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Q5(c)

Critically compare the views of E.B. Tylor and Max Muller on Religion

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · 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

- Compare E. B. Tylor and Max Müller on the origin of religion
- Keep the comparison within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

- **Tylor:** religion begins as **animism**, belief in spiritual beings from dreams and death.
- **Müller:** gods begin as linguistic personifications of natural forces, especially in the Veda.

Both are intellectualist.

Durkheim relocates the sacred in the group.

Use them as a contrast pair, not as the last word.

Introduction

E. B. Tylor and Max Müller both gave intellectualist accounts of religion's origin. They disagreed on the first idea. Tylor started from the soul in dreams and death. Müller started from language and the naming of natural powers.

Body

Tylor: **animism**

- In Primitive Culture, religion is belief in spiritual beings.
- Dreams, trance, and death suggest a soul; the idea is extended to animals, plants, and the world.
- **Survivals** carry old belief into later stages. Evolution is from **animism** toward more abstract theism.

Müller: nature and speech

- **Comparative philology of the Veda:** gods arise as names of sun, dawn, and sky that language later personifies.
- **Myth is a **disease of language**:** forgotten metaphors become stories of beings.
- India and Indo-European comparison, not only a tribal isolate, are his archive.

Shared limit and **Durkheim's** cut

- Both treat the first worshipper as a puzzled philosopher. **Emile Durkheim** answered that the sacred is social assembly, not a mistaken inference.

- Neither theorised church, caste priesthood, or gendered cult as power.

Comparison stated

- **Origin:** soul (Tylor) versus spoken nature-names (Müller).
- **Method:** ethnological **survivals** versus philology.
- Both remain useful as history of ideas, not as adequate sociologies of religion.

Flow diagram

Tylor animism soul -> Intellectualist origin

Müller language nature gods -> Intellectualist origin

Durkheim sacred social -> Critique of both

Conclusion

Tylor's **animism** and Müller's nature-mythology are two intellectualist origins. They differ on soul versus language. **Durkheim's** social sacred, and later Weberian meaning, overtake both as sociology, while the two still mark the Victorian debate.

Facts & figures

Animism

Tylor's minimum definition of religion as belief in spiritual beings.

Survivals

Tylor: practices that persist after their original meaning has faded.

Disease of language

Müller: metaphors of nature forgotten as metaphors and read as divine persons.

Durkheim

Rejected origin-as-error; the sacred is the group in ritual form.