

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

Sociology Optional Visions of Social Change; Rural and Agrarian Transformation in India

Paper 2 · Unit 1

The two engines independent India chose for directed change, the plan and the law, and what actually happened when they met the agrarian structure.

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UPSC SYLLABUS

(i) Visions of Social Change in India: (a) Idea of development planning and mixed economy. (b) Constitution, law and social change. (c) Education and social change. (ii) Rural and Agrarian transformation in India: (a) Programmes of rural development, Community Development Programme, cooperatives, poverty alleviation schemes. (b) Green revolution and social change. (c) Changing modes of production in Indian agriculture. (d) Problems of rural labour, bondage, migration.

Development planning and the mixed economy

Independent India chose planning without abolishing private property. The mixed economy was a political settlement, not a technical choice: the state took the commanding heights, private capital kept consumer goods and trade. The sociological question is never 'did the plan grow output' but 'whose interests did it serve and which social structures did it leave standing'.

- The Bombay Plan (1944), signed by industrialists including J.R.D. Tata, G.D. Birla and Purshotamdas Thakurdas, itself asked for a strong planning state, protection and public investment in infrastructure. The mixed economy therefore had the consent of Indian capital from the start, which is the first fact any critique must explain.
- The Planning Commission was set up by a Cabinet resolution in March 1950, not by statute or by the Constitution. That non-statutory basis mattered: it made planning an executive-expert exercise rather than a democratically bargained one.
- The First Plan (1951-56) used the Harrod-Domar frame and prioritised agriculture, irrigation and rehabilitation. The Second Plan (1956-61) shifted to the Nehru-Mahalanobis strategy: heavy industry and capital goods first, on the argument that machine-making capacity sets the long-run growth ceiling. The Industrial Policy Resolution, 1956 sorted industry into Schedules A, B and C, reserving 17 industries for the state.
- A.R. Desai's Marxist critique (State and Society in India: Essays in Dissent) is the standard citation: Indian planning was capitalist planning. It expanded the base for private accumulation, protected the bourgeois-landlord bloc, and the vocabulary of the 'welfare state' concealed the class character of the state rather than changing it.
- Gunnar Myrdal (Asian Drama, 1968) named the pattern 'soft state': impressive legislation, weak enforcement, and elites who are exempt in practice. It is the sharpest one-word explanation for why land ceilings existed on paper and not on the ground.
- Planning was centralist and expert-driven. The Gandhian alternative, village-centred and decentralised, argued in Hind Swaraj and worked out economically by J.C. Kumarappa, lost the argument in 1950 and returned only as rhetoric inside rural development schemes.
- 1991 ended licensing, not the mixed economy. Five Year Plans ended with the Twelfth Plan (2012-17); NITI Aayog (2015) replaced the Planning Commission as an advisory body with no plan-allocation power. The state shifted from producer to regulator and to direct benefit transferrer, which is a change in the mode of intervention, not its withdrawal.
- Balance sheet: planning built industrial capacity, a public sector, and a salaried middle class that was disproportionately upper caste because it recruited on credentials the caste order had already rationed. It did not touch landholding, so growth and caste survived each other. Dreze and Sen's phrase 'an uncertain glory' captures the outcome: capability failures alongside GDP success.

KEY TERMS

Mixed economy — Coexistence of a state-owned core (Schedule A industries) with private capital, both subject to plan direction.

Commanding heights — The strategic sectors (steel, coal, power, heavy machinery, banking after 1969) reserved for state ownership so that private capital would depend on state inputs.

Soft state — Myrdal's term for a polity that legislates ambitiously but cannot or will not enforce against its own elites.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Discuss in detail the main issues of development planning in mixed economy like India? (2020)
- Examine the importance of Development Planning in Indian Mixed Economy and analyze its problems and prospects. (2019)
- Analyse the idea of development planning in India. (2021)
- Critically examine the relevance of development planning in India. (2024)

Constitution, law and social change

Law in India was asked to do what society had not done for itself: abolish untouchability, give women property, end bondage. The Constitution is therefore a social document, not merely a political one. The recurring examination question is why its writ runs unevenly, and the answer is always about the social base of enforcement.

- Ambedkar's architecture: Article 14 (equality before law), 15 (non-discrimination plus enabling clauses for special provisions), 16(4) (reservation in public employment), 17 (abolition of untouchability), 21A (right to education, inserted by the 86th Amendment, 2002), 23 (prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour), 24 (no child under 14 in hazardous work), and Article 46 as the Directive Principle on SCs, STs and weaker sections.
- 'Constitutional morality' is Ambedkar's, borrowed from George Grote's History of Greece and used in his Constituent Assembly speech of 4 November 1948. His point was that a constitution provides only the organs of state; those organs work only if the paramountcy of constitutional method is internalised, and he warned that Indian soil was 'essentially undemocratic' because it was hierarchical.
- His speech of 25 November 1949 is the anchor for every 'law and social change' answer: from 26 January 1950 India enters a life of contradictions, political equality of one person one vote against social and economic inequality. Political democracy without social democracy, he warned, is a palace built on cow dung.
- Marc Galanter (Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India, 1984) showed what compensatory discrimination actually does: it redistributes opportunity and simultaneously generates a politics of classification, internal stratification among beneficiaries, and the creamy layer problem. Law does not end the group question; it relocates it.
- Upendra Baxi insisted on calling Indian public interest litigation 'social action litigation': it was not transplanted from America but grew after the Emergency out of judicial response to state repression and mass misery, with locus standi relaxed from the Hussainara Khatoon line (1979) onward. Note the class limit: the court can order, it cannot administer.
- Where law has worked, a movement carried it. The agitation over the Mathura judgment produced the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1983 and Section 114A of the Evidence Act; Bhanwari Devi's case produced the Vishaka guidelines (1997) and then the POSH Act, 2013; the Nirbhaya protests produced the Justice J.S.

Verma Committee and the 2013 amendment. Law follows mobilisation far more reliably than mobilisation follows law.

- Where it has not worked: the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 and the Child Labour Act, 1986 all criminalise practices whose enforcement depends on precisely the local elites who benefit from them. The Shah Bano sequence (1985 judgment, 1986 statute reversing it) shows the reverse case, where mobilisation rolled the law back.
- Legal pluralism is the standing limit: personal laws, caste panchayats, khap panchayats and jamaats still govern marriage, divorce and inheritance for most people. The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 gave daughters coparcenary rights by birth; uptake is thin because the norm that a daughter claiming land forfeits her natal family survives the statute intact.

KEY TERMS

Constitutional morality — Ambedkar's borrowing from Grote: the internalised commitment to constitutional forms and procedures, without which the text is inert.

Social democracy — For Ambedkar, a way of life recognising liberty, equality and fraternity as an indivisible union; the missing base under India's political democracy.

Legal pluralism — The coexistence of state law with caste, community and personal-law orders that actually regulate most everyday transactions.

Social action litigation — Baxi's term for the Indian variant of PIL, driven by state repression and mass deprivation rather than by middle-class rights claims.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Elaborate the concept of constitutional morality as given by B.R. Ambedkar. (2018)
- Is social democracy a precondition for political democracy? Comment. (2021)
- Discuss law as an important instrument for women's empowerment. (2022)
- In what respects have the constitutional provisions changed the socio-economic and political conditions of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India? Critically examine. (2025)
- Do you think that law has been able to abolish child labour in India? Comment. (2025)

Education and social change

Education is India's standard answer to inequality and one of its most efficient reproducers of it. The examinable move is to hold both claims at once: access has expanded enormously, and what that access buys has stratified just as fast.

- Colonial inheritance: Macaulay's Minute (1835) and the downward filtration theory produced an English-educated intermediate class rather than mass literacy; Wood's Despatch (1854) built the grant-in-aid system and the university structure (Calcutta, Bombay and Madras universities, 1857). Modern Indian education begins as an instrument for producing clerks and a comprador intelligentsia, not citizens.
- J.P. Naik named the recurring constraint the 'elusive triangle' of equality, quality and quantity: Indian education can deliver any two, never all three at once. Every policy since is a choice among the three.
- The Kothari Commission (Education Commission, 1964-66, chaired by D.S. Kothari) recommended the Common School System, neighbourhood schooling and 6 per cent of GDP on education. The common school was never built, and the 6 per cent target has been restated in 1968, 1986 and 2020 without being reached.

- The 86th Amendment (2002) made Article 21A a fundamental right; the RTE Act, 2009 gave it teeth: free and compulsory education for 6 to 14, a 25 per cent quota for disadvantaged children in private unaided schools, no-detention (diluted in 2019), and pupil-teacher and infrastructure norms.
- The mechanism of reproduction is the tracked system: elite private, low-fee private, government, madrasa and ashramshala. Krishna Kumar's work shows the curriculum and the classroom themselves teach hierarchy and obedience; Bourdieu's cultural capital and Bernstein's elaborated and restricted codes explain why the same school does not deliver the same thing to a Dalit first-generation learner and to a professional's child.
- NEP 2020: a 5+3+3+4 structure, foundational literacy and numeracy (operationalised as NIPUN Bharat, 2021), mother tongue or local language as medium till at least Grade 5, vocational exposure with internships from Grade 6, multiple entry and exit through the Academic Bank of Credits, and a single higher education regulator (HECI). Sociologically it is strong on flexibility and skilling, silent on the common school and near-silent on caste.
- Counter-evidence to 'education equalises': ASER's rural surveys have repeatedly found fewer than half of Class 5 children able to read a Class 2 text, and the PROBE Report (1999) located the failure in teacher accountability and the social distance between teacher and Dalit or Adivasi pupil rather than in parental indifference. Commercialisation of higher education adds a second filter: capitation, coaching and English.
- Education has been a real instrument of assertion wherever a movement carried it: Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule's schools for girls and Shudras from 1848, Narayana Guru's SNDP schools, Ambedkar's People's Education Society (1945). Ambedkar's order was 'educate, agitate, organise', with education first because it is the precondition, not the substitute, for struggle.

The 'education equalises' claim, tested

Claim	Evidence for	Evidence against
Expands opportunity	Near-universal enrolment at primary level after RTE; literacy rose from 18.3% (1951) to 74.04% (Census 2011)	Learning outcomes flat (ASER); enrolment is not attainment
Breaks ascription	First-generation Dalit and Adivasi graduates; reservation in higher education	Tracked school system converts caste and class into 'merit'; English as gatekeeper
Modernises values	Srinivas and Yogendra Singh treat education as a carrier of westernisation and modernisation	Krishna Kumar: curriculum and pedagogy transmit hierarchy; textbook conflicts show education as a site of ideological contest

KEY TERMS

Elusive triangle — J.P. Naik's formulation that equality, quality and quantity in Indian education cannot be achieved simultaneously.

Cultural capital — Bourdieu's term for the dispositions, language and cultural competence that schools reward but do not teach, so children who arrive with it convert it into credentials.

Common School System — The Kothari Commission's proposal that all children attend the neighbourhood school regardless of class, caste or income; never implemented.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Highlight the salient features of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020. (2023)
- 'Instead of promoting equality in society, the present system of education itself has contributed to increased socio-economic disparities.' Comment. (2022)
- Explain the sociological significance of the New Education Policy and its thrust on vocationalization and skill development. (2021)
- Comment on the critical issues of commercialization of higher education in India. (2019)
- Education is a key to social development. Elucidate. (2024)

Rural development: Community Development Programme and Panchayati Raj

The first Indian model of rural development assumed the village was a harmonious community that needed technique and encouragement rather than a redistribution of land. That assumption is the reason the programme failed, and the reason its failure is so instructive.

- The Community Development Programme was launched on 2 October 1952 in 55 projects, with Ford Foundation support, modelled on Albert Mayer's Etawah Pilot Project (1948). Its instruments were the Block, the Block Development Officer and the Village Level Worker, and its philosophy was to work through 'felt needs' and local self-help.
- S.C. Dube's *India's Changing Villages* (1958), a field study of the CDP, is the definitive evidence: benefits went to the better-off and better-connected, the Village Level Worker was overloaded and read by villagers as one more official, and the 'felt needs' acted upon were in practice the needs the officials felt. Community development without structural reform equals elite capture.
- The Balvantray Mehta Committee (1957) diagnosed the failure as an absence of popular participation and proposed 'democratic decentralisation': a three-tier structure of gram panchayat, panchayat samiti (identified as the pivot) and zila parishad. Nehru inaugurated Panchayati Raj at Nagaur, Rajasthan, on 2 October 1959.
- The Ashok Mehta Committee (1978) proposed a two-tier system with the mandal panchayat as base and open party participation; G.V.K. Rao (1985) recommended reviving the district as the planning unit; L.M. Singhvi (1986) recommended constitutional status and gram sabha recognition.
- The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1992, in force 1993) made local government constitutional: five-year terms, State Election Commissions, State Finance Commissions, SC and ST reservation in proportion to population, not less than one-third of seats for women (many states have since legislated 50 per cent), the Eleventh Schedule (29 subjects) for panchayats and the Twelfth Schedule (18 subjects) for municipalities. PESA, 1996 extended panchayats to Fifth Schedule areas with gram sabha primacy over minor forest produce, minor minerals and land alienation.
- The gap between status and power: the 29 subjects are permissive, not mandatory, so devolution of functions, funds and functionaries (the '3Fs') is uneven and rarely happens together. Kerala's People's Plan Campaign (from 1996), which routed roughly a third of state plan funds through local bodies with gram sabha planning, is the standard counter-example.
- Findings on reservation: the 'sarpanch pati' proxy is real, but the literature does not stop there. Women's presence shifts the agenda toward water, sanitation and roads; repeated reservation of the same seat reduces

voter prejudice; and Dalit sarpanches face boycott and violence precisely because the office is real.

Reservation transfers office faster than it transfers authority.

- The village is itself contested ground and the exam expects the disagreement. Ambedkar asked in the Constituent Assembly what the village is but 'a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism'; Gandhi's gram swaraj made it the moral unit of self-rule; Andre Beteille argued the village is a real social entity and a legitimate unit of study, without being the bearer of India's civilisational values.

KEY TERMS

Democratic decentralisation — Balvantray Mehta's phrase for transferring development administration to elected local bodies so that participation is structural rather than exhorted.

Felt needs — The CDP's principle of acting on needs villagers articulate; Dube showed the articulated needs were the dominant sections' needs.

3Fs — Functions, funds and functionaries, the three things that must be devolved together for panchayats to govern rather than implement.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Discuss the challenges in implementing the Rural Development Programs in India. (2019)
- What do you understand by decentralisation of power? What is its role in strengthening the roots of democracy in India? Elaborate. (2024)
- What do you understand by democratic federalism? How does it promote decentralization of power in India? (2020)

Cooperatives and poverty alleviation schemes

Cooperatives were designed to replace the moneylender without touching the landlord, and poverty schemes were designed to add income without redistributing assets. Both work exactly as far as that design allows, which is the argument to make.

- The Cooperative Credit Societies Act, 1904 was a colonial answer to rural indebtedness after the Deccan Riots of 1875. The cooperative was conceived as an alternative to the moneylender, never as a challenge to landholding, and that founding limit persists.
- Daniel Thorner's field study Agricultural Cooperatives in India (1964) is the standard citation for capture: societies existed on paper, credit flowed to those with land to pledge, boards were held by the well-to-do, and the poor stayed with the moneylender. Cooperation among unequals reproduces the inequality.
- The Anand pattern is the honest counter-case: the Kaira District Cooperative Milk Producers' Union, built by Tribhuvandas Patel with Verghese Kurien, scaled into Amul and then Operation Flood (from 1970, through the NDDB). It worked because milk is a daily, small-holder, largely women's income, because processing and marketing were owned upward by producers, and because the state supplied scale without capturing the board.
- Why most cooperatives fail: state sponsorship instead of member origin, Registrar control, politicised boards used as ladders into assembly politics, and the same dominant caste holding the society, the sugar mill and the panchayat (western Maharashtra is the textbook case). The Ministry of Cooperation (2021) and the 97th Amendment (2011, whose provisions binding the states were struck down in Union of India v. Rajendra N. Shah, 2021) address regulation, not capture.

- Poverty policy shifted from trickle-down (First and Second Plans) to direct attack from the Fifth Plan and the Garibi Hatao politics of 1971: IRDP (1978-79, subsidised assets for self-employment), NREP and RLEGP (wage employment), JRY (1989), SGSY (1999). The common flaw was target-driven asset transfer to identified beneficiaries, which invites identification fraud and elite mediation.
- MGNREGA (enacted as NREGA in 2005, renamed in 2009) is different in kind: a justiciable statutory entitlement to 100 days of unskilled manual work per rural household on demand, with unemployment allowance if work is not provided, self-selection through a low wage, at least one-third participation by women, and social audit by the gram sabha. Read it as Amartya Sen's entitlement approach written into statute rather than as a welfare scheme.
- Post-2015 the architecture is mission mode plus direct benefit transfer: DAY-NRLM and its self-help group federations, PMAY-Gramin, Ujjwala, Jal Jeevan Mission, PM-KISAN (2019) as an unconditional income transfer, and the SDG India Index as the tracking frame. The sociological shift is from the group and the asset to the individual and the bank account, which weakens local mediation and also weakens local accountability.
- Measurement is politics. Lakdawala (1993), Tendulkar (2009, which put poverty at 21.9 per cent for 2011-12) and Rangarajan (2014, 29.5 per cent for the same year) produce different Indias from the same survey. The 2017-18 consumption survey was not released, so official headcounts went dark until HCES 2022-23, and NITI Aayog's National Multidimensional Poverty Index built on NFHS became the working substitute. Always cite the committee and the year; never write a bare number.

KEY TERMS

Anand pattern — Three-tier producer-owned dairy cooperative structure (village society, district union, state federation) in which processing and marketing are owned upward by primary producers.

Entitlement approach — Sen's argument that deprivation results from a collapse of a person's command over commodities, not from aggregate scarcity; the theoretical basis for a right to work.

Elite capture — The routing of programme benefits through locally dominant groups who control information, selection and enforcement.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Discuss the challenges faced by the cooperative movements in India. Suggest measures to strengthen the movement at the grass-roots level. (2023)
- What role do co-operatives play in poverty alleviation in rural India? (2022)
- Comment on the role of co-operatives in rural development. (2021)
- Write short note with a sociological perspective: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. (2013)
- What are the Indian government's schemes launched for poverty alleviation after the United Nation's Declaration of 'Sustainable Development Goals-2015'? Briefly describe. (2025)

The Green Revolution and social change

The Green Revolution was a technological answer to a political problem: ship-to-mouth food dependence after the droughts of 1965 and 1966. It solved the food problem and reorganised rural class relations at the same time. An answer that reports only the first half, or only the second, is half an answer.

- The New Agricultural Strategy (1966) built on the Intensive Agricultural District Programme (1960-61, Ford Foundation, seven districts). Its package was HYV seed plus chemical fertiliser plus assured irrigation plus

credit, underwritten by price support through the Agricultural Prices Commission and the Food Corporation of India (both 1965), with Norman Borlaug's Mexican dwarf wheat and M.S. Swaminathan and C. Subramaniam driving adoption.

- It was selective by design. The strategy was to 'bet on the strong': assured-irrigation, surplus-producing districts (Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh), wheat before rice, and farmers who could purchase the package. Regional and class selectivity were not side effects; they were the operating principle.
- Francine Frankel's *India's Green Revolution: Economic Gains and Political Costs* (1971) is the citation to use: output rose and so did inter-regional and intra-rural disparity, with tenants evicted so owners could self-cultivate, and the distance between owner-cultivators and labourers widening in the very districts that succeeded.
- Wolf Ladejinsky's 'Ironies of India's Green Revolution' (1970) supplies the precise formulation: the technology is scale-neutral but not resource-neutral. The same seed enriches unequally because access to water, credit and inputs is already unequal.
- Class outcome: the rise of the rich or capitalist peasant, the 'new power elite' of the countryside, drawn largely from the dominant landowning middle castes (Jats, Patidars, Kammas, Reddys, Vokkaligas, Lingayats). T.J. Byres reads this as agrarian differentiation, producing a class with surplus, political weight and a price agenda rather than a land agenda.
- Political outcome: that class produced the new farmers' movements of the 1980s (Shetkari Sanghatana, Bharatiya Kisan Union, Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha), Charan Singh's kisan politics, and the permanent centrality of MSP, procurement and input subsidy in Indian politics, right through to the 2020-21 mobilisation.
- Labour outcome: mechanisation displaced local attached labour while sharply raising peak-season demand, so Punjab and Haryana became importers of Bihari and eastern-UP migrant labour. Jajmani-style attachment gave way to cash wages, seasonality and contractor recruitment, which is more free and less secure at once.
- The bill: falling water tables and paddy monoculture in Punjab, salinity and micronutrient depletion, subsidised power and fertiliser lock-in, stubble burning, pesticide exposure, and the indebtedness that runs through the farmer suicide literature. This is the substance of 'critique the victory narrative'.
- Second-generation question: the strategy did not travel to rainfed and eastern India until much later (Bringing Green Revolution to Eastern India, from 2010-11). Regional disparity is now a sharper sociological fact than class differentiation alone, because it maps onto the poorest states and feeds the migration corridors.

Green Revolution: gains and costs, held together

Dimension	Gain	Cost
Food security	End of PL-480 dependence; buffer stocks; famine ceased to be an Indian fact	Cereal-centric; pulses, millets and nutrition neglected
Region	Punjab, Haryana, western UP transformed	Rainfed, eastern and dryland India left behind; disparity widened
Class	Owner-cultivators with irrigation accumulated	Tenant evictions; landless labourers gained wages, not assets
Politics	A confident, organised farming class entered national politics	Its agenda is price and subsidy, not land redistribution
Ecology	Yield per hectare rose steeply	Groundwater depletion, salinity, monoculture, input lock-in

KEY TERMS

Scale-neutral but not resource-neutral — Ladejinsky's point that HYV technology works on any plot size but only for those who can already buy water, credit and inputs.

New rich peasant — The surplus-accumulating, market-oriented, mostly dominant-caste cultivator produced by the Green Revolution districts; politically organised around price.

Betting on the strong — The deliberate concentration of the New Agricultural Strategy in favourably endowed districts and on capable farmers.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Critique the victory narratives of Green Revolution in the context of Indian society. (2023)
- Has 'Green Revolution' led to the formation of new power elite in rural India? Elaborate your answer. (2018)
- Write a note on the uneven impact of 'Green Revolution' on rural society. (2016)
- Write short note with a sociological perspective: Green Revolution. (2013)

Changing modes of production in Indian agriculture

The modes of production debate ran mainly in Economic and Political Weekly from the late 1960s into the 1970s, and it was not academic. If Indian agriculture is capitalist, the political task is a socialist one; if it is semi-feudal, the task is a bourgeois-democratic revolution, meaning land reform. Naming the positions to the right authors is exactly what this question is marked on.

- Ashok Rudra, with A. Majid and B.D. Talib, opened the debate with a survey of Punjab's big farmers (EPW, 1969). Using criteria of market orientation, wage labour and reinvestment of surplus, he concluded the evidence did not establish a capitalist class of farmers even in the Green Revolution heartland.
- Utsa Patnaik argued for capitalist development and insisted the test lies in production relations, not market involvement. Her labour-exploitation criterion (the E ratio, in 'Class Differentiation within the Peasantry', 1976) classifies a household by the ratio of labour hired in or hired out to family labour, which identifies accumulation through surplus appropriation rather than through selling.
- Amit Bhaduri's 'semi-feudalism' (1973), drawn from eastern India, specifies four interlocking features: sharecropping, perpetual indebtedness of the tenant, the same person acting as landlord and moneylender,

and the tenant's lack of direct market access. The landlord's interest is in keeping the tenant poor, so he resists productivity-raising innovation. This explains agrarian backwardness without invoking culture.

- Hamza Alavi and Jairus Banaji proposed a 'colonial mode of production': India's agriculture was neither classically feudal nor capitalist but structurally subordinated to metropolitan capital, so European stage categories do not transfer.
- Paresh Chattopadhyay held that capitalism was already dominant; Ranjit Sau and Kathleen Gough ('Modes of Production in Southern India', 1980) argued for coexistence and regional variation. Alice Thorner's three-part EPW review, 'Semi-Feudalism or Capitalism?' (1982), is the standard map of the whole controversy and the safest thing to cite.
- Daniel Thorner's categories still organise fieldwork: maliks (landlords, income from property rights), kisans (working peasants), mazdoors (landless labourers). His 'built-in depressor' thesis argued that the agrarian structure itself, and not technology or climate, blocked productivity growth.
- Land reform is the sub-plot. Zamindari abolition largely succeeded because it aligned with the new state's interest in removing intermediaries. Tenancy reform and ceilings largely failed through benami transfers, 'voluntary surrender' of tenants and unrecorded, un-updated land records. West Bengal's Operation Barga (from 1978, which registered bargadars rather than transferring title) and Kerala's 1969 reforms are the exceptions, and both required a party organisation on the ground, not just a statute.
- Post-1991 the terms have moved: contract farming and corporate retail, the value chain and the buyer rather than the landlord as the point of appropriation, fragmentation of holdings so that the modal Indian farm is small and shrinking, tenancy going informal and unrecorded (which strips tenants of institutional credit and crop insurance), and land moving from cultivating to non-cultivating owners while the actual tiller has no recorded right.

Modes of production debate: who said what

Scholar	Position	Key move
Ashok Rudra (with Majid and Talib, 1969)	Not yet capitalist	Punjab big-farmer survey; capitalist criteria not met
Utsa Patnaik (1971, 1976)	Capitalist development underway	Labour-exploitation (E) ratio; judge by production relations, not market sale
Amit Bhaduri (1973)	Semi-feudal	Four features locking the sharecropper; landlord resists innovation
Hamza Alavi, Jairus Banaji	Colonial mode of production	Subordination to metropolitan capital; European categories do not transfer
Paresh Chattopadhyay	Capitalism already dominant	Reads Rudra's own data as showing capitalist relations
Kathleen Gough, Ranjit Sau	Coexistence and regional variation	Fieldwork in southern India; no single mode across India

KEY TERMS

Semi-feudalism — Bhaduri's model in which sharecropping plus perpetual debt plus a unified landlord-moneylender plus market exclusion make backwardness rational for the dominant party.

Built-in depressor — Daniel Thorner's thesis that the agrarian structure itself suppresses productivity growth.

Maliks, kisans, mazdoors — Thorner's three agrarian classes defined by the source of income: property rights, own cultivation, wage labour.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Explain the implications and the impact of globalization in situating the changing agrarian class structure in India. (2023)
- Explain how land reforms brought about desired agrarian transformation. (2022)
- Write a short note on 'changing means of production and increased rural poverty.' (2017)
- '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. (2025)

Problems of rural labour: bondage and migration

Rural labour is not a residue of agriculture waiting to be absorbed by industry. It is a growing class that is proletarianising without industrialising, and whose unfreedom has changed form rather than ended.

- The structural fact: Census and NSS series show cultivators falling as a share of the rural workforce while agricultural labourers rise, and non-farm casual work (construction above all) absorbing the difference. Land is fragmenting, farm incomes are inadequate, and industry is not hiring at scale, so the countryside produces labourers faster than the cities produce jobs.
- Bondage in law: Article 23 prohibits begar and forced labour; the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 abolished the system, freed bonded labourers and extinguished the debts. Identification and release depend on district vigilance committees, which is why the honest answer to 'has law abolished bondage' is that it abolished the name.
- Jan Breman's South Gujarat fieldwork (Patronage and Exploitation, 1974) traced the hali system between Anavil Brahmin masters and Dubla labourers, and, crucially, showed what its decay produced: not freedom but 'neo-bondage'. Advances and debt now tie workers to labour contractors in brick kilns, cane-cutting, quarrying and construction, for a season rather than a lifetime, and without the patron's reciprocal obligations. The relation is more brutal precisely because it is more contractual.
- Breman's Footloose Labour (1996) names the resulting social type: circulating, casualised, contractor-recruited workers who are neither peasant nor proletarian. Their mobility is a condition of their exploitation, not an escape from it, because moving keeps them outside union, entitlement and enumeration.
- Migration streams to get right: rural-to-rural is still the largest by volume and is dominated by marriage migration of women, which is why headline migration data looks female; rural-to-urban male circular migration feeds construction and the urban informal economy; the corridors run from Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal toward Punjab, Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala and the Gulf.
- Circular migrants are counted badly, and that is a political fact rather than a technical one. The Census counts by place of last residence with duration cut-offs, so seasonal movement disappears; the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979 covers only contractor-recruited workers and depends on registration that contractors avoid. What is not counted cannot be entitled.

- 'Reverse migration' in 2020-21 was not a rural revival. It was the collapse of urban entitlement: migrants were citizens where they were registered and not where they worked, so PDS, housing, health and wage protection were unavailable at the destination. One Nation One Ration Card and the e-Shram register are policy responses aimed at exactly this portability gap, and the village absorbed the shock as a shock absorber of last resort, deepening rural underemployment.
- Do not flatten the debate. The dominant reading is distress migration (Breman: churning at the bottom, no accumulation). The counter-reading (Priya Deshingkar and others) holds that circular migration can be accumulative and aspirational, and that for Dalit and Adivasi workers leaving the village also means leaving the caste gaze, with remittances funding assertion at home. State the reading you take and name who disagrees.

KEY TERMS

Neo-bondage — Breman's term for debt-tied labour under capitalist, contractor-mediated relations: time-bound, wage-based and stripped of the old patron's obligations.

Footloose labour — Circulating, casualised workers who belong to no single labour market and are therefore outside protection, enumeration and organisation.

Hali system — The lifelong, hereditary attached-labour bond between Anavil Brahmin masters and Dubla labourers in South Gujarat that Breman documented.

Reverse migration — Return movement from destination to origin, in 2020-21 driven by the loss of work plus the non-portability of urban entitlements.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Examine whether rural bondage still continues to be a social reality. Give your argument. (2022)
- What is 'reverse migration'? Discuss its features, causes and consequences in India. (2023)
- What are the sociological reasons and implication of 'reverse migration' during the recent pandemic in India? (2021)
- Discuss the dynamics of 'migrant workers' in India in the context of Corona pandemic. (2020)
- What are the major problems faced by the labour migrants while working in informal sectors of Indian States? Discuss. (2025)
- Discuss recent trends in the structure of migration. (2022)

Last-mile revision

- Mixed economy is a class settlement, not a compromise between ideologies: the Bombay Plan (1944) shows Indian capital asked for the planning state.
- A.R. Desai: Indian planning is capitalist planning. Myrdal: soft state, strong statute and weak enforcement.
- Ambedkar, 25 November 1949: political democracy on a base of social and economic inequality is a life of contradictions. Constitutional morality (4 November 1948) is from Grote.
- Law works when a movement carries it: Mathura to the 1983 amendment; Bhanwari Devi to Vishaka (1997) to POSH (2013). Shah Bano shows mobilisation can also reverse law.
- Galanter: compensatory discrimination redistributes opportunity and creates a politics of classification.
- Kothari (1964-66): common school, 6 per cent of GDP. Neither delivered; the target was restated in 1968, 1986 and 2020.
- S.C. Dube on the CDP: 'felt needs' were the officials' needs and benefits went to the connected. Balvantray Mehta (1957) answered with democratic decentralisation; the 73rd and 74th Amendments constitutionalised it in 1992.
- Thorner (1964): cooperatives captured by the well-to-do. Amul is the exception because milk is daily, small-scale and producer-owned upward.
- MGNREGA is Sen's entitlement approach in statute: demand-driven, justiciable, self-selecting through the wage, audited by the gram sabha.
- Green Revolution: scale-neutral, not resource-neutral (Ladejinsky). Frankel: economic gains, political costs. Byres: differentiation and a new rich peasant with a price agenda.
- Modes of production: Rudra (not yet capitalist), Patnaik (capitalist, use the E ratio), Bhaduri (semi-feudal, four features), Alavi and Banaji (colonial mode), Gough (coexistence). Alice Thorner (1982) mapped it.
- Land reform: zamindari abolition worked, ceilings and tenancy did not. Operation Barga and Kerala worked because a party organisation, not just a statute, was present.
- Breman: the hali system decayed into neo-bondage. Footloose labour is mobile because it is exploited, not free because it is mobile.
- Reverse migration in 2020 was not rural revival; it was the non-portability of urban citizenship.

Common errors to avoid

- Describing the mixed economy as a neutral middle path between capitalism and socialism, without naming the settlement (Bombay Plan, IPR 1948 and 1956, Schedules A, B and C) or asking whom it served.
- Attributing 'constitutional morality' to the Constitution or to the Supreme Court. It is Ambedkar's, borrowed from George Grote, in the Constituent Assembly on 4 November 1948.
- Treating the Green Revolution as an ecology question only. The syllabus asks for social change: differentiation, the new rich peasant, tenant eviction, migrant labour and price politics.
- Swapping the modes-of-production positions. Bhaduri is semi-feudalism; Patnaik argues capitalist development and gives you the E ratio; Rudra is the sceptic who opened the debate.
- Saying the Green Revolution 'bypassed the poor' with no mechanism. The mechanism is a purchased input package plus assured irrigation plus credit access, which sorts households by prior endowment.
- Confusing Balvantray Mehta (1957, three-tier, panchayat samiti as pivot) with Ashok Mehta (1978, two-tier, mandal panchayat).
- Writing that the Bonded Labour Act 'ended' bondage. Breman's neo-bondage is the expected counter, and it is stronger than a generic 'implementation is weak'.
- Calling all rural out-migration distress migration. Name the disagreement (Breman versus Deshingkar) and take a side.
- Quoting a poverty percentage with no committee and no year. Tendulkar and Rangarajan give 21.9 and 29.5 per cent for the same 2011-12 data.
- Listing schemes chronologically as if the list were an argument. Group them by logic instead: asset transfer (IRDP), wage employment (JRY), legal entitlement (MGNREGA), cash transfer (PM-KISAN), and say why the logic changed.
- Romanticising the village or dismissing it. Give Ambedkar's 'den of ignorance', Gandhi's gram swaraj and Beteille's middle position, then choose.