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Q2(a)

Do you agree with the view of Andre Beteille that India's villages are representative of Indian society's basic civilizational values ? Present a sociological overview

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 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

- Do you agree with Andre **Beteille** that India's villages are representative of Indian society's basic civilisational values?
- Give a sociological overview with a qualified no
- Use **Srinivas**, **Dumont**, **Marriott**, Desai, and village studies of the 1950s

Revision summary

Villages display caste, kinship and agrarian rank with great force.

Srinivas, **Marriott** and **Dumont** can be read through village interaction.

Beteille denies that the village stands for the whole civilisation.

Cities, texts, markets and citizenship are also Indian values in practice.

Desai adds that the village is a historical class formation, not a timeless essence.

Introduction

Andre **Beteille** questioned the habit of treating the village as a miniature of **Indian civilisation**. Villages display hierarchy, kinship, and agrarian rank with great clarity. They do not exhaust the values stored in texts, cities, courts, and the modern state.

Body

What the village does represent

- **Srinivas**'s field view showed that lived India is jati, dominant caste, faction, and Sanskritization, which no shastra alone can invent.
- **Marriott**'s interactional caste and **Dumont**'s purity-impurity binary are visible in village food, wells, and temples.
- Kinship, gotra, and marriage circles still use the village as a unit of exogamy in the north and as a field of alliance in the south.
- For millions, civilisational practice still means harvest rites, caste panchayats, and local honour, so the village is not a sideshow.

Why **Beteille's caution is right**

- **Indian civilisation** also lives in cities, maths, courts, factories, and the Constitution. **Beteille** argued that equality, individualism, and office are now civilisational facts, not only village

hierarchy.

- **Dumont's** Homo Hierarchicus drew on texts as much as on villages; reducing civilisation to Rampura or Kishan Garhi would betray **Dumont** as well as **Beteille**.
- A. R. Desai's dialectic shows the village as a class structure produced by colonial settlement and post-independence reform, not as a timeless value capsule.
- **The 1950s golden period of village studies created a professional bias:** what was methodologically convenient became theoretically total.

A usable overview

- Agree that basic ranked values of purity, kinship, and patronage are densely instantiated in villages.
- Disagree that the village is representative of the whole civilisational set, which now includes citizenship, markets, and urban anonymity.
- Yogendra Singh's modernization of tradition and the Rudolphs' modernity of tradition both need town, party, and law as well as the hamlet.

Way forward for the argument

- Use the village as a crucial site, not as a proxy for India.
- **Read civilisational values as a layered archive:** text, village, city, and state.

Flow diagram

Village hierarchy kinship -> Part of Indian values
Texts cities Constitution -> Civilisational whole
Part of Indian values -> Civilisational whole
Village hierarchy kinship -.not equal to. -> Civilisational whole

Conclusion

Beteille is right to refuse the village as a full representative of Indian civilisational values. The village is a major theatre of hierarchy and kinship. Civilisation also speaks in cities, scriptures, and the Republic.

Facts & figures

Beteille

Warned against taking the village as the microcosm of **Indian civilisation** and of equality-versus-hierarchy.

Srinivas

Made the village the classic field for dominant caste and the field view.

Marriott

Kishan Garhi as a laboratory of interactional rank.

Dumont

Civilisational ideology of hierarchy; not only a village monograph.

1950s monographs

Created the professional habit of reading India through one settlement.

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