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Q7(a)

How can Parsons' AGIL framework be used to analyse key problems in a society? Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2018 · 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

- How can Parsons' **AGIL** framework be used to analyse key problems in a society? Discuss
- Keep the discussion within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

- **AGIL**: Adaptation, Goal attainment, Integration, **Latency**.

Key problems can be placed and then traced as spillovers.

Indian informal labour, state capacity, communal rupture, and care crisis fit the boxes.

The gain is a whole-system map.

Class, caste, and gender must be added against a consensus bias.

Introduction

- **Talcott Parsons' AGIL names four functional problems every social system must meet:** Adaptation, Goal attainment, Integration, and **Latency**. The framework can diagnose key problems as failures or strains in those boxes. It cannot, by itself, name who wins from the failure.

Body

The four functions

- **Adaptation:** economy and environment. Problem examples: unemployment, informal insecurity, ecological shock.
- **Goal attainment:** polity. Problems: weak capacity, capture, or emergency rule.
- **Integration:** law, solidarity, citizenship. Problems: communal rupture, caste veto, anomie in **Durkheim's** sense.
- **Latency (pattern maintenance):** family, school, culture. Problems: care crisis, school that cannot socialise, value conflict.

How to use it on key problems

- Place the problem in a primary box, then trace spillover. Agrarian distress is Adaptation, then Integration when protest rises.

- Indian liberalisation can be read as Adaptation reform that strained **Latency** in household care and Integration in labour.
- Gender inequality sits in **Latency** (unpaid care, after Ann **Oakley**) and Adaptation (segmented labour).
- **Max Weber**'s legitimacy is a Goal-attainment and Integration issue Parsons tried to systematise.

Gains

- It forces a whole-system look instead of a single-institution sermon.
- It links economy, state, law, and family in one page.

Limits

- Conflict theorists, after Ralf **Dahrendorf**, say "system problems" hide domination.
- **Karl Marx** would relocate Adaptation inside class, not beside it as a neutral box.
- Caste and patriarchy are not mere **latency** glitches.
- The scheme is better as a checklist than as a history.

Flow diagram

Adaptation economy -> Key problems
Goal attainment polity -> Key problems
Integration law solidarity -> Key problems
Latency family culture -> Key problems
Key problems -> Spillover across boxes

Conclusion

AGIL analyses key problems as strains in economy, polity, solidarity, and cultural reproduction, and as spillovers among them. Use it to map Indian informal labour, care, and civic rupture. Then add class, caste, and gender, which Parsons underplayed.

Facts & figures

AGIL

Parsons' four-function paradigm for any social system.

Latency

Pattern maintenance through family, school, and culture.

Dahrendorf

Conflict critique of system-need talk that buries domination.

Oakley

Care as a latency and labour problem the official economy undercounts.

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