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Q4(a)

How has the New Economic Policy (1991) affected the lifestyle and life changed in new middle class in India.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2018 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Social Classes in India

Social Classes in India: Agrarian class structure; Industrial class structure; Middle classes in India.

Core demand of the question

- How has the **New Economic Policy (1991)** affected the lifestyle and life chances of the new middle class in India?
- Treat as a 20-mark answer

Revision summary

1991 grew a services and IT middle class.

Lifestyle became consumer, English, and gated space.

Women's paid work rose beside unpaid care.

Life chances improved for credentialed urban groups and stayed insecure under contracts.

The class rests on cheap labour and caste capital, not on general equality.

Introduction

The 1991 New Economic Policy opened markets, services, and a consumer identity. A new middle class grew in metros and software suburbs. Lifestyle thickened with goods and English. Life chances split: some rode the boom, many stayed one illness from the informal edge.

Body

Who the new middle class is

- Salaried services, IT, media, and private professionals, often urban and caste-advantaged, not the old small-town clerk alone.
- **Yogendra Singh's modernisation of tradition fits their mix:** mall and arranged marriage.

Lifestyle

- Consumer durables, branded education, eating out, and media-saturated homes.
- Women's public work expanded, with a kulavadhu double shift and hired domestic labour.
- Spatial move to gated colonies, a socio-spatial split from slum labour that serves them.

Life chances

- Global jobs and private medicine raised chances for those with English and credentials.
- Coaching markets made education a purchased chance, not a common right.
- Job informalisation and contract work make even this class insecure, a Desai class path in a new gear.

- Caste endogamy and reservation politics still structure entry; the class is not a melting pot.

Who is outside

- Rural poor, displaced Adivasis, and slum workers subsidise the lifestyle as cheap labour.
- Farmer distress continued while urban consumption became the national image.

Balanced effect

- 1991 did not create equality. It created a visible consuming stratum and a wider gap.

Flow diagram

NEP 1991 1991 -> New middle class services
New middle class services -> Consumer gated lifestyle
New middle class services -> Credential global chances
Informal labour caste -> Consumer gated lifestyle
Insecurity coaching -> Credential global chances

Conclusion

NEP 1991 recast lifestyle as consumption and recast life chances as credential markets for a new middle class. Gains are real for that stratum. They rest on informal labour, caste capital, and regional imbalance. Lifestyle glitter is not national life chance.

Facts & figures

1991 NEP

Liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation turn that opened services and consumption.

IT suburbs

Spatial form of the new middle class in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune and similar cities.

Coaching market

Purchased life chance that replaced a thinner common-school path.

Domestic workers

Labour hinge of middle-class women's public lifestyle.

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