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Q1(c)

Examine the changing initiatives of the land tenure system in India

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Rural and Agrarian Social Structure

Rural and Agrarian Social Structure: The idea of Indian village and village studies; Agrarian social structure - evolution of land tenure system, land reforms.

Core demand of the question

- Examine the changing initiatives of the land tenure system in India
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Colonial settlements created landlord, ryot, and village-share grids.

Abolition, tenancy laws and ceilings cut intermediaries unevenly.

Rich peasants and reverse tenancy recast who commands surplus.

Operation Barga and FRA try to title tillers and forest dwellers.

Records still lag the field.

Introduction

Land tenure in India is the legal story of who commands the surplus. Initiatives have moved from colonial landlordism toward occupancy, ceilings, and still-uneven titles for tillers and forest dwellers.

Body

Colonial grids

- Zamindari, ryotwari, and mahalwari fixed different rent and record relations. Daniel **Thorner** later mapped malik, kisan, and mazdoor on that inherited field.
- Permanent Settlement thickened a rentier layer. Ryotwari still left the small holder exposed to revenue and moneylender.

Reform initiatives

- **Zamindari abolition**, tenancy regulation, and ceilings were the Nehruvian triad. A. R. Desai read them as incomplete bourgeois change that strengthened rich peasants more than labourers.
- **Operation Barga** recorded bargadars in West Bengal. Some southern tenancy laws protected occupancy; many states left oral leases invisible.
- Green Revolution and later reverse tenancy recast tenure as capital hiring land, not only as landlord versus serf.

Unfinished tenure

- **Forest Rights Act** titles and homestead schemes try to bring Adivasi and landless claims into the record.
- Fragmentation, benami, and weak mutation mean the map and the field still diverge.

Flow diagram

Colonial zamindari ryotwari -> Abolition tenancy ceiling
Abolition tenancy ceiling -> Rich peasant reverse tenancy
FRA bargadar record -> Unfinished titles

Conclusion

Land tenure initiatives changed the legal top of the agrarian order and thickened a peasant-proprietor layer. Labourers, tenants, and forest dwellers remain the weak end of the record, so tenure is still a political field.

Facts & figures

Zamindari abolition

Post-independence drive that removed many intermediaries but left rich occupancy peasants.

Thorner

Malik-kisan-mazdoor map of agrarian classes on Indian tenure.

Operation Barga

West Bengal recording of sharecroppers as a tenure initiative.

Forest Rights Act

2006 attempt to title forest dwellers outside classical farm tenure.