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Q3(c)

Critically examine the concept of Sanskritization with suitable illustrations

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

- Critically examine Sanskritization with suitable illustrations
- State **Srinivas**'s concept, then limits and politics
- Keep a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Sanskritization is group imitation of a locally higher ritual style to claim rank.

Srinivas illustrated it from Coorg and Rampura and from peasant claims to twice-born status.

It moves groups inside caste rather than abolishing caste.

Dominant caste power, gender costs and alternative paths limit the concept.

Desai and Ambedkarite politics supply class and equality critiques.

Introduction

M. N. **Srinivas** named Sanskritization as the process by which a lower jati copies the ritual, diet, and customs of a locally higher group to claim a better rank. It explains mobility inside caste. It does not explain the end of caste.

Body

The concept

- In Coorg and later in Rampura, **Srinivas** saw groups giving up meat or drink, adopting Brahmanical rites, and rewriting origin stories.
- The **reference model** is usually a locally dominant or priestly lifestyle, not a textbook varna chart.
- It is a group process, not only an individual's fashion.

Illustrations

- Many peasant and pastoral jatis in the twentieth century claimed Kshatriya or twice-born status after land, education, or army service.
- Temple entry and new priests can be part of the same claim.
- The Rudolphs would note that **caste associations** organise this claim in modern print and law.

Critique

- Sanskritization accepts the hierarchy it climbs; it is not a Dalit or Ambedkarite rejection of the ladder.
- Dominant caste power, not only ritual copy, decides whether the claim is honoured, which returns us to **Srinivas** against Dumont's purity alone.
- **Westernization**, conversion, and reservation politics offer other mobility paths that **Srinivas** himself paired with, rather than reduced to, Sanskritization.
- Women's stricter seclusion is often the price of a 'higher' lifestyle, so gender is not a side issue.
- A. R. Desai would add that ritual climbing can distract from land and wages.

Flow diagram

Lower jati -> Copy ritual diet of higher model
Copy ritual diet of higher model -> Claim better rank
Dominant caste power -> Claim better rank
Rejection conversion class politics -> Alternative paths

Conclusion

Sanskritization is a precise name for rank-seeking imitation inside caste. Illustrations are plenty. The critique is that it conserves hierarchy, depends on local power, and is only one of India's mobility scripts.

Facts & figures

Srinivas

Coined Sanskritization from field observation, especially Coorg and later village India.

Reference model

Usually a locally high or dominant lifestyle, not a pan-Indian Brahmana essence.

Caste associations

Modern bodies that press Sanskritizing claims in census and politics.

Westernization

Srinivas's companion process of British-derived lifestyles and education.

Gender cost

Higher rank often meant tighter control of women's movement and diet.