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Q2(a)

Discuss the role of Calvinist ethic in the development of Capitalism.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx

Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx - Historical materialism, mode of production, alienation, class struggle; Emile Durkheim - Division of labour, social fact, suicide, religion and society; Max Weber - Social action, ideal types, authority, bureaucracy, protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism; Talcott Parsons - Social system, pattern variables; Robert K. Merton - Latent and manifest functions, conformity and deviance, reference groups; Mead - Self and identity.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the role of Calvinist ethic in the development of Capitalism
- Keep the discussion within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

- **Weber:** Calvinist inner-worldly asceticism fed the spirit of rational capitalism.

Predestination, calling, and refusal of luxury channelled gain into the firm.

The ethic is not a sufficient cause and not a slur on other civilisations.

Marx supplies class and accumulation; later capitalism can drop the faith and keep the cage.

Use the thesis as one historical mechanism among law, state, and market.

Introduction

Max Weber asked why modern rational capitalism densified in the Occident. In The **Protestant Ethic** he argued that inner-worldly asceticism, especially in Calvinism, supplied a psychological motor for methodical work and reinvestment. The ethic did not invent trade. It helped turn profit into a calling.

Body

The puzzle **Weber set**

- **Karl Marx** located capitalism in class, surplus value, and the world market. **Weber** accepted the economic structure and asked about the spirit that made endless accumulation a duty.
- Traditionalism treats work as enough for customary wants. Rational capitalism treats work as a systematic, calculable enterprise.

The Calvinist mechanism

- **Predestination** created anxiety about election. Worldly success, read as a possible sign, pushed disciplined labour rather than magical consolation.
- The calling (**Beruf**) made everyday occupation a religious task. Waste of time became a sin.
- Ascetic refusal of luxury channelled gain into the enterprise, not into display. This-worldly asceticism is the key phrase.

- Sect organisation and a methodical life-conduct trained book-keeping of the soul, which fitted book-keeping of the firm.

What the ethic is not

- It is not a claim that all capitalists were Calvinists, or that India or China lacked trade. **Weber** wrote comparative essays on those religions precisely to show different inner logics.
- R. H. Tawney and later critics stressed that capitalism also needed law, the state, and expropriation. **Weber** already listed those as other sides of rationalisation.

Development, not origin myth

- Once capitalism is established, the ethic can fade. The **iron cage** of vocation without faith is **Weber's** later mood.
- Talcott Parsons translated and used the thesis as a story of modern values. Robert K. Merton linked Puritanism to early scientific associations, a neighbouring argument about methodical life.
- Indian debate after **Weber** asked why a similar ethic did not produce the same take-off under colonial constraint. The missing piece is often political economy, which **Marx** supplies.

Assessment

- **Role:** a causal contribution to the spirit of rational enterprise, not a sufficient cause of the mode of production.
- **Pair Weber with Marx:** ethic and accumulation, calling and class.

Flow diagram

Calvinist ethic -> Predestination anxiety
Predestination anxiety -> Calling and ascetic work
Calling and ascetic work -> Spirit of capitalism
Spirit of capitalism -> Rational enterprise
Marx accumulation -> Rational enterprise

Conclusion

The Calvinist ethic, in **Weber's** account, turned anxiety, calling, and ascetic reinvestment into a methodical capitalist spirit. It is a partial, historically timed cause. **Marx's** mode of production and the modern state remain necessary companions, not rivals to be erased.

Facts & figures

Protestant Ethic

Weber's study linking Puritan life-conduct to methodical capitalist enterprise.

Beruf

Lutheran-Calvinist idea of worldly occupation as a calling, recast by **Weber** as a capitalist duty.

Predestination

Calvinist doctrine that election is decided; worldly discipline became a psychological response.

Iron cage

Weber's image of vocational capitalism continuing after religious roots wither.

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