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Q4(b)

Explain the implications and the impact of globalization in situating the changing agrarian class structure in India

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Social Classes in India

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

Core demand of the question

- Explain the implications and impact of globalization on the changing agrarian class structure in India
- Treat the question's 'India' as India
- Use **Desai**, **Thorner**-type class maps, and post-1991 farm change

Revision summary

Older maps of landlord, peasant and labourer still organise Indian villages.

Post-1991 globalisation tied farms to volatile prices, corporate inputs and contracts.

Rich peasants in irrigated belts commercialised; marginal households mixed wages and migration.

Class conflict now includes firms and the state, not only the village landlord.

Caste and gender continue to sort owners from labourers.

Introduction

Globalisation here means the post-1991 opening of trade, corporate input markets, retail, and land to new capital, together with a thinner developmental state in agriculture. Agrarian class structure did not vanish. It was recast around commercial crops, **contract farming**, and footloose labour.

Body

The older class map

- A. R. **Desai** and Daniel **Thorner**-type maps distinguished landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants, and landless labourers.
- Land reform and the Green Revolution strengthened a dominant-caste rich-peasant layer in many irrigated belts more than they created an equal family-farm India.
- Caste still sorted who was labourer and who was owner, which Beteille's overlap of caste, class, and power already showed.

What globalisation did to that map

- Cheap imports, price volatility, and corporate seeds, chemicals, and procurement tied surplus households to global value chains.
- **Contract farming** and supermarket standards create a layer of growers who look independent but are budgeted by firms.

- A rentier and absentee class grows where urban money leases land around cities, while actual tilling is done by migrants and women.
- Landless and marginal households mix farm wages with construction, schemes, and circular migration, so the 'peasant' is often a labouring household with a plot.

Implications

- Class conflict shifts from classic tenant-versus-zamindar to farmer-versus-state-and-company on prices, and labourer-versus-farmer on wages.
- **Regional divergence widens:** export horticulture belts versus rainfed distress belts.
- Yogendra Singh's modernizing tradition appears as caste farmer unions using courts, media, and highways.
- Operation Barga-type tenant security matters more, not less, when land is a financial asset, because unrecorded tillers lose first.

Impact on structure, stated plainly

- **Polarisation at the ends:** a thinner commercial elite and a larger labouring mass, with a squeezed middle peasantry in many regions.
- Feminisation of field work where men migrate.
- **New intermediaries:** input dealers, cold-store owners, and labour contractors, not only village moneylenders.

Flow diagram

Trade firms contract farming -> Commercial rich peasants
 Trade firms contract farming -> Migrant landless labour
 Trade firms contract farming -> Squeezed middle peasantry
 Commercial rich peasants -> New agrarian class structure
 Migrant landless labour -> New agrarian class structure
 Squeezed middle peasantry -> New agrarian class structure

Conclusion

Globalisation did not abolish Indian agrarian classes. It commercialised the rich-peasant core, casualised the labouring poor, and inserted firms and urban capital into the village surplus chain.

Facts & figures

Desai

Agrarian India as class structure, not a harmonious peasant community.

Thorner

Malik, kisan and mazdoor type distinctions widely used in Indian agrarian sociology.

1991 reforms

Trade and investment opening that recast input, output and land markets.

Contract farming

Firm-controlled growing that can freeze growers as price-takers.

Circular labour

Village class now includes households whose main wage is urban-rural sojourning.

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