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Q6(c)

Discuss the changing nature of structure of political elites.

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 the changing nature of structure of political elites

Revision summary

Early elites were professional, urban and often upper caste.

Dominant-caste rural notables joined under mass franchise.

Mandal, BSP and regional parties diversified the caste profile.

Liberalisation mixed business and office.

Dynasty, money and weak gender-minority presence continue to close the top.

Introduction

Political elites in India have changed from a small English-educated nationalist circle toward a more regional, caste-inclusive, and money-mediated set. The summit still looks narrow. The recruiting ground has widened.

Body**Older structure**

- The nationalist elite that Desai analysed was professional, urban, and often upper caste, speaking a constitutional all-India language.
- **After independence, the Congress system added rural notables:** dominant castes in Srinivas's sense who could deliver the village vote.
- Ghurye's civilisational Brahmanical lens fits the early cultural capital of this elite, not its later composition.

What changed

- Adult franchise, Mandal, and BSP-type mobilisation brought OBC and Dalit elites into assemblies and cabinets, a disharmonic opening Beteille would recognise: equality as creed, hierarchy as residual honour.
- Linguistic states and regional parties federalised the elite. A chief minister's court can matter more than a Delhi salon.
- Land reform and Green Revolution created rich-peasant politicians. Co-operatives and farmer unions became elite nurseries.
- Liberalisation added business-politician overlap, media owners, and contractors. Informal money sits beside formal office.

- Women entered through reservation at panchayat level more than at the top, so gender change is bottom-heavy.

Continuities

- Kinship and dynasty still organise many parties.
- Corporate and upper-caste networks remain thick in bureaucracy and national media, even when the MLA is from a new jati.
- Adivasi and Muslim representation in high office stays thin relative to population in many states.

Structure now

- **A multi-layered elite:** national professional-business, regional caste-peasant, and local panchayat. Circulation has increased. Closure has not ended.

Flow diagram

Nationalist professional elite -> Dominant caste rural notables
Dominant caste rural notables -> Regional OBC Dalit business elites
Regional OBC Dalit business elites -> Dynasty and money closure

Conclusion

The structure of political elites has changed from a nationalist professional core plus dominant-caste brokers toward a federal, caste-diversified, and more monetised elite. Democracy widened recruitment. Property, dynasty, and media still filter who stays.

Facts & figures

A. R. Desai

Class reading of the nationalist elite as bourgeois-professional with limited agrarian radicalism.

Dominant caste

Srinivas's local land-and-numbers elite that became a vote machine and then a political class.

BSP / Mandal

Routes that created new Dalit and OBC political elites.

Panchayat reservation

A lower-tier opening for women that has not equally remade the national summit.