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Q6(c)

Critically examine the relevance of development planning in India

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Visions of Social Change in India

Visions of Social Change in India: Idea of development planning and mixed economy; Constitution, law and social change; Education and social change.

Core demand of the question

- **State what development planning meant in India:** Five-Year Plans, mixed economy, state investment
- Examine relevance after liberalisation and **NITI Aayog**
- **Be critical:** achievements, failures, and why some **planning** still matters

Revision summary

Planning meant Five-Year Plans, public investment and a mixed economy.

It built industry and science and left caste-agrarian power under-attacked.

Desai read it as bourgeois-state **planning**.

NITI Aayog replaced the Commission but missions and state plans continue.

Climate, health and equity still require democratic **planning**, not only markets.

Introduction

Development **planning** in India was the **Nehruvian bet** that a mixed economy, Five-Year Plans, and public investment in steel, dams and IITs could build a national productive base and reduce poverty. **NITI Aayog** replaced the **Planning Commission** in 2015. The question is not nostalgia. It is whether a society this unequal still needs a public map of investment, or only markets and schemes.

Body**What planning did and did not do**

Planning created a heavy-industry and scientific infrastructure, a language of balanced regional growth, and anti-poverty programmes. **A. R. Desai** criticised it as **planning** for a bourgeois state that left agrarian class power intact. Licence-permit raj and public-sector inefficiency were real. Green Revolution **planning** raised grain and stratified the village. Caste and gender were thin in early plan documents.

After 1991, indicative **planning** shrank. Growth accelerated in services and some industry; inequality and informality remained. **NITI Aayog** is a **think-tank and competitive-federalism** body, not a Commission that allocates Plan funds. States still plan; the Union still runs missions. So **planning** did not die. It **changed form**.

Relevance now

Climate, urban infrastructure, health, and a just energy transition cannot be left only to firms. COVID showed the need for public capacity. Caste-class targeting of health and education still needs a map, which is **planning** by another name. The risk of NITI-style **planning** is **rankings without redistribution**. The risk of old **planning** is rigidity. Relevance lies in **democratic, ecological, federal planning**-closer to FRA consent and panchayat lists than to a closed Yojana Bhavan.

Planning also names **who is the public**. Five-Year Plans spoke of the poor as targets; NITI dashboards speak of states as competitors. Both can hide caste and gender unless the plan is forced to list them. **S. C. Dube** and village studies showed why a national plan fails when it ignores local structure. Relevance today is therefore not a return to licence raj. It is a public investment map for health, skills (NEP), energy and urban services that is **open to Gram Sabha and legislative audit**.

Critically, **planning** remains relevant as **coordination and equity**. It is obsolete as a fantasy of total state control of prices and licences.

Flow diagram

Five-Year Plans -> Mixed economy base
1991 reforms -> NITI competitive federalism competitive federalism
Mixed economy base -> Still need public coordination
NITI competitive federalism -> Still need public coordination

Conclusion

Indian development **planning** built a public productive base and failed to undo agrarian and caste inequality. After 1991 and **NITI Aayog** it is no longer a Soviet-style command system. It remains relevant for climate, infrastructure and redistribution if it is federal and rights-based.

Facts & figures

Planning Commission

1950-2014 body that framed Five-Year Plans and Plan assistance to states.

NITI Aayog 2015

Replacement think-tank; cooperative and competitive federalism without Plan transfers.

A. R. Desai

Marxist critique of Indian planning as compatible with dominant class power.