

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

Sociology Optional Works and Economic Life

Paper 1 · Unit 6

How work has been organised across slave, feudal and capitalist societies, why the formal/informal line keeps moving, and what alienation and informalisation actually mean.

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UPSC SYLLABUS

- (a) Social organization of work in different types of society - slave society, feudal society, industrial /capitalist society.
(b) Formal and informal organization of work. (c) Labour and society.

What Sociology Means by Work

Work is not the same as employment. Sociology defines work as the carrying out of tasks requiring mental and physical effort to produce goods and services meeting human needs, whether paid or not. That definition is deliberately wide, because it lets in domestic labour, care and subsistence agriculture, which the economist's category of employment excludes.

- The social organisation of work means the arrangement of who does what, under whose authority, with what technology, on what terms, and how the surplus is claimed. That is the object of this unit. When a question asks about 'organisation of work in X society', it is asking about the relation between the producer, the means of production and the surplus, not about technology.
- Karl Polanyi (The Great Transformation, 1944) supplies the founding move: in all societies before the nineteenth century the economy was embedded in social relations, organised through reciprocity, redistribution and householding. The market society reversed it, so that social relations became embedded in the economic system. His related concept, fictitious commodities, holds that land, labour and money were never produced for sale, and treating labour as a commodity means treating human activity itself as a thing, which is why society generates a counter-movement of protection, his double movement.
- Mark Granovetter's embeddedness argument (1985) is Polanyi's insight recast for modern economies: economic action remains embedded in networks of social relations even in advanced capitalism, against both the undersocialised view of neoclassical economics and the oversocialised view that norms determine everything.
- The classical three-way split you will use throughout: Marx sees work as the human essence, so alienated labour is a distortion of species-being; Durkheim sees the division of labour as the source of organic solidarity, with anomie and forced division as pathological forms rather than intrinsic ones; Weber sees the rationalisation of work as the master trend, with the calling secularised into disciplined labour and eventually the iron cage.
- Durkheim's abnormal forms are underused and score well: the anomic division of labour, where rapid change leaves rules and moral regulation unformed; the forced division of labour, where the distribution of tasks does not correspond to the distribution of natural talents, because inherited wealth and external inequality corrupt the contract; and poor coordination. His argument is that the division of labour integrates society only when it is spontaneous, that is, only when external inequality is removed. Distinguish this clearly from Marx: for Durkheim the pathology is regulatory and curable, for Marx it is structural and terminal.

KEY TERMS

Embeddedness — Polanyi: the economy is contained within, and constrained by, social relations; the market society inverts this.

Fictitious commodity — Polanyi: land, labour and money were not produced for sale, so their commodification is a social fiction with real destructive effects.

Forced division of labour — Durkheim: a division of tasks distorted by inherited inequality rather than natural aptitude, producing conflict rather than solidarity.

Slave Society

In a slave society the direct producer is himself property. This is the defining feature and everything else follows from it: the worker is not a party to a contract, he is an object of ownership, and the surplus is extracted not from his labour alone but from his person.

- The organisation of work: total appropriation. The master owns the labourer, the labour, the product and the offspring. There is no wage, no exchange, and no limit set by contract, only the limits set by the slave's survival and by the master's calculation of replacement cost.
- Moses Finley's essential distinction (Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology) is between societies with slaves, where slavery exists but is marginal to production, and genuine slave societies, where slave labour is the basis of the surplus. He counted only a handful of the latter in history, including classical Greece, Roman Italy, and the plantation systems of Brazil, the Caribbean and the American South. Use this to avoid the beginner's error of calling every society with slaves a slave society.
- Orlando Patterson (Slavery and Social Death, 1982) is the strongest sociological account and defines slavery not by property but by three elements: the slave suffers natal alienation, being severed from all ties of birth and descent so that kinship confers no rights; the slave lives in a condition of generalised dishonour; and the relation is one of permanent, violent domination of a person without power. Slavery is thus social death, not merely unfree labour. This is the highest-value citation in the section.
- Marx's placement: in the slave mode of production, the entire labour of the slave appears as unpaid labour, since even the portion that reproduces his own subsistence looks like the master's gift. Under wage labour the reverse illusion holds, where all labour appears paid. That symmetry is worth writing out.
- Why productivity was low and technology stagnant: the slave has no interest in the product, so surplus is extracted by direct supervision and force, which caps the complexity of the tasks that can be assigned. Slaves were characteristically set to tasks that were simple, repetitive and gang-organised. Marx's observation that the slave will damage the instruments given to him captures the incentive problem.
- Eugene Genovese (Roll, Jordan, Roll) documents the paternalist ideology of the American South, where masters claimed reciprocal obligation, and shows how the slaves turned that claimed reciprocity into a set of customary rights they could hold masters to. This matters because it establishes that even total domination is negotiated, not simply imposed.
- Eric Williams (Capitalism and Slavery, 1944) argues that Atlantic slavery and the triangular trade financed British industrialisation, and that abolition came when slavery ceased to be economically indispensable, not when moral sentiment matured. The thesis is contested by economic historians, so present it as a claim with a debate around it, not a settled fact.
- The critical comparison with feudalism, which the 2014 question demands: the slave is owned, the serf is bound. The slave has no means of production and no legal personality; the serf holds a plot, produces his own subsistence, has customary rights and a recognised (if inferior) legal status. Under slavery there is no visible division between necessary and surplus labour, since all of it belongs to the master; under serfdom the division is visible in time and space, because the serf works his own strip on some days and the lord's demesne on others. Both extract surplus by extra-economic coercion, which is what separates them from capitalism.

KEY TERMS

Natal alienation — Patterson: the slave's severance from all birth ties, so that ancestry and descent confer no claims.

Social death — Patterson: slavery as permanent violent domination of a natively alienated and generally dishonoured person.

Extra-economic coercion — Marx: extraction of surplus by direct force or legal compulsion rather than through the labour market.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- What are the distinctive features of social organization of work in slave society? How is it different from feudal society? [2014]

Feudal Society

Feudalism organises work around the manor and around a relation of personal dependence. The serf is not free to leave and not free of obligation, but he is not owned. He possesses his means of subsistence, which is why the lord must use extra-economic coercion to obtain a surplus at all.

- Marc Bloch (Feudal Society) characterises the order by the subject peasantry, the widespread use of the service tenement (the fief) in place of a wage, the supremacy of a specialised warrior class, ties of obedience and protection binding man to man, fragmentation of authority, and the survival of kinship and the state within it. Note that Bloch is a historian of the Annales school, and cite him for the description rather than the sociology.
- The mechanism of surplus extraction, from Marx's Capital Volume III, moves through three forms of rent: labour rent, where the serf works so many days on the lord's demesne (corvee); rent in kind, where he hands over a share of his own produce; and money rent, which presupposes markets and already signals dissolution. The sequence matters because it tracks the progressive commodification of the relation.
- The key structural point, and the one most aspirants miss: the serf possesses his means of production. He holds land, tools and family labour, and can subsist without the lord. Therefore the lord cannot rely on economic necessity to extract labour, and must rely on jurisdiction, custom, military power and the law. Under capitalism the worker has been separated from the means of production, so hunger does the coercing and no visible force is required. That contrast is the core of any feudal-versus-capitalist question.
- Organisation of work on the manor: production for use rather than exchange; a low and locally fixed division of labour; the unity of agriculture and handicraft in the household; the guild system regulating urban crafts with restricted entry, fixed quality, fixed prices and the master-journeyman-apprentice ladder; and work rhythms set by season, daylight and the ritual calendar rather than the clock. Weber's contrast is that traditional work is oriented to a customary standard of living, so higher piece rates could reduce the hours worked rather than increase them.
- The transition debate, worth one line if the question permits: Maurice Dobb located the dissolution of feudalism in internal contradictions and class struggle between lords and peasants; Paul Sweezy located it in an external solvent, the growth of long-distance trade and the money economy; Robert Brenner shifted the ground again to the class structure of agrarian property relations, arguing that the different outcomes in England and France depended on the balance of class forces on the land, not on trade or demography.
- Weber's contribution is the prebendal and patrimonial character of feudal administration: the fief is granted in return for service and gradually appropriated by the holder, which is precisely the opposite of the

bureaucratic separation of the official from the means of administration. Feudalism is thus, for Weber, a form of traditional domination, and this is the bridge into Unit 7.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Distinguish between the social organization of work in feudal society and in capitalist society. [2015]

Industrial and Capitalist Society

Do not treat industrial and capitalist as synonyms. Industrialism is a technological order, the application of inanimate power to production; capitalism is a property order, the private ownership of the means of production and the sale of labour power for a wage. The USSR was industrial but not capitalist; merchant capitalism was capitalist but not industrial.

- The founding condition, and the point on which any capitalism answer turns, is the separation of the worker from the means of production. Marx calls its historical creation primitive accumulation, whose classic instance is enclosure. Once the producer owns nothing but his labour power, he must sell it, and the surplus can be extracted through a free contract with no coercion visible on its face. This is why exploitation under capitalism is invisible in a way that corvée never was.
- Marx's central distinction, worth stating precisely: the worker does not sell labour, he sells labour power, the capacity to work, for a period. The capitalist pays its value, that is, the cost of reproducing the worker. But labour power in use produces more value than it costs. The difference is surplus value. Necessary labour reproduces the wage; surplus labour produces the profit.
- The 2018 question on the limits of the working day points to Capital Volume I. Absolute surplus value is increased by extending the working day; relative surplus value is increased by cutting necessary labour time through productivity gains. Marx's dictum on the struggle over the day: between equal rights, force decides. The length of the working day is not settled by economics but by collective struggle, which is why factory legislation is a class outcome, not a technical one.
- Weber's account of the same order is entirely different: rational capitalism rests on the rational organisation of formally free labour, systematic bookkeeping, the calculable legal order, the separation of business from household, and the market. The Protestant ethic supplies the disciplined orientation to work as a calling, and once the machine is built the religious support falls away, leaving the iron cage. Weber's capitalism is defined by calculability; Marx's by exploitation.
- Durkheim's reading: industrialism is the growth of the division of labour driven by rising dynamic density, and its normal effect is organic solidarity, interdependence born of difference. Industrial conflict is not intrinsic to the system for Durkheim, it is the symptom of an anomic transition or a forced division, and the remedy is moral regulation through occupational associations. This is the sharpest available contrast with Marx and examiners reward it.
- The trajectory of the capitalist organisation of work, which answers 'trace the changing nature of work' and 'nature of work in industrial society': the putting-out system and merchant capital; the factory, which concentrated workers under one roof primarily for supervision and discipline as much as for machinery; scientific management and the assembly line; the human relations correction; post-Fordist flexibility; and the current platform and gig regime. Present it as a sequence of answers to one persistent problem: how to convert purchased labour power into actual labour.
- That problem has a name worth using. The employer buys a capacity, not a quantity of work, so there is always an indeterminacy of labour, a gap between the capacity purchased and the effort delivered. Every

system in this section, from Taylor's stopwatch to Ford's line to Mayo's supervisor to the platform's algorithm, is a strategy for closing that gap. Use this to give a scattered question a spine.

- The 2022 question on degradation of work asks for Marx plus Braverman: for Marx, machinery inverts the relation so the worker serves the machine, detail labour cripples the worker into a fragment of a man, and the collective productive power appears as the power of capital. Harry Braverman (Labor and Monopoly Capital, 1974) updates this into the deskilling thesis, and it is the standard answer, developed in the section on formal organisation below.

KEY TERMS

Labour power — The capacity to work, which is what the worker sells; its value is the cost of the worker's reproduction, and it produces more than it costs.

Primitive accumulation — Marx: the historical separation of producers from the means of production, creating a class with nothing to sell but labour power.

Indeterminacy of labour — The gap between the labour power an employer buys and the effort actually delivered, which every system of work organisation tries to close.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Describe the nature of social organization of work in industrial society. [2016]
- Trace the changing nature of organisation of work in capitalist society over the years. [2017]
- Discuss the nature of social organisation of work in capitalist society with reference to the 'Limits of the working day'. [2018]
- What characterizes degradation of work in capitalist society according to Marx? [2022]

Scientific Management, Fordism and Post-Fordism

These are three successive answers to the indeterminacy problem. Taylor tried to remove the worker's discretion, Ford removed the worker's pace, and post-Fordism tried to reclaim the worker's discretion because Taylor and Ford had made production too rigid to sell.

- Frederick Winslow Taylor (The Principles of Scientific Management, 1911) attacked what he called systematic soldiering, the deliberate restriction of output by workers. His method: study the task scientifically through time and motion analysis, find the one best way, select and train the worker scientifically rather than let him choose his method, divide the work so that management takes over all the planning, and pay by a differential piece rate so effort tracks output.
- Taylorism's real sociological content is the separation of conception from execution. The knowledge that was in the craftsman's head is transferred to the planning department, and the worker is left with execution alone. Braverman's whole argument rests on this: Taylorism is not a technique of efficiency, it is a strategy of control, and its purpose is to make labour cheap and replaceable by destroying the craft monopoly of knowledge.
- Taylorism's assumptions and failures: it treats the worker as an isolated economic man responding to money alone, ignores the informal group entirely, generates monotony and turnover, and provoked such resistance that it was investigated by the US Congress. Lenin admired it, which is a useful demonstration that Taylorism is a technique of industrialism rather than of capitalism specifically.
- Henry Ford added the moving assembly line at Highland Park in 1913, plus the standardised product, interchangeable parts, and the machine-paced line. The line does what Taylor's supervisor could not: it

removes the worker's control over pace, making effort structural rather than negotiated. Ford's \$5 day of 1914 is the other half, since a doubled wage was needed to hold workers in jobs made intolerable, and it also made them consumers of the cars they built.

- Fordism as a term is Gramsci's, from the Prison Notebooks essay Americanism and Fordism, and his insight is that it is not merely a production technique but a whole social regime, requiring a new type of worker and a new morality, which is why Ford policed his workers' private lives through his Sociological Department. Fordism as an economic order means mass production tied to mass consumption, sustained by collective bargaining and welfare, which the Regulation school (Aglietta, Lipietz) theorises as a regime of accumulation.
- Post-Fordism arises when saturated and fragmented markets punish rigidity. Piore and Sabel (The Second Industrial Divide, 1984) argue for flexible specialisation, where general-purpose machinery and multi-skilled workers produce varied goods in short runs. The Japanese model supplies the practice: just-in-time, kaizen, quality circles, team working and lean production (documented in Womack, Jones and Roos, The Machine That Changed the World, 1990).
- Post-Fordism has two readings, and a good answer gives both. The optimistic reading is re-skilling, autonomy and the end of the detail worker. The critical reading is that flexibility means insecurity: Atkinson's flexible firm model divides a protected, multi-skilled core from a numerically flexible periphery of temporary, part-time and subcontracted labour, so the gains go to the core and the risk is displaced onto the periphery. Team working and quality circles can be read as a more intensive form of control, with peer surveillance replacing the foreman.
- George Ritzer's McDonaldisation (1993) is the counter-evidence that Taylorism never died: efficiency, calculability, predictability and control through non-human technology, extended from the factory to service work. Its irrationality of rationality is Weber's iron cage arriving in the fast-food kitchen and the call centre, and it is the natural bridge to the gig economy, where the algorithm is a Taylorist supervisor at scale.

KEY TERMS

Separation of conception from execution — Taylor's core move, transferring knowledge of the work from the worker to management; Braverman's basis for the deskilling thesis.

Flexible specialisation — Piore and Sabel: multi-skilled labour and flexible machinery producing varied goods in short runs, in place of mass standardisation.

Flexible firm — Atkinson's model of a secure multi-skilled core surrounded by a numerically flexible, insecure periphery.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- The increasing importance of the tertiary sector has weakened the formal organization of work in recent times. Examine the statement. [2015]

Formal and Informal Organization of Work

The distinction has two quite different meanings and conflating them is the commonest disaster in this unit. Inside an enterprise, formal organisation is the official structure of rules and roles while informal organisation is the spontaneous network of groups and norms that grows within it, which is the Mayo and Barnard sense. In the labour market, formal work means regulated, contractual, protected employment while informal work means unregulated and unprotected, which is the Hart and ILO sense. Read the question to see which one is being asked.

- Formal organisation in the first sense is Weber's bureaucracy applied to production: explicit rules, hierarchy of offices, written records, functional specialisation, impersonality, appointment on qualification, and careers. Its logic is calculability, and the factory, the corporation and the modern government department all share it.
- Informal organisation within the enterprise was discovered at the Hawthorne Works of Western Electric in Chicago between 1924 and 1932. The findings, reported in Roethlisberger and Dickson's *Management and the Worker* (1939) and interpreted by Elton Mayo, founded the Human Relations school. The Relay Assembly Test Room found output rising whatever was done to the lighting and rest breaks, which pointed to attention and group formation rather than physical conditions. The Bank Wiring Observation Room is the more important result: the men enforced their own output norm against management's incentive scheme, punishing both the rate-buster who worked too fast and the chiseler who worked too slow, through ridicule and binging. The informal group, not the wage, set output.
- Mayo's conclusions: the worker is a social being, not Taylor's economic man; output is a function of group norms and social satisfaction; informal groups exercise strong control over members; and management must therefore attend to sentiment and communication. Chester Barnard (*The Functions of the Executive*, 1938) makes the theoretical point that informal organisation is necessary to the formal, since it supplies the communication, cohesion and willingness to serve that the rules cannot generate.
- The critique of Human Relations, which any Mayo answer needs: it is managerialist, treating conflict as a failure of communication rather than a clash of interests; it ignores unions, the wider labour market and the wage relation entirely; the methodology of the Hawthorne experiments has been challenged repeatedly, and the very term Hawthorne effect, meaning the change produced by being observed, was coined later by Landsberger, not by Mayo. Marxists read Human Relations as a subtler technique of control: Taylorism disciplined the body, Human Relations enlisted the sentiments.
- Braverman's deskilling thesis sits here: capitalism progressively degrades work by separating conception from execution, fragmenting tasks, and reducing the worker's skill, so that even clerical and service work is proletarianised. The objections are serious and you should carry them: Braverman ignores worker resistance, assumes management always succeeds, romanticises the craft past, and treats deskilling as the only strategy when responsible autonomy is another (Friedman).
- Michael Burawoy's *Manufacturing Consent* (1979) is the best answer to Braverman and the most sophisticated point in this section. Working on a shop floor, Burawoy asked not why workers resist but why they work as hard as they do. His answer: the game of making out, competing to beat the production quota, absorbs workers' energies and generates consent, because playing the game presupposes accepting its rules. Consent is manufactured on the shop floor itself, and the effect is to obscure and secure surplus value simultaneously.
- Informal work in the labour-market sense is treated in the next section, but note here how the two senses connect: informalisation transfers work out of formally organised enterprises into unregulated arrangements, so the formal/informal boundary within the firm becomes a boundary between firms and contracts. The 2021 work-from-home question is exactly this: remote work dissolved the spatial and temporal container that made an organisation formal, blurred work and home, weakened informal peer groups and union sociability, expanded algorithmic surveillance as a substitute for supervision, and left the formal contract intact while informalising the conditions of its performance. Add that it accelerated the class divide, since work from home was available to the service class and never to the manual and informal worker.

- For the 2012 question on formal and informal organisation and labour mobility: formal organisation aids mobility by making it rule-governed and credential-based, providing internal career ladders and portable certification, but it can also block mobility through rigid job classification and closure by credential. Informal organisation of work in the market sense severely limits mobility, since there is no ladder, no recognised certification, and recruitment runs through kin, caste and village networks, which reproduce ascriptive advantage. Informal organisation inside a firm cuts both ways: patronage networks can lift favourites and freeze outsiders.

Formal and informal organisation of work, in both senses

Basis	Formal organisation	Informal organisation
Origin	Deliberately designed and officially sanctioned	Emerges spontaneously from interaction
Structure	Hierarchy of offices, written rules, defined roles	Networks, cliques, friendship and kin ties
Basis of authority	Rational-legal, attached to the office	Personal influence, seniority, group standing
Regulation of output	Incentive schemes and supervision	Group norms; Bank Wiring Room's restriction of output
Communication	Prescribed channels, written, top-down	Grapevine, lateral, fast and unverifiable
Goals	Organisational goals	Member satisfaction, protection of the group
Chief theorist	Weber (bureaucracy), Taylor (scientific management)	Mayo and the Hawthorne studies, Barnard
Labour-market sense	Contract, regulated hours, social security, unions, legal recourse	No contract, no security, no recourse; Hart's informal sector
Indian illustration	Organised sector: public sector, banks, large manufacturing	Unorganised sector: construction, street vending, domestic work, home-based piecework

KEY TERMS

Informal organisation — The unofficial network of groups and norms arising within a formal structure, which regulates behaviour independently of the rules.

Restriction of output — The Bank Wiring Room finding that work groups enforce their own production norm against management incentives.

Making out — Burawoy: the shop-floor game of beating the quota, which generates consent by making workers accept the rules of production.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- How has the idea of 'Work from Home' forced us to redefine the formal and informal organization of work? [2021]
- How do formal and informal organisation of work influence labour's mobility? Explain with examples. [2012]
- What is formal organization? 'The growth of bureaucracy has resulted in extreme concentration of power at larger levels of social organization.' Discuss. [2011]
- Write short note on Human Relations School of Thought by Elton Mayo as a social organisation of work process in industry. [2010]

Alienation at Work

Alienation is Marx's, from the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, and it is an objective condition of the labour relation, not a feeling. This is the distinction on which most answers are lost: American industrial sociology converted it into a subjective attitude measurable by questionnaire, which is a different concept wearing the same name.

- Marx's four dimensions, and you must give all four. Alienation from the product, because what the worker makes confronts him as an alien object owned by another, and the more he produces the poorer he becomes. Alienation from the act of production, because the work is not his own, is external to him, is forced, so he is at home only when not working and feels himself only in his animal functions. Alienation from species-being, because free conscious creative activity is what distinguishes humans, and when labour becomes merely a means to physical existence, the human essence is reduced to an animal one. Alienation from other people, because the relation to others becomes competitive and instrumental, and the worker's product becomes another man's power over him.
- The cause is structural, not psychological: alienation follows from private property in the means of production and the division of labour, not from technology or from bad management. That is why, for Marx, no reform of the workplace can abolish it. It ends when the property relation ends.
- Melvin Seeman (On the Meaning of Alienation, 1959) recast it as five measurable subjective states: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement. This made alienation researchable and simultaneously severed it from Marx's theory, since Seeman's variants are attitudes that could in principle be relieved by job redesign.
- Robert Blauner (Alienation and Freedom, 1964) applied four of Seeman's dimensions, powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self-estrangement, across four industries defined by technology. His inverted U-curve is the finding to remember: alienation is low in craft printing where the worker controls the whole process, rises in textile machine-minding, peaks in automobile assembly where machine pacing and fragmentation are maximal, and declines again in continuous-process chemicals where automation restores responsibility, team work and control. His conclusion is that automation reverses alienation.
- Blauner's critique, which is more important than his finding: he makes alienation a function of technology, which is technological determinism and lets the property relation off entirely. His chemical workers may report satisfaction while remaining, in Marx's terms, fully alienated, since satisfaction with alienated conditions is exactly what Marx would predict from ideology. Blauner also studied only male manual workers in the United States, and his optimistic reading of automation ignores that it displaces workers rather than liberating them.
- Durkheim's anomie is not alienation and the confusion is common enough to be worth a line in your answer. Anomie is a deficit of regulation, too few norms constraining desire, and its cure is more moral regulation. Alienation is a condition of estrangement produced by the property relation, and its cure is the abolition of that relation. Anomie says the rules are missing; alienation says the rules are the problem.
- Arlie Hochschild's emotional labour (The Managed Heart, 1983) is the contemporary extension: in service work, the worker must manage feeling to produce a publicly observable display, so the commercialisation of feeling estranges the worker from her own emotions. Her flight attendants are alienated in a register Marx did not anticipate, because the raw material being processed is the self.
- The 2010 question quotes Marx's Manuscripts almost verbatim, on labour that mortifies the body and ruins the mind. Answer it by stating the four dimensions, giving Blauner and Seeman as the empirical afterlife of the concept, and then giving the critical evaluation, that Blauner's technology thesis and Human Relations

job redesign both treat symptoms, and that Burawoy's manufactured consent explains why alienated workers may nonetheless report satisfaction.

KEY TERMS

Species-being — Marx's *Gattungswesen*: the human capacity for free, conscious, creative production, which alienated labour reduces to a means of survival.

Inverted U-curve — Blauner: alienation rises from craft to machine-minding to assembly line, then falls under continuous-process automation.

Emotional labour — Hochschild: the management of feeling to produce a required display as part of paid work.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- "Work in capitalism is reduced to mere labour in which the individual does not develop freely his physical and mental energy and mortifies his body and ruins his mind." Critically evaluate. [2010]

The Informal Sector

The informal sector was named by Keith Hart, from fieldwork on low-income workers in Accra, in a 1971 paper published in 1973 as *Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana*. The ILO's Kenya mission report of 1972 popularised it. Hart's discovery was that the urban poor in the global South were not unemployed and waiting for modern jobs; they were intensely at work, in activities the statistics could not see.

- Defining features of informal work: ease of entry, reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership, small scale, labour-intensive and adapted technology, skills acquired outside the formal school system, and unregulated competitive markets. The negative definition matters more: no written contract, no social security, no protection of hours or minimum wage, no union, no legal recourse.
- The dualist assumption in the original formulation, that a modern formal sector and a traditional informal sector exist side by side and the former will eventually absorb the latter, has been comprehensively falsified. The formal sector did not absorb the informal; the informal sector grew, and grew fastest where capitalism was most dynamic.
- The subordination thesis is the correct position and the one to defend. The informal sector is not outside capitalism; it is integrated into it as its cheapest link. Subcontracting chains run from branded firms through contractors down to home-based piece workers; formal firms externalise risk and statutory obligation by informalising the bottom of the chain. This is the answer to the 2020 statement that capitalism has brought increasing informalisation of work: informalisation is not a survival of tradition, it is a product of the search for flexibility and cost, which is exactly what post-Fordism and Atkinson's peripheral workforce describe.
- Jan Breman's work on India is the essential citation. He attacks the dualist model directly, showing that the same workers circulate between sectors and that the boundary is not a wall but a gradient. His concept of footloose labour describes a workforce that is neither peasant nor proletarian, circulating between village and city, employed through jobbers and contractors, without a fixed employer, without settlement, and without the capacity to organise. His point about the neo-bondage in contemporary labour arrangements, where wage advances tie the worker to the contractor, matters because it shows unfree labour surviving inside a market economy.
- For India, keep the framing safe and the numbers honest: the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, chaired by Arjun Sengupta, reported in 2007 that the overwhelming majority of India's workforce is in the unorganised sector with negligible social security. Official survey estimates put the

informal share of employment at roughly nine in ten workers; the exact figure varies with definition, since informal employment inside the formal sector is counted differently across sources, so quote the order of magnitude rather than a precise number.

- Sectoral illustrations to use: construction, which absorbs the largest share of circulating rural migrants; street vending, now partially recognised through the Street Vendors Act, 2014; domestic work, which is feminised, invisible and located inside the employer's home, so it escapes labour law by definition; home-based piece work in garments and beedi; brick kilns, where advances create bondage; and waste picking.
- Gender is the sharpest edge here and the 2021 and 2022 questions demand it. Women are concentrated in the most informal, least visible and lowest-paid segments; the continuity of domestic work and paid work makes home-based work appear as an extension of housework rather than as employment; the double burden means women's informal work is arranged around unpaid care rather than the reverse; and the very location of the work, inside a home, blocks collective organisation and legal inspection. Add that measurement itself is gendered, since women's subsistence and home-based work is systematically under-recorded in labour force surveys.
- The regulation problem, which the 2019 question asks: the entire architecture of labour law presumes an identifiable employer, a workplace and a continuous employment relationship, and informal work supplies none of the three. Where the contractor is the visible employer and the principal is legally distant, liability evaporates. The gig economy reproduces this exactly, since the platform classifies workers as partners and independent contractors, so the algorithm exercises the control of an employer while the firm carries none of an employer's obligations.
- Guy Standing's precariat (2011) generalises the point to advanced economies: a class-in-the-making defined by insecure labour, absence of an occupational identity, loss of the rights of citizenship attached to employment, and reliance on money wages without the social wage. Note that Standing's claim that this is a new dangerous class is contested; the useful part is the observation that informality is no longer a feature only of the South, since the same insecurity is now spreading in the North through gig and zero-hours work.
- The counter-argument to record for balance: Hernando de Soto reads the informal sector as suppressed entrepreneurship, strangled by over-regulation, with formalisation of property titles as the cure. Breman's evidence is the rebuttal, since informal workers are overwhelmingly wage-dependent and subordinated, not frustrated entrepreneurs, and their problem is not the absence of a title deed but the absence of a bargaining position.

KEY TERMS

Informal sector — Hart: unregulated income-generating activity outside the protection of labour law and social security, not a residue of tradition but a structured part of the economy.

Footloose labour — Breman: a circulating workforce, neither peasant nor proletarian, moving between village and city without a fixed employer or settlement.

Precariat — Standing: a stratum defined by insecure labour, no occupational identity, and the loss of the rights that were attached to stable employment.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- What is 'informal labour'? Discuss the need for and challenges in regulating informal labour in the post-industrial society. [2019]
- What do you understand by 'informalisation of labour'? Write your answer with special reference to India. [2017]
- Capitalism has brought increasing informalisation of work in society. Substantiate your answer. [2020]
- "Globalization has pushed the labour into informal organization of work." Substantiate with examples. [2016]
- Explain the emerging challenges in establishing gender equality in the informal sector. [2021]
- Write short note on Self-Help Group (SHG) as an informal organization from a sociological perspective. [2011]

Labour and Society

This head asks how labour becomes a social force, and how the wider society, its gender order, its caste order, its migration circuits, shapes who works on what terms. The recurring examiner move is to ask why the Indian working class never became a class for itself.

- Labour commitment, which the 2018 question asks about, is the degree to which a worker accepts and internalises the norms of industrial work, that is, regular hours, factory discipline, permanent severance from the land, and an identity as an industrial worker. The concept comes out of the industrialisation literature (Moore and Feldman) and the classic Indian debate turned on whether the Indian industrial worker was committed or remained a peasant with an urban job. The evidence is mixed and the honest answer is: commitment in India has been partial and conditional, because circular migration, land as insurance, and recruitment through the jobber kept the village tie alive. Breman's footloose labour is the strongest evidence that the classical commitment thesis mis-specified the problem, since the failure is not cultural reluctance but a labour regime built on keeping workers mobile and unattached.
- Why Indian labour is weakly organised: unions cover only the organised sector, which is a small minority of workers; political affiliation fragments unions along party lines rather than uniting them by industry; recruitment through jobbers, contractors, kin and caste networks splits the workforce at the point of entry; caste and regional identity cut across class identity on the shop floor; and the reserve of surplus labour is so large that any group of workers is instantly replaceable. State the last one plainly, because it is the structural condition that makes the others effective.
- The reserve army of labour, asked in 2019, is Marx's: the relative surplus population, in its floating, latent and stagnant forms, is produced by capital accumulation itself and functions to discipline the employed and depress wages. Feminist scholars extended it to women, arguing that women constitute an ideal reserve, drawn into employment in booms and expelled in slumps, with the ideology of domesticity supplying the legitimation for the expulsion, since a woman sent home is not called unemployed, she is called a housewife. The critique of the feminist version is important and should be given: women's employment has proved not to be reversible in the way the reserve army model predicts, because occupational segregation means women are concentrated in sectors where they do not compete with men and cannot simply be substituted, so segmentation explains the pattern better than reserve army does.
- Feminisation of work, asked in 2021 and 2022, has two distinct senses and you must separate them. Quantitative feminisation is the rising share of women in the workforce, driven by export manufacturing, services and care. Qualitative feminisation is the spread of conditions historically associated with women's work, that is, low pay, casualisation, part-time and insecure terms, to the workforce as a whole. Standing's argument was that global competition drove both together. Its implications: incomes rise and some autonomy follows, but the double burden persists because the domestic division of labour did not change,

the work is concentrated in the informal and unprotected end, occupational segregation confines women to a narrow band of jobs, and the gender wage gap survives the entry. In India the additional puzzle is that female labour force participation has been low and has fallen over periods of high growth, and the accepted explanations are rising household incomes withdrawing women from distress work, longer schooling, the shrinking of agriculture without a corresponding creation of jobs women can access, and the constraints of status and safety.

- Globalisation's impact on labour, asked repeatedly: a global division of labour relocating production to low-wage sites; a race to the bottom in labour standards as states compete for investment; the decline of union power because capital is mobile and labour is not, which is the structural asymmetry at the heart of it; the growth of the peripheral, subcontracted and informal workforce; and the emergence of new labour geographies through migration. The counter-case to acknowledge: it created employment and raised wages in some receiving economies, and export manufacturing gave many women their first independent income.
- The migrant labour question, asked with reference to the 2020 lockdown, is best answered structurally rather than as an account of a crisis. Circular migrants are entitled where they are registered and present where they are not, so the portability of entitlements fails at exactly the point of need; they are hired through contractors, so no employer is accountable; they are invisible in official data because they are neither counted at origin nor at destination; and they hold no political weight in the city because their vote is in the village. What the lockdown revealed was not a new vulnerability but a normally invisible one, which is the sentence worth writing.
- The gig and platform economy, the contemporary form of this whole unit, is best analysed by naming its three moves: it converts employment into a commercial contract, so labour law does not apply; it converts supervision into an algorithm, so control is total but no supervisor is accountable; and it converts fixed costs into the worker's own assets, since the driver supplies the vehicle and the rider supplies the bike. Ritzer's McDonaldisation and Braverman's deskilling both describe it, and India's Code on Social Security, 2020, is notable for defining gig and platform workers in law, which is a first step toward the protection the category was designed to escape.
- The theoretical close worth using anywhere in this unit: Polanyi's double movement. Labour is a fictitious commodity, and the attempt to run society by a self-regulating market in labour produces a protective counter-movement, factory acts, unions, social security, minimum wages. Read informalisation and the gig economy as the disembedding phase, and the litigation over gig workers' status, the Street Vendors Act, and the social security codes as the counter-movement forming. It gives an examiner the sense that you have a framework rather than a list.

KEY TERMS

Labour commitment — The extent to which a worker internalises industrial work norms and severs the tie to land and village.

Reserve army of labour — Marx: the surplus population created by accumulation, which disciplines the employed and holds down wages.

Qualitative feminisation — The spread of terms historically attached to women's work, low-paid, casual, insecure, across the workforce as a whole.

Double movement — Polanyi: the expansion of the self-regulating market provokes a spontaneous societal counter-movement of social protection.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- What is labour commitment? Discuss it with reference to studies of manufacturing industry. [2018]
- What is 'reserve army of labour'? Present the position of feminist scholars on this. [2019]
- Explain the implications of feminization of work in the developing societies. [2022]
- Examine the social impact of globalization on labour and society. [2013]
- Elucidate the main problems and challenges faced by the migrant labourers in the recent 'Lockdown period'. [2021]

Last-mile revision

- Industrial is a technological category, capitalist is a property category. The USSR was the first without being the second.
- The slave is owned, the serf is bound, the worker is free and propertyless. Slave and serf yield surplus through extra-economic coercion; the worker yields it through a contract, which is why capitalist exploitation is invisible.
- Patterson defines slavery by natal alienation, generalised dishonour and permanent violent domination: social death, not just unfree labour.
- The serf possesses his means of subsistence, so the lord needs force. The worker has been separated from them, so hunger suffices. That single contrast answers most feudal-versus-capitalist questions.
- Marx: the worker sells labour power, not labour. Its value is the cost of his reproduction; its use produces more. The gap is surplus value.
- Taylor separates conception from execution; Ford removes control over pace; Mayo discovers the informal group; Braverman calls the whole sequence deskilling; Burawoy asks why workers consent anyway.
- Hawthorne's decisive result is the Bank Wiring Room, not the lighting: the group set its own output norm against management's incentive, punishing rate-busters and chiselers.
- Marx's alienation has four dimensions: from the product, from the act of production, from species-being, from other people. It is objective, not a feeling.
- Blauner's inverted U: craft printing low, textiles higher, auto assembly peak, continuous-process chemicals low again. The critique is technological determinism, since he drops the property relation.
- Anomie is a deficit of regulation (Durkheim, curable). Alienation is estrangement from the property relation (Marx, terminal). Do not merge them.
- Formal/informal has two senses: inside the firm (Mayo, Barnard) and in the labour market (Hart, ILO). Identify which the question means before writing a word.
- The informal sector is not a residue of tradition. It is subordinated and integrated: subcontracting chains push risk and statutory obligation downward. Breman's footloose labour is the Indian evidence.
- Feminisation is quantitative (more women working) and qualitative (women's terms spreading to everyone). Give both.
- Polanyi's double movement is the frame that ties the unit together: labour is a fictitious commodity, and its commodification always provokes a protective counter-movement.

Common errors to avoid

- Using 'industrial' and 'capitalist' as synonyms. The syllabus writes 'industrial /capitalist' with a slash, which is not permission to conflate them.
- Answering 'organisation of work in X society' with a description of technology. The question is about who works, under whose authority, on what terms, and who takes the surplus.
- Calling every society that had slaves a slave society. Finley's distinction between societies with slaves and genuine slave societies is the whole point.
- Saying the serf was owned. He was bound to the land and to obligations, held his own plot, and had customary and legal standing. Ownership of the person is what makes slavery slavery.
- Writing that the worker sells his labour. He sells labour power. The entire theory of surplus value collapses without that distinction, and examiners look for it.
- Confusing the two senses of formal/informal. A 'work from home' question is about the enterprise sense shading into the market sense; an 'informalisation of labour' question is purely the market sense. Answering one with the other loses the question.
- Presenting Mayo approvingly and stopping. The Human Relations school is managerialist, ignores the wage relation and unions, and treats conflict as miscommunication. Also note the 'Hawthorne effect' was named by Landsberger later, not by Mayo.
- Giving two or three dimensions of alienation. There are four, and the one dropped is almost always species-being, which is the philosophically central one.
- Treating Blauner as confirming Marx. Blauner measures subjective attitudes caused by technology; Marx describes an objective condition caused by property. Blauner's satisfied chemical worker is still alienated in Marx's sense.
- Attribution slips: 'informal sector' is Keith Hart, not the ILO, which popularised it a year later. 'Fordism' as a concept is Gramsci's. Deskilling is Braverman; manufactured consent is Burawoy; emotional labour is Hochschild; footloose labour is Breman; precariat is Standing; flexible firm is Atkinson; flexible specialisation is Piore and Sabel.
- Treating the informal sector as backward, traditional or transitional. The dualist model is falsified. Informality expands with capitalist dynamism because it is where risk and cost are dumped.
- Quoting precise informal-sector percentages with false confidence. Definitions differ, especially on informal employment inside formal enterprises. Say roughly nine in ten and note that estimates vary.
- Leaving gender out of a labour answer. Feminisation, the reserve army debate, domestic work and the double burden are asked directly and repeatedly.