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Q4(b)

"Industrial class structure is a function of social structure of Indian society." Do you agree with this statement? Analyze

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · 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

- State what industrial class structure means (owners, managers, formal labour, informal labour)
- Show how Indian social structure-caste, kin, village, gender, region-shapes recruitment, unions and the informal majority
- **Agree with qualifications:** capitalism reworks caste; it does not become a pure class society
- Cite Holmstrom, Sheth, Ramaswamy, Desai, Breman

Revision summary

Indian industrial classes include owners, managers, a small formal workforce and a large informal majority.

Recruitment, unions and job queues follow caste, kinship, language and sending villages.

Breman, Holmström and Ramaswamy show particularism inside industry, not a pure proletariat.

Owners too are often community-based business groups.

Capitalism reworks these ties but has not replaced them with a casteless class structure.

Introduction

Industrial class structure is the pattern of **owners, managers, regular workers and a vast irregular workforce** around factories, mills and now platforms. In India that pattern is **a function of the wider social structure**, not a carbon copy of nineteenth-century Manchester. Caste, kinship, language and the village labour-sending household organise who stands on which shop floor.

Body

Why the statement is largely true

A. R. Desai expected industrialisation to push class contradiction forward. What arrived was a **dual labour market**. **Jan Breman** described **footloose labour: circular migrants, contractors, and the absence of a stable proletariat**. **Mark Holmström** showed how "the town" of organised industry still ran on particularistic ties. **E. A. Ramaswamy** and union studies found **caste and region inside the union**, not only against it. **D. N. Dhanagare** and others noted that the industrial working class was often **upper-shudra or specific jatis** in a given mill town, with Dalits in the hardest informal jobs.

Recruitment through sardars, kin chains from one district, and language clusters (Bhojpuri in Mumbai's informal economy, Telugu in construction) is social structure at work. Women are concentrated in garments, electronics assembly and home-based piecework-**gendered class**. Public-sector "labour aristocracy" reproduced the old middle-caste/upper-caste schooling advantage. **N. R. Sheth's** factory studies already showed that Indian industrial relations carry community and paternalism, not only a wage bargain.

- **Platform gig work is a new chapter of the same book:** algorithms look class-neutral; entry still runs on a smartphone, a deposit, and a caste-region network in the city. The **unorganised majority** (NCEUS) is the industrial class structure that census "workers in industry" understate.

Qualifications

Industry also **reworks** social structure. A badge, a PF number, and a strike can create class solidarity that caste forbids in the village well. Automobile and IMT unions have at times spoken a wage language across jati. **New economic policy casualised even this: contract labour inside the factory wall blurs class. Capitalists themselves are not a casteless bourgeoisie; business communities** (Marwari, Chettiar, Patel, new OBC capital) show social structure on the owners' side too. Family firms use kinship as a trust technology that textbooks call "culture" and accountants call control.

Public-sector steel and coal towns created a more classical working class for a generation; privatisation and contract mining then **re-informalised** it. So the function of social structure is historically timed, not a timeless essence.

- **So one should agree:** Indian industrial classes are functions of caste-kin-region-gender structure and of capitalist accumulation. To say they are only a function of social structure would deny the factory's own discipline. To say they are only Marxian classes would deny the contractor, the jati, and the village.

Flow diagram

Caste kin gender region -> Recruitment and contracting
 Industrial capital -> Recruitment and contracting
 Recruitment and contracting -> Formal workers
 Recruitment and contracting -> Informal / footloose labour
 Recruitment and contracting -> Community-based owners

Conclusion

- **Yes, with a hinge:** industrial class structure in India is produced by capitalism operating through caste, kinship, gender and migration. Formal workers, informal majority and community-based owners are the resulting map.

Facts & figures

Jan Breman

Footloose labour: circular migration and informality as the modal industrial condition.

Mark Holmström

Industry and inequality in Indian town studies; organised sector as a minority citadel.

Contract labour

Post-liberalisation core-periphery inside the same plant; weakens classical working-class formation.

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