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Q8(a)

"The sociological imagination enables us to grasp SOCIOLOGY and biography and the relationship between the two in society." - C.W.Mills . Explain.

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

- "The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relationship between the two in society." - C. Wright Mills. Explain
- Keep the explanation within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

- **Mills:** sociological imagination links biography, history, and structure.

Personal troubles become public issues when rates and institutions are seen.

He criticised Parsons' grand theory and survey empiricism without history.

Weber's ethic-and-life is an ancestor of that link.

Indian informal labour, gender, and caste are lived as biography inside structures.

Introduction

C. Wright Mills's sociological imagination is the capacity to see private lives inside public structures and historical time. Biography is not a sealed self. History is not a distant chronicle. Society is their relation.

Body

The three questions

- What is the structure of this society as a whole?
- Where does it stand in human history?
- What varieties of men and women now prevail, and how are they selected?

Personal trouble and public issue

- Unemployment as a **personal trouble** is one CV. As a **public issue** it is a rate, a class, and a policy.
- Mills opposed both grand theory without people, as in Talcott Parsons, and **abstracted empiricism** of surveys without history.

History and biography

- A mill worker's life in Mumbai is a biography inside deindustrialisation and informalisation, which Jan Breman's type of labour regime historically situates.
- A woman's double day is biography inside patriarchy, which Ann Oakley and NFHS files make public.
- **Max Weber** already tied the Protestant's inner life to a historical ethic; Mills generalises that move for the mid-century United States and beyond.

What the imagination does

- It translates "I failed" into "what institutions failed how many".
- It refuses fate and mere gossip.

Indian use

- Farmer suicide as biography plus agrarian history, readable also with **Durkheim's** rates.
- Caste humiliation as a life and as a structure of endogamy and office.

Limit

- Imagination is a craft, not a method recipe. It still needs evidence.

Flow diagram

Biography -> Sociological imagination
History -> Sociological imagination
Social structure -> Sociological imagination
Sociological imagination -> Public issues from private troubles

Conclusion

Mills meant that sociology holds together a person's story and an epoch's structure. The imagination is that holding. Without it, we get either lonely blame or empty system talk. With it, troubles become issues located in history.

Facts & figures

The Sociological Imagination (1959)

Mills's statement of troubles versus issues and the three questions.

Personal trouble

A problem lived in character and immediate milieu.

Public issue

A problem of institutional arrangement affecting many.

Abstracted empiricism

Mills's name for method-rich, history-poor survey work.

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