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Q7(a)

Define Secularisation. What are its major dimensions in the modern world?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- Define Secularisation. What are its major dimensions in the modern world?
- Keep the answer within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

- **Secularisation:** uneven decline of religion's social authority, not automatic atheism.
- **Dimensions:** differentiation, practice, privatisation, rationalisation, and pluralism.

Weber, Wilson, Durkheim, Parsons, Luckmann, and Berger organise the map.

Civil religion, fundamentalism, and Indian public faith are counter-currents.

Measure dimensions separately; do not export one European trend as the world.

Introduction

Secularisation is the historically uneven decline of religion's public authority, not the sudden death of belief. In the modern world it is a cluster of dimensions: differentiation, decline of practice, privatisation, and new sacred forms. The cluster is contested, especially outside Western Europe.

Body**Definition**

- Bryan Wilson treated secularisation as the loss of social significance of religion.
- **Max Weber's disenchantment is the wider process:** calculation replaces magical and prophetic monopoly.
- Emile Durkheim expected new cults, including the cult of the individual, not a simple empty sky.
- **A working definition:** institutions and meanings once organised as sacred are reorganised as worldly, plural, and optional, in varying degrees.

Major dimensions

- **Structural differentiation:** education, law, medicine, and the state claim autonomy from church courts. Talcott Parsons described this as modern subsystem specialisation.
- **Decline of institutional practice:** attendance, vocations, and religious law as public code.
- **Privatisation:** belief becomes a personal taste, which Thomas Luckmann stressed.

- **Rationalisation of conduct:** Weber's inner-worldly asceticism can secularise into vocation without faith, the iron cage.
- **Pluralism:** competing faiths in one public, which Peter Berger once thought relativised belief, then partly retracted for global resurgence.

Counter-dimensions in the same world

- Political religion, nationalism, and civil religion (Robert Bellah) resacralise the state.
- Fundamentalism is modern organisation of certainty, not a fossil.
- **Indian public:** Census communities, personal law, and temple-mosque politics show incomplete differentiation.
- NFHS on practice and fertility shows religion still patterning family, even as urban work secularises the clock.

Karl Marx and the rest

- Marx expected critique of heaven to become critique of earth. Religion as protest can outlast the factory.
- George Herbert Mead's generalised other can be a civic public or a congregation; secularisation changes which other dominates.

Assessment

- Dimensions do not move as one. Europe's practice decline is not the world's law.
- **Measure each dimension separately:** state law, school, family ritual, and party.

Flow diagram

Secularisation -> Differentiation of institutions
Secularisation -> Decline of practice
Secularisation -> Privatisation
Secularisation -> Weber rationalisation
Civil religion fundamentalism -> Uneven modern world

Conclusion

Secularisation is the uneven loss of religion's encompassing authority through differentiation, falling practice, privatisation, and rationalisation. Weber, Wilson, Durkheim, Parsons, and Berger name the dimensions. Nationalism, fundamentalism, and Indian public religion show that the modern world is not a finished secular script.

Facts & figures

Disenchantment

Weber: the world becomes calculable; prophetic and magical monopoly recedes.

Wilson

Secularisation as religion's declining social significance.

Bellah

Civil religion: national sacred without a single church.

Indian personal law

A limit case of incomplete differentiation of law from religious community.

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