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Q3(b)

Discuss the dynamics of 'migrant workers' in India in the context of Corona pandemic.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · Sociology GS 2 · 15 marks · Population Dynamics

Population Dynamics: Population size, growth, composition and distribution; Components of population growth: birth, death, migration; Population policy and family planning; Emerging issues: ageing, sex ratios, child and infant mortality, reproductive health.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the dynamics of 'migrant workers' in India in the context of Corona pandemic

Revision summary

Migrant workers are circular worker-peasants in informal urban jobs.

COVID lockdowns cut cash wages and transport at once.

Reverse migration exposed the absence of urban membership.

Villages became both shelter and a site of stigma and surplus labour.

Portable food, work and housing rights are the sociological remedy.

Introduction

COVID-19 made India's migrant workers suddenly visible as a class without a city right. The pandemic did not create circular labour. It broke the thin arrangements that had hidden it.

Body**Pre-pandemic dynamics**

- Worker-peasants move from poorer agrarian tracts to construction, factories, and services, a recast of Thorner's mazdoor.
- **Informal hiring**, cash wages, and no urban social security are the structure A. R. Desai would call unfinished bourgeois development.
- Caste and region organise labour gangs; women migrants face extra care and harassment loads.

Corona as x-ray

- Lockdown without wages or transport produced reverse migration on foot, a public proof of urbanism without membership.
- Quarantine stigma in villages and lost kharif labour showed the village as fallback and as another closed door.
- State food and work schemes existed; portability and last-mile trust failed the moving body.

After-shocks

- Some returned to cities on harsher terms. Some stayed as underemployed on tiny farms.

- Policy talk of One Nation One Ration and databases named the problem the pandemic had already named.

Sociological meaning

- Migrant dynamics are the link between agrarian class structure and Indian urbanism as a way of life that can evict its service class overnight.

Flow diagram

Agrarian surplus labour -> City informal wage
Lockdown -> Reverse migration
Reverse migration -> Village fallback underemployment

Conclusion

In the Corona context, migrant workers appeared as citizens of neither workplace nor village. The dynamics are circular labour, informality, and a state that plans cities without planning the people who build them.

Facts & figures

Reverse migration 2020

Mass return of workers when cities closed without a social wage.

Informal hiring

No contract, so no paid furlough when work stopped.

Village fallback

Tiny farms absorbing labour the industry dumped.

Ration portability

A policy response to the fact that PDS is still locally trapped.

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