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Q3(a)

Compare capability deprivation approach with that of social capital deprivation in understanding chronic poverty

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Stratification and Mobility: Concepts

Stratification and Mobility: Concepts - equality, inequality, hierarchy, exclusion, poverty and deprivation; Theories of social stratification - Structural functionalist, Marxist, Weberian; Dimensions - Class, status groups, gender, ethnicity and race; Social mobility - open and closed systems, types, sources and causes.

Core demand of the question

- **Explain Sen's capability deprivation:** functionings, freedoms, not income alone
- **Explain social capital deprivation:** networks, trust, norms after Putnam, Coleman, Bourdieu
- Compare them as tools for chronic poverty
- Use Indian illustrations of lasting poverty

Revision summary

Sen's approach defines poverty as capability deprivation, not income shortfall alone.

Functionings are beings and doings; capabilities are the real set of lives one can choose.

Social capital is networks, trust and norms in Coleman, Putnam and Bourdieu, unequally held.

Chronic poverty lasts because freedoms stay contracted or because bridges to work and credit stay closed.

Dense caste bonding can coexist with capability failure.

Indian SHGs, migration networks and **multidimensional poverty** measures illustrate the comparison.

Introduction

Chronic poverty is poverty that lasts across years and often across generations, not a short shock after a drought. Two influential approaches try to say what is missing in such lives. **Amartya Sen's** capability approach looks at the real freedoms people have to be and to do what they value. Social capital approaches look at the networks, trust and norms that help people get jobs, credit, care and political voice. They are not rivals in every respect, but they diagnose deprivation differently.

Body

Capability deprivation

Sen, later with **Martha Nussbaum** in a related philosophical register, shifted poverty studies from income baskets to **functionings** (being nourished, literate, mobile, respected) and **capabilities** (the set of lives one could actually choose). A person may have rupees and still be capability-poor if stigma, disability, unsafe streets or missing public health convert money poorly into living. The human development index and the Alkire-Foster **multidimensional**

poverty index operationalise this spirit. Chronic poverty, on this view, is a durable contraction of the capability set: bonded labour, undernutrition of girls, exclusion from school, or living with a disability without assistive public goods. Income poverty lines miss those conversions. Gender and caste enter because conversion factors are social, not only metabolic.

Social capital deprivation

James Coleman treated social capital as obligations, information channels and norms that make action possible. Robert Putnam stressed trust, associations and civic engagement. Pierre Bourdieu treated social capital as actual or potential resources linked to a durable network, unequally distributed like other capitals. Deprivation here means thin or stigmatised networks: migrants without urban kin, Dalit households excluded from dominant-caste labour gangs, women whose mobility is policed so that SHG and market ties never form. Chronic poverty persists when people cannot convert effort into opportunity because the bridges are missing. India's SHG-bank linkage and Kudumbashree try to manufacture social capital; the limits show when groups remain trapped in low-return activity.

Comparison for chronic poverty

- **Capability deprivation is broader and more ethical:** it names what a just society owes as freedoms, including health and education as public goods. Social capital deprivation is more relational and can be conservative if "community" is caste closure. A household may have dense bonding capital and still be capability-poor, as in a tightly knit but malnourished hamlet. Conversely, a person with a government job has capabilities partly because of institutionalised social capital. For chronic poverty in India, Sen explains why land, school and clinic matter as freedoms; social capital explains why two equally poor villages diverge when one has ties to a contractor, a party, or a women's group. A full account uses both: missing freedoms and missing connections.

Flow diagram

Chronic poverty -> Capability deprivation
Chronic poverty -> Social capital deprivation
Capability deprivation -> Functionings and freedoms
Social capital deprivation -> Trust networks norms
Capability deprivation -> Public goods conversion
Social capital deprivation -> Exclusion and bonding traps

Conclusion

Sen locates chronic poverty in lasting unfreedom to live a valued life. Social capital theory locates it in missing or exclusionary networks. They complement each other when networks are treated as one conversion factor among others, not as a substitute for rights, wages and public goods.

Facts & figures

Capabilities and functionings

Sen: functionings are achieved beings and doings; capabilities are the freedoms to achieve them.

Three faces of social capital

Coleman on obligations and norms, Putnam on civic trust, Bourdieu on unequal network resources.

Multidimensional poverty

Alkire-Foster style measures follow Sen in counting education, health and living standards, not rupees only.

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