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Q1(e)

Analyse the relevance of 'Pattern variables' in the study of social change.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · 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

- Analyse the relevance of 'Pattern variables' in the study of social change
- Keep the analysis within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Parsons's pattern variables are dichotomies of action choice.

They map traditional versus modern role styles.

Relevant for tracking schools, offices, and clinics.

- **Indian change is a mix:** office universalism with marital particularism.

Not a destiny tale of the West.

Introduction

- **Talcott Parsons's pattern variables are five dichotomies of choice in action:** affectivity-neutrality, self-collectivity, particularism-universalism, ascription-achievement, diffuseness-specificity. They remain relevant as a language of change. They are weak as a one-way story of modernity.

Body

The tool

- Traditional action leans toward affectivity, collectivity, particularism, ascription, and diffuseness.
- Modern occupational systems lean toward the opposite poles. That was **Parsons's** map of differentiation.

Relevance for social change

- One can track a school exam, a hospital, or a civil service as a shift toward universalism and achievement.
- Indian modernisation debates, after **Yogendra Singh**, used such mixes rather than a total flip.
- M. N. **Srinivas's** Sanskritisation is change along honour, not along **Parsons's** achievement pole alone.

Limits

- The variables can hide class and caste power as mere "ascription".
- Change is often simultaneous particularism in marriage and universalism in the office.
- Gendered care stays affective and diffuse while the market claims neutrality.

Analysis

- Relevant as a checklist of institutional styles.
- Not relevant as proof that the West's poles are the destiny of every society.

Flow diagram

Pattern variables -> Ascription particularism

Pattern variables -> Achievement universalism

Social change -> Institutional mixes

Institutional mixes -> Pattern variables

Conclusion

Pattern variables help name how roles change when institutions differentiate. They are relevant for studying schools, offices, and clinics. They fail if social change is reduced to a march from ascription to achievement. Use them to describe mixes, as Indian caste-class already forces.

Facts & figures

Parsons

Five pattern variables as the grammar of role expectations.

Achievement-ascription

A key pair for modernisation as occupational placement.

Yogendra Singh

Modernisation of Indian tradition as selective, not total, variable shift.

Srinivas

Caste mobility of style that is not a simple achievement variable.