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Q7(c)

Discuss the phenomenon of rural-urban continuum with suitable examples

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 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 rural-urban continuum with suitable examples
- Keep a 10-mark length

Revision summary

The rural-urban continuum is a gradient of settlement and social organisation.

Indian **census towns** and peri-urban belts are textbook cases.

Kinship, caste and investment still bind city workers to villages.

Circular migration is the labour form of the continuum.

Two-box policy misses the middle.

Introduction

The rural-urban continuum means settlement and social life form a gradient, not two sealed boxes. Indian evidence is strong: **census towns**, peri-urban belts, and **circular migrants** live in between village and city.

Body

Concept

- **Robert Redfield's folk-urban idea was later recast as a continuum:** occupation, density, and values change by degree.
- **M. S. A. Rao and Indian urban sociology stressed rural ties:** the city household still votes, marries, and invests in the village.

Indian examples

- Gurgaon-Faridabad-Noida belts mix high-rise capital with villages that sold land but keep caste panchayats and fields at the edge.
- **Census towns are administratively rural and functionally urban:** workshops, warehouses, and denser streets without municipal services.
- Srinivas's village is tied to town markets; Marriott's interactional caste now also happens in factory canteens and urban neighbourhoods.
- Kerala's town-village mix and Punjab's industrial villages show agriculture and industry on the same road.

- Reverse and circular migration during 2020 made the continuum visible as a single labour system.

Why it matters

- Policy that funds only 'pure' village or 'pure' city misses the peri-urban poor.
- Beteille's civilisational values are not parked only in villages; the continuum carries hierarchy into the town.

Flow diagram

Village -> Census town peri-urban
Census town peri-urban -> Municipal city
Circular migrants -> Village
Circular migrants -> Municipal city

Conclusion

Rural and urban in India are poles of a continuum of work, kinship, and governance. **Census towns**, peri-urban NCR, and migrant corridors are the examples that make the concept concrete.

Facts & figures

Census towns

Settlements that meet urban criteria but remain panchayat-governed.

Rao

Indian urban studies stressing village-city social continuity.

NCR fringe

Villages absorbed into real-estate and service economies while keeping rural institutions.

Circular migrants

Workers who socially inhabit both poles in one year.

Redfield

Folk-urban contrast later used as a continuum rather than a break.

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