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Q2(c)

Evaluate if social stratification is functional for society.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2018 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 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

- Evaluate if social stratification is functional for society
- Keep the evaluation within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

- **Davis and Moore:** unequal reward places talent in important roles.
- **Tumin:** tautology and wasted talent.
- **Marx and Weber:** class exploitation and status closure.

Caste and unpaid care invert the functional premise.

A placement function in some jobs does not justify inherited hierarchy.

Introduction

Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore argued that stratification is functional because unequal reward places the talented in important roles. Evaluation must test that claim against waste, conflict, and honour systems such as **caste**.

Body**The functional claim**

- Some positions are more necessary and harder to fill.
- Unequal prestige and pay motivate training.
- Stratification is thus a device of placement, not a mere injustice.

Critiques

- **Melvin Tumin:** barriers of birth waste talent; the theory is tautological about "importance".
- **Karl Marx:** stratification is exploitation, functional for a class, not for "society".
- **Max Weber:** status honour can block the market the functionalists need.
- **Caste** in India assigns rank by birth. M. N. Srinivas's Sanskritisation is group mimicry, not open sorting.
- **Gender:** unpaid care, after Ann **Oakley**, is vital work with low reward, which inverts the Davis-Moore premise.

Partial use

- Some credential races do sort skills in modern labour markets.
- That is compatible with large non-functional residues of ascription.

Verdict

- Stratification is functional for reproducing a given order.
- It is not shown to be functionally necessary in its actual, inherited form.

Flow diagram

Davis Moore -> Placement function
Tumin Marx Weber -> Waste exploitation honour
Caste gender -> Waste exploitation honour
Placement function -> Partial in labour markets

Conclusion

The Davis-Moore thesis overstates a placement function and understates birth, **caste**, gender, and class power. Stratification can coordinate a division of labour. That does not make existing hierarchies the optimal or just device for society as a whole.

Facts & figures

Davis and Moore

1945 thesis that stratification is a functional necessity of placement.

Tumin

Classic critique: inequality prevents the discovery of talent.

Oakley

Vital unpaid work with low reward, against the importance-pay link.

Caste

Ascribed rank that cannot be read as open functional sorting.