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Q7(c)

Assess critically A. G. Frank's theory of development of underdevelopment'

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · 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

- Assess critically A. G. Frank's theory of **development of underdevelopment**
- Keep the assessment within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Frank held that underdevelopment is produced by surplus drain from satellite to metropole.

It rejected modernisation stages such as Rostow's ladder.

The gain is a relational map of empire, export, and local allied classes.

The limit is underplaying dependent industrialisation and internal social structure.

Keep the drain thesis. Drop the closed law.

Introduction

Andre Gunder Frank argued that underdevelopment is not an original lack. It is produced by the incorporation of satellites into a capitalist world system that drains surplus to metropolises. The theory was a sharp critique of modernisation. It is too rigid as a total history of every poor region.

Body

What Frank claimed

- In Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America, Frank treated Chile and Brazil as cases of a chain of surplus extraction from village to capital city to foreign metropole.
- Development and underdevelopment are two sides of one process, not two stages on W. W. Rostow's ladder.
- The more a region is tied to the core, the more its development is distorted toward export and monopoly.
- Breaking the chain, in his early politics, pointed toward socialist delinking.

Critical gains

- It named empire, unequal trade, and class allies inside the periphery, which modernisation had treated as cultural lag.
- It still helps read extractive belts, export enclaves, and the location of dirty work in global chains.

- It joins **Marx's** surplus to a geography of core and periphery, which Immanuel **Wallerstein** later systematised.

Critical limits

- **Cardoso** and others in dependency debate showed that some dependent development of industry does occur, as in parts of East Asia, which Frank's early drain model underplayed.
- Internal class, caste, and state capacity are not only effects of the metropole.
- Delinking as a programme failed or was unused in most states, while selective engagement plus public investment produced other paths.
- Culture, gender, and ecology are thin in the original texts.

Assessment

- Keep Frank as a theory of relational drain and distorted export structure.
- Reject Frank as a law that contact always and only underdevelops.

Flow diagram

Metropole -> Drain of surplus
Periphery satellite -> Drain of surplus
Drain of surplus -> Produced underdevelopment
Agency state East Asia -> Dependent development possible
Produced underdevelopment -> Critical limit

Conclusion

Frank's **development of underdevelopment** correctly treats poverty as a product of surplus drain in a world capitalist chain, not as a first stage of growth. The critique of Rostow still holds. The theory over-states the impossibility of industrialisation in the periphery and under-states internal structure. Use it as a relational warning, not as a closed law.

Facts & figures

Development of underdevelopment

Frank's phrase for poverty produced by capitalist incorporation, not by original isolation.

Metropole and satellite

His chain of cities and regions through which surplus moves upward.

Rostow contrast

Modernisation stages that Frank rejected as a false sequence from tradition to take-off.

Wallerstein

World-systems theory that extended core, semi-periphery, and periphery as a single division of labour.

Cardoso

Dependency writer who allowed associated-dependent development, a critique of Frank's rigidity.

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