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Q4(a)

Is humanity at the mercy of Nature, Science and Technology ? Comment in the light of pandemic situation.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Social Change in Modern Society

Social Change in Modern Society: Sociological theories of social change; Development and dependency; Agents of social change; Education and social change; Science, technology and social change.

Core demand of the question

- Is humanity at the mercy of Nature, Science and Technology? Comment in the light of pandemic situation
- Keep the comment within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

COVID-19 showed bodily dependence on nature and on laboratory technique.

- **Exposure was socially structured:** crowding, care work, migrant walks.

Beck's risk society and **Latour's** hybrids fit better than raw surrender.

Science healed and also excluded and surveilled.

Vaccine nationalism showed hierarchy in science itself.

- **Comment:** dependent, not equally at mercy.

Introduction

The **COVID-19** pandemic showed humans as bodies in a viral ecology, as patients of laboratories, and as subjects of apps, lockdowns, and vaccines. Mercy here means dependence without control. Humanity was not helpless in every sense. It was exposed.

Body

Nature

- A zoonotic virus reminded us that society sits in nature, which **Karl Marx** already treated as metabolism with the earth.
- Density, wet markets, and global travel are social natures, not a revenge of a pure wilderness.
- **Ulrich Beck's risk society:** manufactured uncertainties return as side-effects of our own organisation.

Science and technology

- Virology, oxygen plants, and mRNA platforms were conditions of survival, not optional culture.
- **Bruno Latour's hybrids:** the virus-in-the-PCR-machine is neither raw nature nor pure society.
- **Technology also harmed:** misinformation, exclusion from telemedicine, and surveillance apps.

Mercy or relation?

- **Emile Durkheim's** social facts include mortality rates that no one person authors, as the pandemic curve showed.
- **Max Weber's rationalisation met a limit:** calculation lagged the pathogen.
- Informal labour and migrant walks in India showed that "humanity" was stratified. Ann Oakley's care work and caste crowding were the real mercy map.

Comment

- **At the mercy of nature:** yes as bodies; no as if culture did not shape exposure.
- **At the mercy of science and technology:** dependent on them, and also governed by those who own labs and platforms.
- The pandemic was a teacher of interdependence, not of simple surrender.

After the peak

- Vaccine nationalism and patent fights showed science as a world-system good, after Immanuel Wallerstein's sense of hierarchy.
- Memory of lockdown is now a social fact for a cohort.

Flow diagram

Viral nature -> Exposure
Science technology -> Exposure
Science technology -> Vaccine oxygen
Class caste gender -> Exposure
Exposure -> COVID-19 situation

Conclusion

In the pandemic, humanity was at the mercy of a natural pathogen and of the sciences and techniques that named, tracked, and sometimes healed it. Comment: dependence is real; equal mercy is false. **Marx's** metabolism, **Beck's** risk, and Indian migrant labour show a structured exposure, not a single human fate.

Facts & figures

COVID-19

A pandemic that linked ecology, labs, lockdowns, and unequal death.

Beck

Risk society: modernisation produces uncertainties it cannot fully insure.

Latour

Nature-society hybrids; the laboratory as a political actor.

Indian migrant crisis 2020

Lockdown without social security made informal labour the face of "mercy".

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