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Q1(d)

Are Tradition and Modernity antithetical to each other? Comment

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · 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

- Comment on whether tradition and modernity are antithetical
- Use **Yogendra Singh**, the **Rudolphs**, and **Srinivas**
- Give a clear no, with limits

Revision summary

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

The **Rudolphs** show traditional institutions taking modern political form.

Srinivas's Sanskritization and Westernization can operate together.

Clash remains around endogamy, honour and inequality.

The pattern is recombination, not simple antithesis.

Introduction

Tradition and modernity are not two locked rooms in Indian society. **Yogendra Singh**, Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, and M. N. **Srinivas** all show tradition being recast by law, market, and vote, rather than simply dying.

Body**Why they are not antithetical**

- **Yogendra Singh**'s modernization of Indian tradition distinguishes orthogenetic change from inside the civilisation and heterogenetic change from Islam, colonialism, and the West.
- The **Rudolphs**' modernity of tradition shows caste sabhas becoming interest groups and panchayats becoming statutory bodies without ceasing to be caste or village institutions.
- **Srinivas**'s **Sanskritization and Westernization often run in the same family**: a jati tightens ritual and also seeks English education and office.

Where they still clash

- Endogamy, honour codes, and pollution rules can block a modern legal claim to choose a spouse or a job.
- A. R. **Desai** would add that 'tradition' can be landlord ideology resisting land reform, so the clash is also class, not only culture.
- Andre **Beteille** notes that equality as a constitutional value sits uneasily with ranked social honour, even when both live in one person.

The usable comment

- Treat modernity as new resources and rules, and tradition as living organisation that uses those resources.
- **Antithesis is a polemic. Indian evidence is recombination:** arranged love marriage, temple trusts, and caste-based parties.

Flow diagram

Living tradition -> Recombination
Law market vote education -> Recombination
Recombination -> Caste associations statutory panchayats
Recombination -> Tension with equal citizenship

Conclusion

Tradition and modernity are not antithetical as systems that must cancel each other. They are often mutually converting. Conflict remains where ranked honour meets equal citizenship.

Facts & figures

Yogendra Singh

Modernization of Indian Tradition: orthogenetic and heterogenetic sources of change.

Rudolphs

The Modernity of Tradition: caste and village bodies as modern interest groups.

Srinivas

Sanskritization and Westernization as paired, not purely opposite, processes.

Beteille

Harmonic and disharmonic systems: hierarchy and equality can coexist uneasily.

Desai

Tradition can function as class ideology against agrarian reform.