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Q9

COVID-19 pandemic accelerated class inequalities and poverty in India. Comment.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · GS I · 10 marks · Women, Population and Urbanisation

Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

Core demand of the question

- COVID-19 pandemic accelerated class inequalities and poverty in India. Comment
- Keep the comment within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Lockdown split remote formal jobs from informal daily wages.

Education and health gaps widened along the same class line.

Reverse migration in 2020 sent unemployed workers back to villages.

Relief schemes cushioned hunger later; they did not stop the acceleration.

COVID amplified existing informal-economy inequality.

Introduction

The 2020 lockdown stopped informal wages overnight. Those who could work from a screen kept pay. Those who could not walked home. COVID did not invent Indian inequality. It accelerated it.

Body**How class gaps widened**

- Formal salaried and platform-able white-collar work moved online. Informal casual labour in cities lost days with almost no contract cushion.
- School closure hit first-generation learners without devices; elite private schooling continued on screens. The class gap became an education gap.
- Health spending and hospital access split the insured and the cash-poor. Mortality and debt followed that split.

Poverty and reverse migration 2020

- **Reverse migration** from metros to villages in 2020 dumped unemployed workers onto rural households already thin on work.
- Daily-wage poverty became visible on highways. Food insecurity rose even where PDS later expanded.
- Women lost more paid work and took more unpaid care. Class and gender stacked.

Comment, not slogan

- Emergency cash, **PMGKY** rations, and MGNREGA demand were real buffers, yet they followed the shock rather than preventing it.
- Asset-owning classes gained from cheap money and later asset prices; labour did not.
- **Comment:** the pandemic was a class event in a labour-surplus informal economy. Poverty rose as lost days and debt, even where official lines later moved.

Flow diagram

Lockdown -> Formal WFH kept pay
Lockdown -> Informal wage collapse
Informal wage collapse -> Reverse migration 2020
Reverse migration 2020 -> Deeper poverty and inequality

Conclusion

COVID-19 accelerated class inequality by protecting remote formal work and stripping informal wages. Reverse migration in 2020 is the illustration. Poverty deepened as insecurity, even where relief later arrived.

Facts & figures

Reverse migration 2020

Mass return of migrant workers from cities to villages after the March lockdown.

Informal workforce

Most Indian workers lack contracts and paid leave, so a stoppage is an immediate poverty event.

PMGKY

Emergency food and cash package that tried to offset lockdown hunger.

MGNREGA surge

Rural job demand rose as returnees sought work at the village end.

Digital schooling

Online classes that only households with devices and quiet rooms could use well.