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Q5(e)

How well do you think Tönnies, Durkheim, Weber and Marx predicted the character of Modern society ? Critique

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 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 well do you think Tönnies, Durkheim, Weber and Marx predicted the character of modern society? Critique
- Keep the critique within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Tönnies, Durkheim, Weber, and Marx hit contract, differentiation, bureaucracy, and class.

Community, anomie, the iron cage, and the commodity still travel.

They under-predicted caste, gender, and religious-national re-enchantment.

Treat the classics as types, not closed forecasts.

Modernity is their order plus ascriptive returns.

Introduction

Ferdinand Tönnies, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx each drew a type of modernity: association, organic solidarity, rationalisation, and capitalism. They predicted well on the large drift. They missed how caste, gender, and new media would re-enchant and re-ascribe.

Body

Hits

- Tönnies's shift from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft names urban contract, yet community did not die; it relocated in caste associations and apps.
- Durkheim's differentiation and the cult of the individual still fit exams, rights, and occupational codes. Anomie also still fits.
- Weber's bureaucracy, calculation, and iron cage describe the office and the platform algorithm.
- Marx's commodity, class, and world market remain the grammar of informal and formal work.

Misses

- None centred gender as Ann Oakley later required. Care work still holds modernity up.

- Indian modernity kept caste, which their European types under-predicted.
- Religious revival and nationalism re-encharmed what **Weber** thought would thin.
- Consumer identity and new middle-class style, after Bourdieu, sit beside class polarisation.

Critique

- They predicted the character of a capitalist-rational order better than they predicted its cultural leftovers and returns.
- Use them as types, not as finished prophecy.

Flow diagram

Tonnies Gesellschaft -> Modern character
Durkheim organic -> Modern character
Weber rationalisation -> Modern character
Marx capitalism -> Modern character
Caste gender revival -> Under-predicted

Conclusion

The four predicted differentiation, contract, bureaucracy, and class with lasting accuracy. They under-predicted ascription, gender, and sacred politics. The character of modern society is their map plus those returns. Critique the prophecy, not the tools.

Facts & figures

Tönnies

Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft: will of custom versus will of contract.

Durkheim

Mechanical to organic solidarity; anomie as a modern risk.

Weber

Rationalisation and bureaucratic domination as fate of the West, now global.

Marx

Capitalist modernity as expanding value, class, and world market.