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Q5(b)

Is there a connection between labour migration and informal sector? Justify your answer with reference to Indian context.

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

- Argue that labour migration and the informal sector are linked in India
- Use **circular migration**, contractors, construction, garments, domestic work, and platforms
- Justify with structure, not a one-line yes

Revision summary

Most Indian labour migrants enter informal work, not a formal citadel.

Contractors, advances and caste-kin networks organise the move.

Construction, garments, domestic work and platforms illustrate the link.

COVID return walks showed the city does not socially incorporate this labour.

Informality and migration reproduce each other.

Introduction

Yes, there is a tight connection. Most internal migrants in India do not enter a formal factory with a provident fund. They enter **construction, workshops, domestic service, vending, kilns and now platforms-the informal sector**. Migration supplies flexible labour; informality is how that labour is used without social security.

Body**How the link works**

Jan Breman's circular migrants move between village and work site without becoming a stable urban proletariat. Labour contractors recruit by kin and caste, pay advances, and keep people outside the regular roll. That is the same dualism **Holmström** described inside industry. The informal sector is not a traditional leftover; it is how Indian capitalism uses **migrant flexibility**.

Construction in Mumbai, Delhi and Gulf-oriented Kerala streams; garments in Tiruppur and NCR; domestic work in every metro; and seasonal agriculture in Punjab all rest on this link. The COVID-19 lockdown made the connection visible when informal migrants walked home because the city had no claim on them.

Justification in the Indian context

If migration went mainly into organised public-sector jobs, informality would be a side issue. The employment structure is the opposite. Even registered firms subcontract. **e-SHRAM** and One Nation One Ration are attempts to follow the migrant inside informality, which admits the link. Caste and region organise niches: eastern India to western construction, Adivasi streams to brick kilns.

The connection is two-way. Informal demand pulls migrants. Migrant oversupply keeps work informal by weakening unions. Village land, however small, subsidises urban cheap labour-**A. R. Desai's** political economy still holds.

- **So the justification is structural:** India's informal sector is a **migrant labour regime**, not a separate traditional economy.

Flow diagram

Village labour surplus -> Circular migration
Circular migration -> Informal construction services
Contractors -> Informal construction services
Informal construction services -> Flexible cheap labour

Conclusion

Labour migration and the informal sector are connected because migrants are recruited into unsecured work through contractors, and because firms stay informal by using that circulating labour. Indian cities and harvests run on that link.

Facts & figures

Circular migration

Repeated village-work site movement without permanent urban settlement or formal status.

COVID-19 migrant crisis

Mass return of informal workers when urban livelihoods and transport collapsed.

e-SHRAM

National database aimed at unorganised workers, many of them migrants.