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Q3(b)

Critically Analyse Durkheim's views on elementary forms of religious life and role of religion Also discuss the consequences of religious revivalism in contemporary society.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 marks · Religion and Society

Religion and Society: Sociological theories of religion; Types of religious practices: animism, monism, pluralism, sects, cults; Religion in modern society: religion and science, secularization, religious revivalism, fundamentalism.

Core demand of the question

- Critically analyse **Durkheim's** views on **elementary forms** of religious life and role of religion. Also discuss the consequences of religious revivalism in contemporary society
- Keep the analysis within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

- **Elementary forms:** sacred-profane, totem, effervescence, moral community.
- **Role of religion:** integration and classification.
- **Critique:** meaning, class, gender, and evolutionary overreach.

Revivalism consecrates identity; consequences are belonging, policing, conflict, and sometimes welfare.

Durkheim explains the energy; not the enemy-making.

Introduction

In The **Elementary Forms** of Religious Life, **Emile Durkheim** read the sacred as society's ideal, produced in ritual. Religion's role was moral community. The analysis still explains solidarity. It underplays meaning, gender, and conflict. Revivalism today uses that solidarity with new media and parties.

Body

Elementary forms and role

- Sacred and profane, totem, and **collective effervescence** are the elementary grammar.
- The clan worships itself in a symbol. The church is a moral community.
- **Role:** integration, classification of the world, and periodic recharging of belief.

Critical analysis

- **Max Weber** asked about theodicy, virtuosi, and this-worldly asceticism, which a clan model misses.
- **Karl Marx** treated religion as protest and veil. **Durkheim** underplayed inner domination.
- **Feminist readings:** whose sacred order? Priesthood and purity often rank women.
- Aboriginal Australia as the elementary case is an evolutionary overreach.

Religious revivalism: consequences

- Revival re-sacralises identity in a differentiated world. Robert Bellah's civil religion can turn nationalist.
- Consequences include intensified belonging, moral policing, communal conflict, and a challenge to secular law.
- It can also fund welfare and dignity movements. Not every revival is only harm.
- Contemporary media amplify effervescence beyond the local cult.

Joint discuss

- Durkheim helps explain why revival feels like energy.
- He does not explain why revival targets minorities or women unless power is added.

Flow diagram

Durkheim -> Sacred ritual community
Sacred ritual community -> Integration
Weber Marx gender -> Limits
Revivalism -> Identity energy
Revivalism -> Policing conflict welfare

Conclusion

Durkheim's elementary forms explain religion as ritual solidarity and classify its role as moral community. Weber, Marx, and gender critique limit the group-mirror. Revivalism today consecrates identity with political and media force. Use Durkheim for the charge; use conflict theory for the target.

Facts & figures

Elementary Forms (1912)

Durkheim's late masterpiece on Australian totemism as a key to religion.

Collective effervescence

Ritual assembly that generates the feeling of a force beyond the individual.

Weber

Religion as meaning, salvation, and rationalisation, not only group worship.

Bellah

Civil religion: national sacred that revival can intensify.