traditional India was closer to a **harmonic** hierarchy. Constitutional India is **disharmonic**: it values equality while ranked life continues.

Body

The two conceptions

- A **harmonic** structure is one in which inequality is legitimate in the ruling ideas, as in a caste order that treats rank as dharma.
- A **disharmonic** structure is one in which equality is the official value, yet status, class, and honour remain unequal, as in **Sripuram** after land reform and adult franchise.
- Beteille was not saying India became equal. He was saying the contradiction became central.

Changing Indian society

- Law, vote, and school teach equality. Endogamy, temple rank, and land still teach hierarchy, which Louis Dumont would still read as purity, and Beteille would read as a clash of values.
- **Dominant castes and new middle classes use both languages:** reservation as right, honour as family rule.
- **The view remains accurate for honour crimes, campus caste, and farm labour:** the Constitution is not a false front, and the village is not unchanged.

Use

- The pair is a diagnostic, not a nostalgia for harmony. Disharmony is the space of democratic politics.

Flow diagram

Harmonic hierarchy as value -> Caste order

Disharmonic equality as value -> Unequal caste class honour

Disharmonic equality as value -> Democratic politics

Conclusion

Beteille's **harmonic** and **disharmonic** structures still fit changing India. Equality is now a public creed; caste and class remain organised facts. Sociology should study that tension, not wait for one pole to win.

Facts & figures

Sripuram

Beteille's Tanjore village study of caste, class, and power in a changing agrarian order.

Harmonic

A structure whose inequalities are morally accepted by the prevailing value system.

Disharmonic

A structure whose values condemn inequality while practice reproduces it.

Dumont contrast

Dumont stressed homo hierarchicus; Beteille stressed the modern value of equality inside the same society.

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