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Q7(a)

Do modernization and secularization necessarily go together? Give your views

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 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

- Define modernisation as structural differentiation, science, market, state and urban life
- Define secularisation as the declining social authority of religion in public institutions and, in some versions, in belief
- Argue that they often travel together but do not necessarily do so
- Use **Weber**, **Durkheim**, Berger and Indian illustrations

Revision summary

Modernisation means industrial, bureaucratic, scientific and urban transformation.

Secularisation means religion losing authority over public institutions and sometimes over belief.

Weberian rationalisation made the pair look necessary.

The United States, global religious revivals and India show modern life with strong religion.

Berger revised the classical secularisation story.

The two processes often meet, but they do not have to travel as one.

Introduction

Modernisation is the cluster of changes that produce industrial economies, bureaucratic states, science-based knowledge and more individual choice. Secularisation is the process by which religion loses authority over law, education, politics and, in stronger versions, over personal belief. Many classical sociologists expected the two to move together. The question asks whether that necessity holds. My view is that they often accompany each other and that they do not necessarily do so.

Body

Why they have been linked

Max Weber's rationalisation thesis tied the modern world to **disenchantment**. Calculation, office and science crowd out magical and priestly control of public life. **Emile Durkheim** expected the cult of the individual and occupational ethics to grow as mechanical solidarity of a common church weakened, though he also looked for new forms of the sacred. Peter Berger, for a time, described a secularising modern consciousness. Functional differentiation, in Talcott Parsons and later Niklas Luhmann, gives religion a specialised slot rather than a

canopy over all institutions. European histories of church and state seemed to confirm the pair: industrial society, liberal constitutions and declining Sunday practice.

Why they do not necessarily go together

The United States modernised while remaining highly religious in church membership. Jose Casanova showed public religions returning to politics. Berger later revised his own secularisation thesis after looking at global Pentecostalism and other revivals. India is a decisive case for this question. Colonial and postcolonial modernisation brought railways, universities, industry and a secular constitutional state. Religious identity, pilgrimage, televised ritual and communal politics did not fade. Ashis Nandy and T. N. Madan questioned a simple Western secularism as the only modern path. Rajeev Bhargava's idea of **principled distance** describes an Indian state that is not the same as French laicite. Instrumental modernisation can even intensify religious organisation, because parties and media use sacred symbols. Fundamentalist movements use modern technology.

So modernisation tends to differentiate institutions and to create secular law in some spheres. It does not necessarily empty the public square of religion, and it does not necessarily make individuals unbelievers. Secularisation, where it occurs, has more than one path: decline of belief, privatisation, or merely the state's refusal to be a theocracy. Those paths are historical and political, not automatic companions of the factory and the smartphone.

My view, stated plainly

I do not treat the classical pair as a law. Factories, universities and ballots can grow while pilgrimage, televangelism and religious parties also grow. What often does go together with modernisation is differentiation: the hospital is not run as a temple, and the civil code is not a sermon. That is a limited secularisation of institutions. Belief and identity can remain strong, and can even use modern media to become stronger. Turkey, the United States, Iran after a modernising state, and India after 1991 all show different pairings. A student who writes that they must go together has repeated a European expectation. A student who writes that they never meet has ignored law, science and the bureaucratic state. They often meet in part. They do not necessarily meet in full.

Flow diagram

Modernisation -> Differentiation science state market

Secularisation -> Religion loses public monopoly

Modernisation -> Secularisation

US India revivals -> Modernisation

US India revivals -> Secularisation

Conclusion

Modernisation and secularisation have often been partners in Western classical theory and in some European histories. They are not necessary twins. Modern societies can remain publicly religious, and secular law can coexist with intense belief. India shows that pairing with special clarity.

Facts & figures

Disenchantment

Weber's term for the replacement of magical and sacred control by calculation and technical means.

Casanova on public religion

The argument that religion can re-enter public politics in modern societies rather than only retreat to the private home.

Principled distance

Bhargava's account of Indian secularism as a state that engages religions with equal distance rather than a wall of separation only.

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