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Q1(b)

Do you agree that the agrarian class structure in India is changing? Justify your answer with illustrations.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Social Classes in India

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

Core demand of the question

- Do you agree that the agrarian class structure in India is changing? Justify with illustrations
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Intermediary landlordism declined after land reform.

A commercial rich-peasant layer grew in Green Revolution regions.

Labour is more migrant and informal, as COVID reverse flows showed.

Caste-land overlap and landlessness persist.

The structure is changing, not ending.

Introduction

Yes, India's agrarian class structure is changing, but it is not becoming a simple two-class farm. Intermediaries fell, a rich-peasant layer thickened, and labour became more mobile and informal.

Body**What changed**

- Zamindari abolition and later tenancy laws, as **A. R. Desai** noted, cut the old rentier top and strengthened occupancy peasants in many regions.
- Green Revolution belts produced a commercially oriented farmer class that hires labour, buys inputs, and uses the state, which Daniel Thorner's malik-kisan-mazdoor map only partly captures now.
- Land ceilings were uneven, yet fragmentation, tenancy revival, and reverse tenancy by capital-rich farmers recast who commands the surplus.

Illustrations

- **Operation Barga** in West Bengal recorded bargadars and shifted bargaining against landlords.
- Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh show farmer unions and tractor capital beside landless Dalit labour.
- Circular migration and COVID **reverse migration** showed that many rural poor live as worker-peasants, not as a closed village class.

What persists

- Dominant castes still overlap with land control, as Srinivas's Rampura insight still travels.
- **SECC** and other rural counts keep showing landless and deprived households, so change is real and incomplete.

Flow diagram

Zamindari abolition -> Rich peasant and tenant
Rich peasant and tenant -> Migrant labour
Dominant caste land -> Rich peasant and tenant
Migrant labour -> Informal worker peasant

Conclusion

- **Agrarian class structure has changed:** intermediaries declined, rich peasants and migrant labour rose. Caste and landlessness still organise who wins, so the change is transformation, not disappearance of class.

Facts & figures

A. R. Desai

Read land reform as incomplete bourgeois change that strengthened rich peasants more than labourers.

Operation Barga

West Bengal recording of sharecroppers that altered local class bargaining.

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

Socio Economic and Caste **Census** documented rural deprivation and landlessness at household scale.

Reverse migration

COVID-19 return of workers to villages exposed the farm as a fallback, not a closed class world.

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