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Q7(b)

Discuss recent trends in the structure of migration .

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Sociology GS 2 · 15 marks · Perspectives on the study of Indian society
Perspectives on the study of Indian society: Indology (G.S. Ghurye); Structural functionalism (M.N. Srinivas); Marxist sociology (A.R. Desai).

Core demand of the question

- Discuss recent trends in the structure of migration

Revision summary

Circular and seasonal migration now structures rural livelihoods.

Women's labour streams and Gulf/worker versus student elites split the field.

Destinations are informal, not classic factory towns.

COVID reverse migration showed missing portable rights.

Caste chains and undercounting persist.

Introduction

Recent Indian migration is less a one-way village-to-city story. It is circular, female in new streams, informal at the destination, and shock-prone, as COVID reverse migration made plain.

Body**Structural trends**

- Circular and seasonal movement between farm and construction, brick kiln, and services has become the livelihood structure of millions.
- Intra-state and neighbouring-state streams often outweigh the old long-distance male 'Bombay' myth, though metros still pull.
- Women's migration for care, garment, and marriage continues; independent female labour migration is rising in some corridors.
- International Gulf and other unskilled-semiskilled streams sit beside elite student and professional out-migration, a class split in the same word 'migrant'.

Links to agrarian and urban change

- Incomplete land reform, fragmentation, and dominant-caste control of village surplus push labour out, as Desai's class reading still helps.
- **Informal sector growth at the destination absorbs them without urban citizenship:** slum, contractor, and no social security.
- **SECC** deprivation in sending pockets predicts who must move.

Shocks and new visibility

- **COVID reverse migration** revealed dependence on the village as insurance and the absence of portable rights.
- Digital payments and phones changed remittance, not necessarily bargaining power.
- Climate stress and drought add an environmental push beside the older Green Revolution labour-saving push.

What has not changed

- Caste and recruitment chains still organise who gets which city job.
- The census undercounts circular workers, so the structure is larger than the table.

Flow diagram

Village surplus labour -> Circular migration
Circular migration -> Informal city kiln
Circular migration -> Remittance and return
COVID climate -> Reverse flows

Conclusion

The structure of migration has shifted toward circular informal labour, gendered new streams, and dual international elites versus workers. COVID did not create this structure. It photographed it.

Facts & figures

Circular migration

Repeated village-city movement as one economy, not a one-time break with the village.

COVID reverse migration

Mass return in 2020 that exposed informal disposability and village fallback.

Socio-Economic Caste **Census** (SECC)

Sending-area deprivation that correlates with who must sell labour elsewhere.

Informal destination

Construction, kilns and services rather than a growing formal proletariat.