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Q6(a)

"Education helps in perpetuating social and economic inequalities." Critically examine the statement.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Works and Economic Life

Works and Economic Life: Social organization of work in different types of society; Formal and informal organization of work; Labour and society.

Core demand of the question

- "Education helps in perpetuating social and economic inequalities." Critically examine the statement
- Keep the examination within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

School can copy class, caste, and gender as certified merit.

Marx, Althusser, Bourdieu, Turner, and correspondence theory name reproduction.

Parsons and Davis-Moore claim allocation by achievement; Tumin criticises the tautology.

Indian coaching, language, care, Mandal, Census, and NFHS show mixed outcomes.

- **Verdict:** strong tendency to perpetuate, not a total lock; measure leaks.

Introduction

Education is officially a ladder. The statement says it is also a machine that copies inequality. Both can be true. Critical examination asks for whom school equalises, and how credentials, culture, and funding freeze rank.

Body**How education perpetuates inequality**

- **Karl Marx and later reproduction theorists:** school trains labour-power and legitimates class as merit. Louis Althusser named education an ideological state apparatus.
- **Pierre Bourdieu:** cultural capital and habitus make the same exam unequal. Linguistic and caste codes travel as "ability".
- **Ralph Turner's sponsored mobility:** elites co-opt a few through school, which looks open and stays selective.
- **Bowles and Gintis:** correspondence between classroom discipline and workplace hierarchy.

Functional and mobility claims

- Talcott Parsons treated school as a differentiating and allocating agency on an achievement axis.
- Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore treated unequal reward as a way to sort talent. Melvin Tumin answered that unequal schooling wastes talent and calls inequality functional by tautology.

- **Emile Durkheim** saw moral education as solidarity. That moral can be the moral of a ranked order.

Indian files

- Public school versus private coaching, English, and unpaid care after Ann Oakley shape who can convert hours into marks.
- Reservations after **Mandal** open some offices and can also become a new credential gate.
- **Census** literacy and NFHS education of women show gains that still sit beside occupational and land inequality.
- **Gig and informal work absorb the certificated poor:** credentials without class mobility.

Critical verdict

- The statement is strong as a structural tendency, weak as a total law.
- Education also produces new middle classes, feminist publics, and Dalit counter-publics.
- **Max Weber**'s status groups use education as honour; they also fight over it.
- **Examine both reproduction and leak:** who funds the school, whose culture is the curriculum, and which labour market waits outside.

Flow diagram

Family capital caste gender -> School credentials
School credentials -> Ideology of merit
Ideology of merit -> Reproduced inequality
School credentials -> Some mobility

Conclusion

Education often perpetuates social and economic inequality by converting inherited capital into certified merit. **Marx**, **Bourdieu**, Turner, and **Tumin** explain the mechanisms. It also remains a contested channel of mobility. The critical task is to measure reproduction and leak together, not to choose a slogan.

Facts & figures

Bourdieu

Cultural capital: inherited style and language converted into school success as if it were talent.

Althusser

Education as ideological state apparatus reproducing relations of production.

Tumin

Criticised Davis-Moore: unequal education blocks the talent that stratification claims to sort.

Mandal

State-sponsored educational and job channels that both open offices and politicise caste as a credential.

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