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Q3(b)

Critically examine how Durkheim and Merton explicate Anomie.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Sociology GS 1 · 15 marks · Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx

Sociological Thinkers: Karl Marx - Historical materialism, mode of production, alienation, class struggle; Emile Durkheim - Division of labour, social fact, suicide, religion and society; Max Weber - Social action, ideal types, authority, bureaucracy, protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism; Talcott Parsons - Social system, pattern variables; Robert K. Merton - Latent and manifest functions, conformity and deviance, reference groups; Mead - Self and identity.

Core demand of the question

- Critically examine how **Durkheim** and Merton explicate Anomie
- Keep the examination within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

- **Durkheim:** anomie is weak regulation; **anomic suicide** and **forced division of labour** follow.
- **Merton:** anomie is strain between universal success goals and unequal legitimate means.

Five adaptations include innovation as deviance.

Durkheim fits shocks; Merton fits blocked mobility in a success culture.

Class, caste, and gender still have to be named beside both.

Introduction

Anomie is a condition of weak or conflicting norms. **Emile Durkheim** used it to explain a form of suicide and a pathology of the division of labour. Robert K. Merton recast it as a strain between culturally approved goals and legitimate means. Both name a mismatch in the moral order. They do not name the same mechanism.

Body**Durkheim's anomie**

- In Suicide, **anomic suicide** rises when regulation collapses, as in boom, crash, or sudden widowhood. Desire is unlimited once the moral brake fails.
- **In The Division of Labour, anomic division is forced and uncoordinated specialisation:** the parts of the organism do not know their reciprocal duties.
- Anomie is a property of the social whole, consistent with his sui generis claim. It is not a private mood first.

Merton's anomie

- In Social Structure and Anomie, American culture over-emphasises success goals. The class structure restricts legitimate means.
- **Adaptation follows:** conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion.
- Innovation includes crime as a use of illegitimate means for approved goals. This is a theory of deviance in an apparently open class system.

Critical comparison

- **Durkheim** stresses regulation and sudden change. Merton stresses a stable culture of success plus blocked opportunity.
- **Durkheim's** actor is under-regulated. Merton's actor is over-committed to goals and under-supplied with means.
- **Marx** would locate both in accumulation and class, not only in missing morals or missing scholarships.
- Merton is more usable for Indian exam competition, corruption as innovation, and informal enterprise. **Durkheim** is more usable for market shocks and the deregulation of desire in consumer booms.
- Farmer distress suicides are often read with **Durkheim** on regulation and integration, and with agrarian class structure that Merton's **American dream** model only partly fits.
- **Feminist critique:** both underplay gendered regulation of desire and honour. NFHS and unpaid care show other strains.

Limits

- **Durkheim** can sound like a call for more discipline without asking who writes the norms.
- Merton can sound like a catalogue of poor men's deviance while elite goal-setting stays natural.
- Albert Cohen, Cloward and Ohlin, and later labelling theory revised the opportunity map.

Flow diagram

Durkheim -> Weak regulation
 Durkheim -> Anomic division of labour
 Merton -> Goals versus means
 Goals versus means -> Five adaptations
 Weak regulation -> Anomie
 Goals versus means -> Anomie

Conclusion

Durkheim's anomie is failed regulation of the whole. Merton's anomie is strain between success culture and unequal means. Use **Durkheim** for shocks and missing moral limits; use Merton for blocked mobility and innovative deviance. Neither replaces class, caste, or gender as structure.

Facts & figures

Anomic suicide

Durkheim: rises when moral regulation fails in boom, crash, or sudden status change.

Five adaptations

Merton: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, rebellion.

American Dream

Merton's cultural goal of success that outruns the supply of legitimate careers.

Forced division of labour

Durkheim's pathological specialisation without moral coordination of functions.

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