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Q2(a)

Factors like community, culture and nation weaken the hegemony of neo-liberalism today. Discuss

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · PSIR GS 1 · 20 marks · Political Theory

Political Theory: meaning and approaches.

Core demand of the question

- Factors like community, culture and nation weaken the hegemony of neo-liberalism today. Discuss. (20 marks)

Revision summary

Neo-liberalism was a Gramscian common sense of markets after 1991, named in **Hayek** and the Washington Consensus.

Community, in communitarian theory and in household welfare, refuses the unencumbered market self.

Culture, from Boas to religious and linguistic politics, refuses culture as a private leftover.

Nation, in Brexit, tariffs, and self-reliance talk, restores borders against hyper-globalisation.

The hegemony of the slogan is weaker; capitalist and disciplinary practices still operate.

Introduction

Neo-liberalism claimed that free markets, open capital, and a small welfare state were the only rational order after the Cold War. Community, culture, and nation have since returned as rival sources of consent, so that **Hayek's** market order is no longer an unchallenged common sense.

Body

What neo-liberal hegemony was

- **Friedrich Hayek** and **Milton Friedman** treated prices as the only large coordinator and treated politics as a threat of planning.
- The Washington Consensus of the 1990s, structural adjustment, and India's **1991 liberalisation** spread privatisation, fiscal squeeze, and global value chains.
- **Antonio Gramsci's** hegemony means leadership by consent in civil society, not only coercion. For two decades, market reform spoke as necessity, not as one ideology among others.
- **Karl Polanyi** had already warned that a disembedded market would provoke a countermovement to protect society.

Community as a limit

- Communitarian writers such as **Michael Sandel**, **Michael Walzer**, and **Charles Taylor** denied that persons are only market choosers.

- Family, caste association, church, mosque, and neighbourhood still allocate care, honour, and votes. They are **Easton's** extra-political environment that the market cannot fully convert.
- Self-help groups, cooperatives, and **Gandhi's** constructive village programme treat livelihood as membership, not as a labour contract alone.
- COVID-19 welfare, food rations, and migrant return showed that households and local community, not only markets, absorbed shock.

Culture as a limit

- **Boas** and **Herskovits** had argued that culture is not a lagging extra. Cultural nationalism now uses that insight against a cosmopolitan consumer identity.
- Hindutva, Christian right, Islamic politics, and indigenous movements all refuse the claim that culture is a private taste after the market has done its work.
- Multicultural rights, in **Will Kymlicka** and in Indian **Articles 25** to 30, protect language and religion as public facts.
- The limit is that culture can become majoritarian coercion. Weakening neo-liberalism is not the same as enlarging liberty.

Nation as a limit

- Brexit, tariff wars, industrial policy, and "Atmanirbhar" language restored the nation as an economic unit after hyper-globalisation.
- **List's** infant industry and later developmental-state practice contradict **Hayek's** world market as the only law.
- Border, citizenship amendment, and security politics put membership before mobility of capital and labour.
- Regional parties and federal bargains, as in GST Council politics, show that the nation is internally contested, yet still a veto on borderless neo-liberalism.

How far the hegemony is weakened

- **The claim is strongest as ideology:** few parties now win only on privatisation slogans. Welfare transfers, reservation politics, and cultural identity organise consent.
- Capital still structures production, platform work, and fiscal rules. **Foucault's** governmentality can survive as audit and targeting even when the slogan is social.
- **Rawls's** difference principle and rights-based laws (MGNREGA, NFSA, RTE) are liberal, not neo-liberal, replies inside the state.
- So community, culture, and nation have punctured market common sense. They have not abolished capitalist power; they have pluralised the bases of hegemony.

Flow diagram

Neo-liberal hegemony -> Hayek market order
 Community -> Walzer Sandel Gandhi
 Culture -> Kymlicka Arts 25-30
 Nation -> Brexit industrial policy
 Community -> Weakens Neo-liberal hegemony
 Culture -> Weakens NL
 Nation -> Weakens NL

Conclusion

Neo-liberal hegemony weakened when community, culture, and nation again supplied consent that the price system cannot buy. **Gramsci** and **Polanyi** explain the shift. **Hayek's** order remains as practice more than as uncontested faith. The political task is to see that the countermovement may be welfare and rights, or it may be majoritarian closure.

Facts & figures

Hayek

The Road to Serfdom and later works treated planning as the road away from liberty, a core neo-liberal text.

Polanyi

The Great Transformation predicted a social countermovement against a disembedded market.

Gramsci

Hegemony is leadership through consent in civil society; market necessity was such a consent for a time.

1991 liberalisation

Indian neo-liberal turn in trade, industry, and fiscal policy, later mixed with rights-based welfare.

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