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Q5(b)

Critically examine the relevance of Vilfredo Pareto's theory of Circulation of Elites in the present scenario

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

- Is Vilfredo Pareto's theory of **circulation of elites** relevant in the present society? Comment
- Keep the comment within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

- **Pareto**: history as **circulation of elites**, **lions and foxes**, not mass self-rule.

Parties, boards, and caste-business recruitment still fit.

Mills's power elite is a related present map.

Marx, gender, and global firms mark the limits.

Relevant as scepticism; incomplete as full class theory.

Introduction

Vilfredo Pareto treated history as the **circulation of elites**, not as the self-rule of the many. **Residues** of combination and persistence, **lions and foxes**, replace one another. Democracy changes the idiom of rule more than it abolishes a governing minority.

Body

The claim

- Every society has a governing elite and a non-elite. Revolution is often elite replacement, not elite extinction.
- Foxes rule by cunning and combination; lions by force and persistence. Decay of **residues** invites circulation.

Present relevance

- Party systems, corporate boards, and senior bureaucracy still concentrate command, as C. Wright **Mills** later mapped as a power elite in another vocabulary.
- Caste associations, business houses, and professional credentials recruit new personnel into old summit posts: circulation of persons, stability of height.
- Media and elections change the fox's tools. They do not, by themselves, equalise power.

Limits

- **Marx** locates elite change in class contradiction, not in psychology of **residues**.

- Gender and reserved representation show political engineering of who may enter the elite, which Pareto under-theorised.
- Global firms and platforms add a transnational elite that a national circulation model only partly captures.

Comment

- Relevant as a warning against naive popular sovereignty.
- Incomplete as a theory of capitalism, gender, and world-system hierarchy.

Flow diagram

Governing elite -> Circulation
 Non-elite -> Circulation
 Foxes cunning -> Circulation
 Lions force -> Circulation
 Parties boards platforms -> Governing elite

Conclusion

Pareto remains relevant wherever a minority governs through force, cunning, and recruitment. Elections circulate personnel more than they abolish elites. **Marx**, **Mills**, and gender critique are needed so that "circulation" does not become a cynical law of nature.

Facts & figures

Circulation of elites

Pareto: governing minorities replace one another; the mass does not become the government.

Lions and foxes

Types of elite rule by force and by cunning, cycling as residues decay.

Residues

Relatively stable sentiments; derivations are the justifications elites offer.

Mills

Power elite: interlocking command of state, corporation, and military in a later industrial order.

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