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Q5(d)

Discuss the changing nature of political elites in India.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Rural and Agrarian transformation in India

Rural and Agrarian transformation in India: Programmes of rural development, Community Development Programme, cooperatives, poverty alleviation schemes; Green revolution and social change; Changing modes of production in Indian agriculture; Problems of rural labour, bondage, migration.

Core demand of the question

- Define political elites as those who regularly take binding decisions
- **Show the old Congress-era elite and what changed:** regional, OBC, business, media, and dynasty
- Use **Kothari**, Rudolphs, **Mandal**, and contemporary illustrations

Revision summary

Political elites are regular decision-makers in parties and the state.

Kothari's Congress system centred a professional and upper-caste mediating elite.

Mandal and regional parties diversified caste and linguistic composition.

Post-1991 capital and media reshaped recruitment and funding.

Women and informal labour remain weakly present inside the elite.

Introduction

Political elites are the relatively small set of people who **regularly shape binding decisions** in parties, ministries, state capitals and now in business-media nexuses. Independent India's elite was never a closed European aristocracy. It has still changed in **social composition and in how power is organised**.

Body**The older pattern**

Rajni Kothari's Congress system described a centrist, English-educated, often upper-caste professional and landed elite that mediated factions. **André Beteille** and others noted the overlap of caste status, land and office. The Rudolphs showed tradition modernising as caste federations entered this elite as brokers rather than as revolution.

What has changed

Mandal and state-level OBC parties brought **backward-caste elites** into chief ministerships and cabinets. Regional parties produced linguistic and state elites. Business wealth after 1991 entered politics more openly through funding, media and candidate selection. Dynastic succession sits beside self-made contractors. Hindu nationalist organisation created a parallel elite of swayamsevak and communication managers. Women remain under-represented except where dynasty or reservation operates. Dalit and Adivasi elites exist (BSP's rise and plateau, ST leaders in the Northeast and central India) but rarely command the core of

capital.

The elite is **more plural in caste and region, more capital-intensive, and more media-facing**. It is not a simple replacement of Brahmin-Kayastha lawyers by farmers. Corporate and professional layers still matter in the Union. Local elites in panchayats are a different storey of the same building after the **73rd Amendment**.

- **Changing nature, then:** from a relatively coherent Congress-era professional-landed centre to a **federal bazaar of caste blocs, regional bosses, business and organisational cadres**, still male-dominated and still distant from informal labour.

Flow diagram

Congress professional landed elite -> Regional OBC Dalit elites

Congress professional landed elite -> Business media money

Party organisations -> Recomposed political elite

Regional OBC Dalit elites -> Recomposed political elite

Business media money -> Recomposed political elite

Conclusion

Political elites in India have widened by caste and region since **Mandal** and the rise of state parties, and they have grown closer to business and media after 1991. The older professional-landed Congress type has not vanished; it has been crowded. Labouring classes still enter mainly as voters, not as the elite itself.

Facts & figures

Mandal

OBC reservation politics that recast who could claim ministerial and administrative elite status.

Kothari

Congress system as a centrist elite mediating factions rather than a two-party class cleavage.

73rd Amendment

Created a large local elected elite, including reserved women and SC/ST seats.