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Q5(c)

Describe the differing principles of work organization in feudal and capitalist societies.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Works and Economic Life

Works and Economic Life: Social organization of work in different types of society; Formal and informal organization of work; Labour and society.

Core demand of the question

- **Describe feudal work organisation:** personal dependence, manor, estate, limited market
- **Describe capitalist work organisation:** free labour, wage contract, commodity production, factory discipline
- Keep **Marx's** modes of production in view without turning the answer into a full history of Europe

Revision summary

Feudal work is tied to land, lord and custom rather than to a free labour market.

Surplus is taken through extra-economic power and personal dependence.

Capitalist work sells labour power as a commodity under wage and clock.

The factory and office separate production from the household.

Marx's modes of production name this contrast of principles.

Unfree labour can survive inside capitalism without erasing the type.

Introduction

Work is organised under different principles in different historical types of society. In feudal society, labour is tied to land, lord and estate. In capitalist society, labour is sold as a commodity on a market and is coordinated by wage and clock. **Karl Marx's** contrast of feudal and capitalist modes of production is the clearest sociological statement of this difference.

Body

Feudal principles of work organisation

Feudal work, in the European type that **Marx** and later historians such as Marc Bloch described, rests on extra-economic power. The serf or dependent peasant is not a free seller of labour power. Obligation to the lord, customary dues, and rights in the manor organise production. The household and the village community do much of the coordination. Time follows season and custom more than the factory bell. Occupation is largely ascribed. Guilds in towns regulate craft by status and apprenticeship, not by an open labour market. Surplus is taken as rent in labour, kind or money, backed by political and military lordship. **Max Weber** also stressed traditional domination and the absence of a fully separated economic sphere.

Indian agrarian history is not a copy of European feudalism. Dharma Kumar, Irfan Habib and others have debated how far land control, caste occupation and jajmani resemble a feudal principle. The syllabus contrast still helps: work organised by personal dependence and customary status, rather than by a universal wage contract.

Capitalist principles of work organisation

Capitalist work organisation rests on **formally free labour**. The worker owns no means of production and must sell labour power. The capitalist owns the plant and the product. Coordination is through the wage, the contract and workplace discipline. The factory, and later the office, separate workplace from household. Time is measured. Harry Braverman described how scientific management deepens this control. Commodity production for the market, not use for the manor, becomes the aim. Competition forces reinvestment. Karl Polanyi showed that labour, land and money are treated as if they were ordinary commodities, which is a radical social change.

The two principles can mix. Plantations, colonial forced labour and today's informal tying of migrants to contractors show unfree elements inside capitalism. The typological difference remains. Feudal organisation binds work to personal and landed hierarchy. Capitalist organisation binds work to propertyless wage labour and market discipline.

Flow diagram

Feudal work -> Personal dependence and manor
Capitalist work -> Free labour wage and factory
Feudal work -> Rent through extra-economic power
Capitalist work -> Surplus value through market

Conclusion

Feudal work is organised by customary dependence on land and lord. Capitalist work is organised by the wage contract, commodity production and workplace discipline. The contrast is of principle. Real histories often mix unfree ties with market labour.

Facts & figures

Formally free labour

Marx's mark of capitalism: the worker can change employers but must sell labour power to live.

Extra-economic coercion

The feudal use of political and customary power to take surplus, not only a market bargain.

Polanyi on fictitious commodities

Labour, land and money treated as market goods, which reorganises the whole of social life.