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Q5(d)

Issues relating to the informal labour market in urban India.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Industrialization and Urbanisation in India

Industrialization and Urbanisation in India: Evolution of modern industry in India; Growth of urban settlements in India; Working class: structure, growth, class mobilization; Informal sector, child labour; Slums and deprivation in urban areas.

Core demand of the question

- Issues relating to the informal labour market in urban India
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

- **Most urban work is informal:** construction, domestic, vending, home-based.

Migrants lack the city as a right, only as a worksite.

Caste and gender structure who gets the worst tasks.

Labour law often cannot find the employer.

Formalisation talk fails without security and union power.

Introduction

- **Urban India's informal labour market is the majority experience of work:** no contract, no social security, and high caste-gender sorting. Liberalisation thickened this world rather than replacing it with factory citizenship.

Body**Issues**

- **Construction, domestic work**, street vending, and home-based manufacture sit outside most labour law.
- **Jan Breman's** circular migrants and footloose labour show the city as a camp, not a career.
- Women and Dalits crowd the worst rungs; skill talk rarely meets unpaid care and stigma.

Structural links

- Rural landlessness and Green Revolution labour surplus feed the informal city.
- Contractors and the absence of unions keep wages flexible for capital, which Desai would call a bourgeois state outcome.

Policy issues

- Street-vendor law, NREGA as a rural fallback, and codes on social security exist. Enforcement and employer identity remain thin.

Flow diagram

Rural surplus -> Urban informal
Urban informal -> No contract security
Caste gender -> No contract security

Conclusion

The informal urban labour market is the organised face of insecurity. Issues are legal exclusion, migrant dependence, and caste-gender crowding at the bottom, not a temporary wait for formality.

Facts & figures

Jan Breman

Documented footloose and circular labour between village and city.

Domestic work

A huge female informal sector inside private homes.

Construction

A male-dominated informal absorber of rural migrants.

Social security code

Recent legal attempt to name informal workers; delivery is the issue.