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Q6(b)

Discuss the changing nature of the problems of working class in the informal sector of the economy.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · Sociology GS 2 · 15 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

- Discuss the changing nature of the problems of working class in the informal sector of the economy
- From mill union to **footloose labour**

Revision summary

The old working-class problem was the mill and the union.

The informal majority now faces hidden employers and no career.

Migration and home-based women's work broke the factory neighbourhood.

Caste and gender structure the worst informal tasks.

Organisation must follow the chain, not wait for a mill gate.

Introduction

The informal-sector working class in India now faces problems of no employer, no union, and no career, more than the old mill-strike against a visible factory boss. The nature of the problem changed with liberalisation and rural out-migration.

Body**Older working-class problems**

- Organised mills and plantations had wages, unions, and a clear opponent. Desai could map industrial class in that frame.
- Informal work always existed. It was not yet the majority story of 'working class' in public talk.

Changing problems

- Contract chains hide the principal employer. Social security codes struggle to find a contributor.
- Circular migrants, women home-workers, and app or workshop casuals lack the mill neighbourhood as a solidarity space.
- **Skill polarisation:** a small formal core, a large unprotected periphery.
- **Caste and gender sort tasks:** Dalit sanitation, women domestic work, Muslim artisanal clusters.

What remains

- Surplus extraction remains. The form of struggle shifts to street-vendor law, **NREGA fallback**, and sporadic strikes.

Flow diagram

Mill union boss -> Old working class

Contractor migrant home work -> Informal problems

Informal problems -> No security no union

Conclusion

Informal working-class problems changed from factory bargaining to insecurity without a workplace community. The class is larger and harder to organise, not less exploited.

Facts & figures

Footloose labour

Breman's term for workers who cannot settle into a stable proletariat.

Contracting

The device that informalises work even inside formal firms.

Home-based work

A female informal problem that labour inspectors rarely see.

NREGA fallback

A rural shock-absorber that marks the weakness of urban informal security.

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