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Q3(a)

## **Analyze the manifest and latent functions of 'security of the tenure of bureaucrats' in the light of Merton's theory.**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · 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**

- Analyze the manifest and latent functions of 'security of the tenure of bureaucrats' in the light of Merton's theory
- Keep the analysis within a 20-mark length

### **Revision summary**

- **Merton:** manifest functions are intended; latent are unintended and often unseen.

Tenure manifestly protects rule-bound impersonality and continuity (**Weber**).

Latently it can feed **ritualism**, goal displacement, and unaccountable delay.

Indian transfers politicise a staff that dismissal cannot easily touch.

Keep the shield; design against trained incapacity.

### **Introduction**

Robert K. Merton split manifest functions, the intended and recognised consequences of a practice, from latent functions, the unintended and often unrecognised ones. Security of tenure for bureaucrats is a legal-rational device in **Max Weber**'s state. Merton's pair shows why tenure can both protect impersonality and breed **ritualism**.

### **Body**

#### **Manifest functions of tenure**

- Protect officers from arbitrary dismissal so that files follow rules, not a minister's mood.
- Attract talent to public office with a career, which Talcott Parsons would read as pattern-maintaining motivation.
- **Support Weber's impersonality:** the person is not the office, and the office outlasts the politician.
- In a democracy, tenure is meant to keep continuity of administration across elected governments.

#### **Latent functions Merton helps name**

- **Ritualism:** clinging to means when goals recede, one of Merton's adaptations to strain. Tenure can reward rule-worship.

- **Displacement of goals:** survival of the bureau becomes the aim, as in his essay on bureaucracy.
- **Patronage in hiring despite tenure in staying:** a latent alliance with party, which Weber feared as a spoils risk.
- **Conservative lag:** cultural lag in Ogburn's sense, when tenure blocks adaptation to new tasks such as digital service or social audits.
- **For citizens, latent exclusion:** a secure staff facing insecure informal workers, which Karl Marx would read as a class fragment of the state.

### Dysfunctions, which Merton insisted on

- Inaccessibility, delay, and trained incapacity, in Thorstein Veblen's neighbouring phrase.
- Weak accountability if removal is nearly impossible and performance is unmeasured.
- Gender and caste in posting and promotion can be frozen by a "neutral" seniority that looks like tenure's cousin.

### Indian light

- All-India and state services use tenure and promotion ladders. Transfers, not dismissal, become the political weapon, a latent politics around the manifest rule.
- Right to information and courts are counter-devices to latent opacity.

### Analysis, not a slogan

- Abolish tenure and you may restore spoils, which was the manifest problem Weber and reformers named.
- Merton's lesson is to design against ritualism without destroying the manifest shield.

### Flow diagram

Security of tenure -> Impersonality continuity  
Security of tenure -> Ritualism goal displacement  
Merton -> Impersonality continuity  
Merton -> Ritualism goal displacement

### Conclusion

Manifestly, tenure secures rule-bound, continuous, impersonal administration. Latently, it can produce ritualism, goal displacement, and a sheltered staff. Merton's theory, read with Weber, explains both. Reform the dysfunctions; do not pretend the manifest function is a myth.

### Facts & figures

#### Manifest function

Merton: intended, recognised consequence of a social practice.

#### Latent function

Merton: unintended, often unrecognised consequence.

**Ritualism**

Merton's adaptation: clinging to institutional means when goals recede.

**Weberian bureaucracy**

Career, files, and impersonality; tenure is a typical legal protection of that staff.

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