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Q7(c)

Critically assess the Marxian theory of 'Alienation'."

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 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

- Critically assess the Marxian theory of 'Alienation'
- Keep the assessment within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

- **Alienation:** estrangement from product, process, **species-being**, and others.

Capital's fetishism is a related later concept.

- **Strength:** names loss beyond the wage, including gig work.
- **Limits:** essentialist human nature, mill-centric picture, unfinished cure in state socialism.

Feminist care and informal labour require an expanded reading.

Assess as critique of the wage form, not as a complete psychology.

Introduction

In the **1844 manuscripts**, **Karl Marx** named alienation as the worker's estrangement from product, process, **species-being**, and other humans under wage labour. The theory is a powerful critique of capitalist work. It is also philosophically loaded and historically dated in some examples.

Body**The four moments**

- **Product:** the object stands over the worker as capital.
- **Process:** labour is external, forced, not a free life-activity.
- **Species-being:** creative social humanity is reduced to a means of survival.
- **Others:** competition replaces association. **Commodity fetishism** in Capital is a later cousin.

Critical strengths

- It names a lived loss that wage tables miss. **Gig ratings** and assembly lines still fit.
- It links work to a theory of the human, not only to a pay dispute.
- Feminist social-reproduction writers extend it to unpaid care as alienated or invisibilised labour.

Critical limits

- The **species-being** claim is essentialist. Later **Marx** stressed historical relations more than a fixed human nature.

- Peasants, informal self-employment, and public-sector professions do not all match the Manchester mill.
- **Max Weber** saw meaning in some vocations; not all modern work is the same estrangement.
- Actually existing socialist factories did not automatically end alienation, which questions a simple property switch.

Assessment

- Keep alienation as a critique of wage command and the commodity form.
- Drop the hope that a single seizure of plants ends every estrangement of bureaucracy and gender.

Flow diagram

Wage labour -> Alienation
Alienation -> Product
Alienation -> Process
Alienation -> Species-being
Alienation -> Others
Essentialism mill bias -> Limits

Conclusion

- **Marxian alienation remains a strong assessment of capitalist wage work:** product, process, humanity, and others. Fetishism later sharpened the appearance. Critique the essentialist **species-being** and the mill-only picture. Informal India and feminist care expand it; Soviet offices warn against a magic cure.

Facts & figures

1844 Manuscripts

Marx's early statement of the four moments of alienated labour.

Commodity fetishism

Social labour appearing as a relation among things, a mature companion idea.

Species-being

Marx's term for creative social humanity, later criticised as essentialist.

Gig ratings

A contemporary form of external command over the labour process.