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Q1(c)

## What is the Marxist concept of 'fetishism of commodities'?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

### Core demand of the question

- What is the Marxist concept of 'fetishism of commodities'?
- Keep the answer within a 10-mark length

### Revision summary

- **Fetishism of commodities:** social relations among producers appear as relations among things.

Exchange-value hides labour time as price.

The illusion is socially real, not a personal superstition.

Lukács extended it as reification.

Gig pay and piece-rates still carry the appearance.

### Introduction

In Capital, Karl Marx named commodity fetishism as the way products of labour appear as things with a life of their own. Social relations among producers take the form of relations among objects on the market. The mystery is in the form of the commodity, not in a primitive idol.

### Body

#### The concept

- A commodity has use-value and exchange-value. In exchange, labour time is expressed as a price.
- Producers do not meet as co-workers. They meet through things. The social character of labour is hidden in the object.
- **Fetish here means a social illusion that is real in its effects:** money and capital seem to grow by themselves.

#### What it is not

- It is not only consumer advertising. Georg Lukács later extended it toward reification of the whole of life.
- It is not a claim that use-values are imaginary. Bread still feeds. The fetish is the market form.

#### Sociological use

- Informal piece-rates and gig apps still present a wage as a thing the platform "gives", hiding the relation.

- **Census** occupational tables count jobs; they do not by themselves show this appearance.

## Flow diagram

Social labour -> Commodity form  
Commodity form -> Things seem alive  
Things seem alive -> Class relation hidden

## Conclusion

Commodity fetishism is **Marx's** name for social labour appearing as a relation among things. Price looks natural; class is displaced. **Lukács** and later labour studies keep the concept usable beyond the nineteenth-century factory.

## Facts & figures

### **Marx, Capital I**

The commodity is a social hieroglyph; value appears as a property of the object.

### **Use and exchange**

Use-value satisfies need; exchange-value is the market form of abstract labour.

### **Lukács**

Reification: social processes take on thing-like objectivity in capitalist culture.

### **Money**

The general equivalent that makes the fetish everyday: wealth seems to breed wealth.