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Q2(a)

Do you think that in a society like India orthogenetic changes take place through differentiation? Do you observe continuities in the orthogenetic process ? Elaborate your answer with suitable examples

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Politics and Society

Politics and Society: Nation, democracy and citizenship; Political parties, pressure groups, social and political elite; Regionalism and decentralization of politics; Secularization.

Core demand of the question

- State Yogendra Singh's idea of orthogenetic change
- Explain differentiation as the inner mechanism (roles, institutions, little/great tradition)
- **Show continuities:** hierarchy, kinship, village, religious idiom
- Give Indian examples, not abstract modernization theory only

Revision summary

Yogendra Singh's orthogenetic change is transformation generated inside **Indian civilisation**.

Differentiation of roles, jati, household and sect is the main inner mechanism.

Sanskritization and Bhakti are examples of mobility and critique on inherited ladders.

Continuities appear in marriage, village, and sacred public language even after factories and votes.

Western and Islamic contacts are heterogenetic; they are absorbed through this differentiating structure.

Introduction

Yogendra Singh argued that Indian society changes from within-**orthogenetic** change-and not only when the West arrives. That inner change works largely through **differentiation**: roles, cults and institutions split and specialise, while older meanings hitch a ride. Continuities are therefore not failures of modernity; they are how the orthogenetic process actually looks.

Body**Orthogenetic change and differentiation**

Orthogenetic sources include the **Little and Great traditions** (Redfield via Marriott and Singer), **Bhakti and reform**, the internal logic of varna-jati, and the long history of statecraft. Differentiation means a priestly role splits from kingship, a jati splits by occupation and region, a joint household throws out a nuclear residential unit, a sect splits from a sampradaya, and a caste association splits from the village panchayat. **Sanskritization** is orthogenetic mobility: groups rearrange themselves on an inherited ladder rather than inventing class from nothing.

Singh did not deny **heterogenetic** shocks-Islam, British law, industrial capitalism, the Constitution. He insisted that those shocks are **interpreted through** an already differentiating civilisation. NEP 2020's bilingual classroom, electronic voting, and corporate mandirs are intelligible as new specialised institutions wearing old names.

Continuities you can still observe

- **Hierarchy does not vanish when a factory opens. It re-specialises:** a dominant caste becomes a political caste; purity rules weaken in the canteen and tighten at marriage. **I. P. Desai** and **A. M. Shah** showed family continuity beneath residential split. Village studies after Srinivas show the village remaining a **ritual and vote unit** even when men live in Surat or Gulf dormitories. **Dumont's** encompassing hierarchy is too stiff as a total theory, but the idiom of rank continues in matrimony and food.
- **Examples of continuity-through-differentiation:** the **Khap** using WhatsApp; **Jat and Patel** agitations mixing agrarian status with OBC demand; **Ambedkarite Buddhism** as orthogenetic critique using a civilisational repertoire; **Ramjanmabhoomi** politics as politicised great tradition. Green Revolution technology differentiated kulak from labourer without ending caste in the labour gang.
- **So yes:** in a society like India, orthogenetic change proceeds through differentiation. Continuities are the other face of the same process-not a separate "tradition" sitting outside history.

Flow diagram

Orthogenetic sources -> Differentiation of roles
 Heterogenetic contact -> Differentiation of roles
 Differentiation of roles -> New institutions
 Differentiation of roles -> Continuities of rank and kin

Conclusion

- **Singh's orthogenetic thesis is still usable:** India modernises by splitting roles and institutions while recycling hierarchy, kinship and sacred language. Heterogenetic forces matter, but they land on a differentiating old structure. The task is to name both the split and the leftover bond.

Facts & figures

Orthogenetic / heterogenetic

Singh's pair: change from within the tradition versus change from civilisational contact.

Little / Great tradition

Village and local cults in dialogue with Sanskrit or civilisational centres; used by Marriott and Singer in India.

Sanskritization

Srinivas's process of group mobility that exemplifies orthogenetic differentiation rather than simple Western copy.

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