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Q5(a)

'The transfer of land from cultivating to the non-cultivating owners is bringing about transformation in Indian society.'
Justify your answer by giving suitable illustrations.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Perspectives on the study of Indian society

Perspectives on the study of Indian society: Indology (G.S. Ghurye); Structural functionalism (M.N. Srinivas); Marxist sociology (A.R. Desai).

Core demand of the question

- Explain the shift of land from cultivating peasants to non-cultivating owners
- **Give illustrations:** absentee landlords, urban investors, **reverse tenancy**, peri-urban real estate, **benami**
- **Show social transformation:** class, caste, labour, village power

Revision summary

Land is moving from tillers to rentiers, urban buyers, and machine-owning lessees.

Peri-urban real estate, **benami**, absentee title and **reverse tenancy** are the main paths.

Class polarises; caste elites often convert land into urban capital while labour stays land-poor.

Women's field rights and village agrarian identity weaken.

Acquisition law mediates price more than it reverses the social shift.

Introduction

When title to land moves from those who **plough** to those who **collect rent, interest or plot value**, the village changes its spine. This is not only the old zamindar story. It is also the **builder, the NRI, the commission agent, and the machine-owning farmer** who leases in. Indian society is being recast around that transfer.

Body**How land leaves the cultivator**

Colonial settlements and post-independence ceilings never fully locked land to the tiller. **Benami**, gifts to kin, and temple or trust holding kept large owners alive. After the 1990s, **peri-urban real estate** around Delhi, Bengaluru, Pune and Hyderabad converted cultivating families into one-time cash sellers-and often into labour on what was their field. **Absentee ownership** by professionals and politicians is common in canal belts. **Reverse tenancy** in Punjab and west UP lets small owners lease to tractor-capitalists; the cultivator of record is not the cultivator of fact.

Contract farming and warehouse finance can similarly separate **control** from the household that still lives in the village.

Social transformation

- **Class:** a rentier and speculative stratum grows; petty peasants become wage or gig labour.
 - Caste:** dominant landed castes may cash out into education and urban property while still commanding the panchayat; Dalit labour remains land-poor. **Gender:** women who worked the field lose customary use when a plot becomes a layout. **Politics:** farmer identity becomes a claim on MSP and compensation more than on tilling. Village studies after Srinivas already saw non-cultivating power; the scale is now metropolitan.
 - **Illustrations:** Greater Noida and Gurugram farmland; SEZ and highway takings; coastal tourism plots; and mining belts where Adivasi cultivators become a displaced proletariat.
- RFCTLARR 2013** tries to price this; it does not stop the class shift.

Flow diagram

Cultivating household -> Sale lease acquisition
Sale lease acquisition -> Non-cultivating owner
Non-cultivating owner -> Rent speculation reverse tenancy
Cultivating household -> Labour and migration

Conclusion

Land moving to non-cultivating owners turns peasants into labour, villages into land banks, and caste power into real-estate power. The transformation is already visible on the urban fringe and in **reverse tenancy** belts.

Facts & figures

Reverse tenancy

Small owners lease land to larger, machine-owning farmers; common in Green Revolution tracts.

RFCTLARR 2013

Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, **Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act**.

Benami

Holdings in others' names used to evade ceilings and hide non-cultivating control.

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