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Q4(b)

Explain how land reforms brought about desired agrarian transformation.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Sociology GS 2 · 15 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

- Explain how land reforms brought about desired agrarian transformation
- **Be critical:** state what was desired, what was achieved, and where it failed

Revision summary

The desired change was tillers' rights, end of intermediaries, and a less feudal village.

Zamindari abolition largely succeeded.

Tenancy and ceilings succeeded mainly where the state recorded rights, as in **Operation Barga**.

Dominant castes and benami deals blocked much redistribution.

Women and landless Dalits gained least.

Introduction

Desired agrarian transformation after independence meant tillers' rights, the end of intermediaries, and a more equal village. Land reform moved India toward that goal in law and in some regions. It did not deliver a uniform social revolution.

Body

What was desired

- Abolition of zamindari and jagirdari so that the state and the cultivator replaced the rentier.
- Tenancy security, fair rent, and ceilings to cut large holdings and give land to the landless.
- A democratic village less tied to feudal honour, which planners linked to food and citizenship.

What actually changed

- Intermediaries were largely abolished. A class of occupancy peasants and rich farmers thickened, as Desai argued.
- Where records and organisation met the state, as in **Operation Barga** in West Bengal, sharecroppers gained tenure and a better share.
- Kerala's reforms and some zamindari areas showed measurable shifts in who could speak in the panchayat.
- **Beteille's Sripuram** showed caste, class, and power sliding at different speeds: Brahmins lost some land dominance, but hierarchy did not vanish.

Why the desire was only partly met

- Benami transfers, poor land records, and dominant-caste capture, in Srinivas's sense, blocked ceilings.
- Women and Dalit labourers rarely received title. Patriarchy and untouchability structured who was the 'tiller'.
- Green Revolution later favoured capital-rich farmers, recasting inequality rather than completing reform.
- SECC still found widespread rural deprivation, which is not the village the Constitution imagined.

Sociological verdict

- Transformation was real at the top of the old pyramid and incomplete at the bottom.
- Desired equality needed organisation plus records, not statutes alone.

Flow diagram

Desired tiller rights -> Zamindari abolition
Zamindari abolition -> Rich peasant capture
Zamindari abolition -> Operation Barga type success
Rich peasant capture -> Uneven transformation

Conclusion

Land reform brought a desired end to classic intermediaries and, in a few states, real tenant security. It did not equalise the agrarian structure. The desired transformation remains regional and unfinished.

Facts & figures

Zamindari abolition

Early 1950s state laws that removed superior intermediaries in large parts of India.

Operation Barga

West Bengal's recording of bargadars, a rare case of desired tenancy transformation.

A. R. Desai

Saw reform as incomplete: rentiers fell, agrarian capitalism and inequality continued.

Sripuram

Beteille's illustration that land change does not automatically dissolve caste honour.