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Q3(c)

Is Weber's idea of bureaucracy a product of the historical experiences of Europe? Comment

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 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

- Is **Weber's** idea of bureaucracy a product of the historical experiences of Europe? Comment
- Keep the comment within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

- **Weber's bureaucracy is legal-rational office:** rules, hierarchy, files, salary, impersonality.

The type was drawn from European, especially Prussian, state and firm history.

Weber compared China and India to show patrimonial contrast.

Colonial file government carried the form beyond Europe.

Indian services are Weberian in claim and mixed in practice.

Introduction

- **Max Weber's bureaucracy is an ideal type of legal-rational domination:** written rules, office hierarchy, files, salaried career, and impersonality. It was written from European state-building, especially Prussian administration. The comment must say both that the type has a European history and that the form travelled.

Body

European historical source

- **Weber** watched the German Reich, the **Prussian civil service**, and the modern firm as they replaced patrimonial households of rule.
- Legal-rational authority was contrasted with traditional and charismatic authority, a triad drawn from European and biblical cases as well as from China and India in his comparative essays.
- The separation of office from person, the money salary, and the trained jurist were thick on the European ground he knew best.
- **In that sense, yes:** the ideal type is a product of European historical experience of the modern state and capitalist enterprise.

Why it is not only European

- **Weber** himself compared patrimonial administration in China and the Mughal and caste orders in India to show what legal-rational office was not.
- Colonial states exported file government to India. The **Indian Civil Service** and later the Union and State services are bureaucratic in **Weber's** sense even though their history is imperial, not Prussian.
- Caste, faction, and political transfer postings show that the type is never pure. Merton later named trained incapacity and displacement of goals as dysfunctions of the same form.
- New public management and digital files change the furniture. They do not erase hierarchy and written competence as the claim of office.

Comment

- Treat bureaucracy as a European-born ideal type that became a world form through capitalism, empire, and the nation-state.
- Do not treat India as a failed Prussia. Treat it as a historically specific mix of Weberian office and patrimonial leakage.

Flow diagram

European state and firm -> Weber ideal type
Weber ideal type -> Legal-rational office
Colonial and postcolonial states -> Legal-rational office
Patrimonial leakage -> Never pure type
Legal-rational office -> Never pure type

Conclusion

Weber's bureaucracy is a product of European historical experience in its construction as an ideal type. It is not a product only of Europe in its later career, because colonial and postcolonial states installed the same claim of legal-rational office. The type is European in origin and comparative in use.

Facts & figures

Legal-rational domination

Weber's type of authority based on enacted rules and impersonal office.

Prussian civil service

A principal historical reference for trained, salaried, hierarchical administration.

Office versus person

The rule that the job is not family property, central to the ideal type.

Merton's dysfunctions

Trained incapacity and goal displacement inside bureaucratic organisation.

Indian Civil Service

Imperial and then national career bureaucracy that installed file government in India.

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