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Q1(b)

Davis and Moore made it clear that social stratification is a functional necessity and also an unconscious device. Discuss

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Stratification and Mobility: Concepts

Stratification and Mobility: Concepts - equality, inequality, hierarchy, exclusion, poverty and deprivation; Theories of social stratification - Structural functionalist, Marxist, Weberian; Dimensions - Class, status groups, gender, ethnicity and race; Social mobility - open and closed systems, types, sources and causes.

Core demand of the question

- **Davis and Moore** made it clear that social stratification is a functional necessity and also an unconscious device. Discuss
- Keep the discussion within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

- **Davis and Moore**: unequal rewards fill important roles; the device is unconscious.
- **Tumin**: importance is politically defined.

Marx and **Weber** add exploitation, status, and party.

Caste and gender close talent before sorting begins.

Use the thesis for incentives; do not use it as a full theory of inequality.

Introduction

Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore argued that unequal rewards place talent in functionally important roles. Stratification is, for them, a necessity of complex society and a device that works without a planner. The claim is neat. It is also contested.

Body**Functional necessity**

- Some positions are more functionally important and harder to fill. Higher prestige and pay attract training and effort.
- The family and school sort people into those slots. Inequality is treated as a mechanism of allocation, not as theft.
- **The device is unconscious**: no committee sits to invent caste or class. The pattern is said to arise as a system need.

Limits of the thesis

- Melvin **Tumin** asked who decides importance. Power, not function, often sets pay, as inherited wealth shows.
- **Karl Marx** treated class as exploitation, not as a talent contest. **Max Weber** added status and party.
- Indian caste and gender close talent before the market opens. M. N. Srinivas's **Sanskritisation** is group honour, not Davis-Moore sorting.

- **Census** and NFHS inequalities of education and work sit poorly with a pure necessity story.

Discussion

- The thesis names a real problem of filling skilled roles.
- Calling the device unconscious hides who benefits. Necessity is an overclaim.

Flow diagram

System need for talent -> Davis Moore
Davis Moore -> Unequal rewards
Power ascription -> Tumin Marx caste
Tumin Marx caste -> Not pure necessity

Conclusion

Davis and Moore made stratification a functional sorter that no one designs. **Tumin**, **Marx**, and caste-gender closure show that power and ascription also allocate. Treat the thesis as a hypothesis about incentives, not as a defence of every hierarchy.

Facts & figures

Davis and Moore

1945 argument that stratified rewards are a functional requirement of placing talent.

Tumin

Asked who measures functional importance and whether inequality wastes talent.

Weber

Class, status, and party: market chance is only one axis of rank.

Sanskritisation

Srinivas: group mobility of ritual style, not individual merit placement.