

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

Sociology Optional Industrialisation and Urbanisation in India; Politics and Society

Paper 2 · Unit 2

How India industrialised without proletarianising and urbanised without industrialising, and how caste, region and religion were absorbed into democratic politics rather than dissolved by it.

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UPSC SYLLABUS

(iii) Industrialization and Urbanisation in India: (a) Evolution of modern industry in India. (b) Growth of urban settlements in India. (c) Working class: structure, growth, class mobilization. (d) Informal sector, child labour. (e) Slums and deprivation in urban areas. (iv) Politics and Society: (a) Nation, democracy and citizenship. (b) Political parties, pressure groups, social and political elite. (c) Regionalism and decentralization of power. (d) Secularization.

Evolution of modern industry in India

Indian industry did not grow out of Indian handicraft. It was inserted by colonial capital, on colonial terms, alongside the destruction of the artisanal economy. That double movement, deindustrialisation and enclave industrialisation, sets up every later question about the Indian working class.

- The deindustrialisation thesis: Dadabhai Naoroji (Poverty and Un-British Rule in India, 1901) argued the drain of wealth, and R.C. Dutt (Economic History of India) argued that British policy destroyed Indian textile handicraft and pushed labour back onto land. Morris D. Morris challenged the thesis in 1963, arguing the evidence for a decline in artisanal employment was weak; Bipan Chandra, Toru Matsui and others responded. Present it as a debate, not as settled fact.
- The enclave beginnings: the first cotton mill at Bombay (1854), the first jute mill at Rishra in Bengal (1855), the first railway line Bombay to Thane (1853), and TISCO at Jamshedpur (registered 1907, production from 1912). Cotton was largely Indian-owned (Parsi and Gujarati capital), jute was largely European: the ownership pattern shaped who organised whom.
- Post-independence: the Industrial Policy Resolutions of 1948 and 1956, licensing, MRTP (1969) and bank nationalisation (1969) built a public-sector-led industrial structure. The New Industrial Policy of 1991 dismantled licensing and reservation for small industry. The Indian sequence therefore ran from colonial enclave to state-led heavy industry to liberalised services, and services, not manufacturing, absorbed the growth.
- Milton Singer (When a Great Tradition Modernizes, 1972) studied Madras industrial leaders and found no war between tradition and modernity. They used 'compartmentalisation' (separating the ritual sphere at home from the work sphere), 'ritual neutralisation of the work sphere', and 'vicarious ritualisation' (delegating rites to priests or women). Tradition adapted; it did not retreat.
- N.R. Sheth (The Social Framework of an Indian Factory, 1968) studied a factory in Gujarat and showed the shop floor was organised by caste, kinship and region as much as by the formal hierarchy: recruitment ran through jati and village networks, so the factory reproduced the very ties it was supposed to dissolve.
- This is the answer to 'is industrial class structure a function of social structure': the Indian factory did not create a class shorn of ascription. Recruitment through jobbers and kin networks, caste clustering in departments, and the persistence of the village link mean that class and caste operate together rather than in sequence.
- Village industry declined for identifiable reasons rather than through nostalgia's 'neglect': loss of the patron demand structure with the end of the jajmani order, competition from mill and imported goods, migration of the young, weak credit and marketing, and the failure of KVIC-style protection to build market access. What survives (handloom clusters, Moradabad brassware, Tiruppur knitwear) survives by linking to a market, often an export one.
- The Indian industrial worker is thus a hybrid: not Marx's fully expropriated proletarian, since the village land and household remain a fallback, and not a peasant either. That is why classic class-consciousness

predictions fail here, and why examiners reward candidates who explain the hybridity instead of apologising for it.

KEY TERMS

Deindustrialisation — The nineteenth-century decline of Indian handicraft and the reversion of artisans to agriculture; asserted by Naoroji and Dutt, contested by Morris D. Morris.

Compartmentalisation — Singer's term for keeping ritual and industrial spheres in separate domains so that neither has to yield to the other.

Jobber (mukadam, sardar) — The intermediary who recruited, disciplined and lent to mill workers through caste, kin and village ties, standing between capital and labour.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Is industrial development in India a bane or a boon to agrarian class structure? Substantiate your answer with suitable examples. (2019)
- Examine the influence of industrialization on caste. (2013)
- Examine the impact of industrialization and urbanization on family structure. (2016)
- 'Industrial class structure is a function of social structure of Indian society.' Do you agree with this statement? Analyze. (2025)
- Bring out various factors responsible for declining of village Industries in India. (2025)

Growth of urban settlements in India

India is urbanising without industrialising, and much of its urban growth is happening in places that are not administered as urban at all. Get the Census definitions right first, because the entire argument about 'over-urbanisation' turns on them.

- Census categories: a statutory town has a municipality, corporation, cantonment board or notified area committee. A census town has no urban local body but satisfies three conditions together: population of at least 5,000, at least 75 per cent of the male main working population in non-agricultural pursuits, and density of at least 400 persons per square kilometre. An urban agglomeration is a contiguous spread of a town and its outgrowths.
- Census 2011 baseline: 31.16 per cent urban, about 377 million people, density 382 per square kilometre. Census 2011 counted 3,894 census towns against 1,362 in 2001, so most of the increase in the number of towns came from villages crossing a threshold rather than from migration into big cities. Note that the 2021 Census was postponed, so post-2011 shares are projections; cite the source and year.
- That census-town explosion is 'in situ' urbanisation: places become urban statistically while continuing to be governed as villages, with panchayat-level finance and no urban planning. This is where the deprivation is worst and where nobody is responsible.
- Urbanisation in India is top-heavy: growth concentrates in Class I cities and metros, so the settlement system is polarised rather than graded. Amitabh Kundu's arguments on 'exclusionary urbanisation' and 'degenerated peripheralisation' describe the result: the poor are pushed out of the core into unserved peripheries, and city growth increasingly happens by boundary extension.
- 'Over-urbanisation' (Kingsley Davis and Hertha Golden, 1954) means an urban share out of proportion to the level of industrialisation, so cities absorb population into low-productivity services rather than factories.

N.V. Sovani (1964) attacked the concept as statistically unfounded and definitionally circular. Use both: the phenomenon is real in India, the label is contested.

- Louis Wirth's 'Urbanism as a Way of Life' (1938) derives impersonality, anonymity, secondary contacts and segmentation from size, density and heterogeneity. It travels badly to India: caste and kin networks organise housing, credit, marriage and jobs inside the city, so Indian urbanism is dense with primary ties, not stripped of them.
- Hence the rural-urban continuum. Robert Redfield's folk-urban continuum and M.S.A. Rao's Indian work argue that rural and urban are poles of a gradient, not a dichotomy: the migrant remits, marries and votes in the village, the census town is both at once, and caste and kinship imprints are reproduced in urban residential segregation. Ghettoisation by caste and religion (Muslim segregation, documented after the Sachar Committee report of 2006) is the hard version of this claim.
- Industrialisation is not the only precondition of urbanisation, and 2025 asked exactly that. Indian urban growth also comes from natural increase within cities, from reclassification of villages, from boundary extension, from administrative and service functions, from distress-driven push rather than industrial pull, and from IT-services and real-estate booms (Gurugram, Hyderabad, Bengaluru) that create cities without factories.

Sources of urban growth in India, and what each produces

Source	Mechanism	Consequence
Natural increase	Births minus deaths within existing towns	The single largest component; not migration
Rural to urban migration	Push from agrarian distress more than pull from industry	Informal work, slums, circular male migration
Reclassification	Villages crossing the census-town thresholds	In situ urbanisation with panchayat governance and no urban services
Boundary extension	Municipal limits enlarged to absorb the periphery	Statistical urbanisation; the periphery is serviced last

KEY TERMS

Census town — A settlement urban by the three Census criteria (population, non-agricultural male main workers, density) but still governed by a panchayat.

Over-urbanisation — Davis and Golden's term for urban concentration exceeding what the level of industrialisation can employ; contested by Sovani.

Degenerated peripheralisation — Kundu's term for the pushing of the poor into unserved urban peripheries as the core becomes unaffordable.

Rural-urban continuum — The claim (Redfield, M.S.A. Rao) that rural and urban are poles of a gradient linked by migration, kinship, remittance and reclassification, not two discrete types.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Elaborate the causes, consequences and other concerns of growth of urban settlements in India. (2020)
- Discuss the phenomenon of rural-urban continuum with suitable examples. (2023)
- Elaborate urbanism as a way of life in India. (2019)
- Examine with suitable examples the recent trends in the growth of urban settlements in India. (2024)
- Discuss the trend of urbanization in India. Do you think that Industrialization is the only precondition of urbanization? Give your arguments. (2025)
- Urban settlement in India tend to replicate its rural caste-kinship imprints. Discuss the main reasons. (2021)

The working class: structure, growth and class mobilisation

The Indian working class was formed with the village still attached to it, and organised through community as much as against capital. The examinable question is why the classical model of class consciousness does not describe it, without concluding that class is absent.

- **Structure:** a small organised core (public sector, large private manufacturing, unionised, with statutory protection) inside a very large unorganised mass. The organised core has been shrinking in relative terms since the 1980s and even within registered factories, work has been contractualised, so 'formal enterprise, informal worker' is now the dominant type.
- **Growth:** mill labour in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Kanpur and Calcutta was recruited through jobbers (sardars, mukadams) on caste, kin and village lines, kept a rural foothold, and circulated between mill and village. The working class was made by these networks, not despite them.
- Dipesh Chakrabarty (Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890-1940) argued that Calcutta jute workers' consciousness was structured by community, religion, hierarchy and the authority of the sardar, so their protest was not a deficient version of European class consciousness but a different formation. This is the single most cited intervention on the topic.
- Rajnarayan Chandavarkar (The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India, on Bombay millworkers) pushed back on the dualisms: rural link and class action are not opposites, the neighbourhood (mohalla) was itself a site of class organisation, and casualisation was a strategy of capital rather than a survival of tradition. Chitra Joshi's Lost Worlds on Kanpur adds the memory and decline of the mill world.
- E.A. Ramaswamy (The Worker and His Union, 1977) studied Coimbatore textile unions and showed the union as a political-brokerage institution: leadership is external and political, and the worker's loyalty is to the leader and the party as much as to the union as a class instrument.
- **Union structure and the politicisation problem:** the Trade Unions Act, 1926 gave legal recognition; AITUC (1920, first president Lala Lajpat Rai), INTUC (1947, Congress), HMS (1948, socialist), BMS (1955), CITU (1970, CPI-M). Each major federation is tied to a party, which gives labour a national voice and simultaneously fragments the shop floor and makes strikes hostage to alliance politics.
- The turning point is the Bombay textile strike of 1982-83 under Datta Samant: a massive, militant, non-party-federation strike that collapsed, hastened mill closures, moved production to powerlooms in Bhiwandi and elsewhere, and effectively broke organised textile labour in the city. It marks the end of the classical industrial working class as a political actor.
- **Changing nature since 1991:** contract and fixed-term labour inside factories, the special economic zone, automation, the disappearance of the permanent job, the rise of platform and gig work with no employer of record, and a corresponding shift from the industrial union to NGO-style and identity-based organising (SEWA is the exemplar). Parliament passed four labour codes (Code on Wages, 2019; Industrial Relations,

Social Security and OSH Codes, 2020) consolidating 29 central laws; their rollout has been phased and contested, so describe their logic (easier retrenchment thresholds, expanded but thin social security cover) rather than asserting a status.

- The verdict to argue: the Indian working class is real but is mobilised along multiple axes at once, so class consciousness in the classical sense is the exception. Say why (community recruitment, rural fallback, party-federation unionism, informality) rather than declaring workers 'backward'.

KEY TERMS

Jobber system — Recruitment, discipline and credit mediated by a sardar or mukadam using caste, kin and village ties, tying labour to community even inside the factory.

Contractualisation — Employing workers through contractors within formal enterprises so that the enterprise is formal but the worker is not.

Outsider leadership — The Indian pattern of unions led by politicians and lawyers rather than workers, producing brokerage rather than autonomous class organisation.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Discuss the changing nature of Industrial working class. (2022)
- Discuss the changing nature of the problems of working class in the informal sector of the economy. (2016)

The informal sector and child labour

The informal sector is not a sector in India; it is the economy, and formality is the exception. Start by refusing the dualism, because that refusal is what separates a sociological answer from an economics summary.

- The term is Keith Hart's, coined from his Accra fieldwork (1971, published 1973), and popularised by the ILO's Kenya mission report (1972). It originally described income opportunities outside the enumerated wage economy, and it always carried the dualist assumption that the informal was a transitional residue to be absorbed. In India, seventy years on, nothing has been absorbed.
- Scale: the NCEUS (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, chaired by Arjun Sengupta) reported in 2007 that roughly 836 million people, about 77 per cent of the population, lived on less than Rs 20 a day in 2004-05, and that the overwhelming majority of workers were informal. Successive PLFS rounds keep informal employment at roughly nine in ten workers, though exact shares turn on whether you count by enterprise or by worker.
- Distinguish informal enterprise from informal employment. An informal enterprise is unincorporated, unregistered and small; informal employment is work without a written contract, paid leave or social security, and it exists inside formal firms and government too. That distinction produces the modern Indian pattern: formal enterprise, informal worker.
- Jan Breman is the standard critique of the dualist model: formal and informal are not two sectors but one continuum, connected by subcontracting chains. The garment export house is formal; the piece-rate stitcher in her home is not; they are the same production system. Informality is produced by capital, not left over from tradition.
- Barbara Harriss-White (India Working, 2003) supplies the sociological content: the informal economy is not unregulated, it is socially regulated, by caste, gender, religion, kinship and locality, which allocate credit, contracts, trust and labour. Her 'India of the 88 per cent' is governed by social institutions where the state is absent.

- Globalisation intensified rather than formalised it: flexible specialisation, subcontracting to home-based women workers, export clusters (Tiruppur), the SEZ, and now platform work in which the algorithm sets the wage and the worker is a 'partner' with no employer. Social security responses (Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008; e-Shram registration from 2021; the Social Security Code, 2020) register workers without creating employers.
- Child labour is a function of this structure. Article 24 bars children under 14 in factories, mines and hazardous work; the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 regulated it; the 2016 amendment prohibits employment of children below 14 in all occupations, but carves out 'family or family enterprise' outside school hours and permits work in the entertainment industry, and it bars adolescents (14 to 18) only from hazardous occupations. The family exemption is the sociological hole: most Indian child labour is family-based and caste-based (carpet, bangle, beedi, zari, agriculture).
- Myron Weiner (The Child and the State in India, 1991) makes the argument examiners want tested: India's persistence of child labour is not explained by poverty, since poorer countries abolished it, but by a belief system among the state bureaucracy and the upper strata about the social order, about who is educable, and about the appropriateness of manual work for the lower orders. Compulsory education, not labour law, is his instrument.
- Neera Burra (Born to Work, 1995) supplies the fieldwork counter-evidence to the 'nimble fingers' myth: children are employed because they are cheap, docile and unable to unionise, not because a task requires small hands. The policy conclusion is that RTE plus mid-day meal plus enforcement plus household income support work together, and that a ban alone drives the work underground.

Formal versus informal: the distinction, and why it leaks

Criterion	Formal	Informal	Why the line leaks
Registration	Registered enterprise, statutory returns	Unregistered, unincorporated	Registered firms subcontract to unregistered ones
Contract	Written, with notice and grievance	Oral, daily, piece-rate	Contract labour inside registered factories
Social security	PF, ESI, gratuity, leave	None, or a registration without an employer	e-Shram registers the worker but names no employer
Regulation	State law and inspection	Caste, kin, gender, locality (Harriss-White)	Both are regulated; only one is regulated by the state

KEY TERMS

Informal sector — Hart's term for income opportunities outside the enumerated wage economy; in India a permanent structure, not a transitional residue.

Social regulation — Harriss-White's argument that caste, gender, religion and kinship, not the state, govern the informal economy's contracts, credit and labour.

Family enterprise exemption — The 2016 amendment's clause allowing children under 14 to help in family enterprises outside school hours; the main criticism of the law.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- How do you view the growth of informal sector in India? (2022)
- Distinguish between formal and informal sectors in India. (2013)
- Discuss the impact of globalization on the workers in the Informal sector. (2014)
- Is there a connection between labour migration and informal sector? Justify your answer with reference to Indian context. (2024)
- What actionable measures would you suggest to curb the recurrent child labour menace in India? (2023)
- Point out the main causes of 'child labor' in India. How far the State policies have succeeded in its elimination? (2020)
- Do you agree that the issue of child labor raises questions about and beyond the informal sector? Give reasons. (2017)

Slums and deprivation in urban areas

The slum is not a failure of the city; it is the housing arm of the informal economy. Cities that need cheap labour but price land beyond that labour's reach produce slums as a matter of arithmetic, and then criminalise the result.

- Census 2011 recorded roughly 65 million slum residents in the 2,613 towns reporting slums, and used three categories: notified (declared under a state Act), recognised (identified by the local body but not notified) and identified (a compact settlement of at least 300 people or 60 households of poorly built, congested tenements in an unhygienic environment). The categories matter because entitlement follows notification, so the same shack is or is not eligible depending on a state's declaration.
- Deprivation in a slum is multiple and simultaneous, and that is the shape of a good answer: tenure insecurity (which suppresses investment in one's own house), water and sanitation, drainage and flooding, health (density plus fuel plus open drains equals TB and diarrhoeal load), education (distance and first-generation learning), fire and demolition risk, and stigma that follows the address into the job interview.
- Slums are not homogeneous. Dharavi contains leather, pottery, recycling and garment enterprises and a rental market; slum landlordism, caste and regional clustering (Kumbharwada, the Tamil quarter) and a hierarchy from pucca structure owner to pavement dweller are internal to it. Treating the slum as an undifferentiated mass of the poor is the standard weak answer.
- Explanation to argue: slums are the residue of a land and housing market, not of migration as such. Cities zoned for formal housing that informal wages cannot buy; public housing was never built at scale; so the labour the city depends on houses itself illegally on land it does not own. This is why 'are slums the manifestation of industrialisation and urbanisation' should be answered yes with a qualification: they are the manifestation of urbanisation without industrialisation, of pull that is service-sector and casual.
- Partha Chatterjee (The Politics of the Governed, 2004) gives the sharpest frame. Slum residents are not in civil society, whose members hold enforceable rights; they are in 'political society', where population groups negotiate with a governmental apparatus through claims of need, using votes, mediation and violation, and receive exceptions rather than rights. This explains why slum politics is patronage politics and why regularisation always comes before elections.
- Arjun Appadurai's 'Deep Democracy' (2001) documents the alternative: the alliance of SPARC, Mahila Milan and the National Slum Dwellers Federation in Mumbai practised self-enumeration, savings and 'the politics of patience', building capacity to negotiate rather than to confront. Read Chatterjee and Appadurai together: one describes the structural limit, the other an agentic response inside it.

- Policy sequence: from slum clearance (1950s and 1960s) to in situ improvement (Environmental Improvement of Urban Slums, 1972) to JNNURM (2005) with its BSUP and IHSDP sub-missions, Rajiv Awas Yojana (2011) with its 'slum-free India' and property-rights framing, PMAY-Urban (2015), plus AMRUT and Smart Cities (2015). The Street Vendors Act, 2014 and PM SVANidhi (2020) address livelihood rather than housing. The recurring failure is the same one: relocation to the periphery destroys the livelihood that made the location valuable, so people return.
- Add the caste layer, which the 2017 question asked for directly. A Dalit family in an urban slum trades the visibility of the village (where caste is known and enforced by the whole settlement, and commons are denied) for anonymity plus insecurity: work is available and stigma is looser, but housing, sanitation work allocation and residential clustering still track caste, and the rural safety net of kin and land is gone.

KEY TERMS

Political society — Chatterjee's domain in which population groups without secure rights negotiate with the state as objects of policy, extracting exceptions through need, numbers and mediation.

Politics of patience — Appadurai's term for the slum federations' long-horizon strategy of enumeration, savings and negotiation instead of confrontation.

Notified, recognised, identified slums — The Census 2011 three-way classification; entitlements follow notification, so classification is itself an instrument of exclusion.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Discuss different forms of deprivation associated with slums. (2022)
- Urban slums are sites of social exclusion. Explain. (2021)
- Are slums the manifestations of industrialisation and urbanisation in India? Explain. (2024)
- Give a sociological analysis of the problems of migrant urban poor. (2014)
- Compare the pressing problems of a dalit poor family living in an urban slum with a similar type of family living in a rural setting. (2017)
- Write a note on Basic Services to Urban Poor (BSUP) and Integrated Housing and Slum Development (IHSD) programs provided for the urban poor. (2018)

Nation, democracy and citizenship

India inverted the European sequence. It granted universal adult franchise at once, to a largely illiterate and deeply stratified society, before it had delivered civil or social rights. Everything distinctive about Indian democracy follows from that inversion.

- Theories of the nation to name: Ernest Gellner (Nations and Nationalism, 1983) treats nationalism as a functional requirement of industrial society, which needs a standardised, literate, mobile culture; Benedict Anderson (Imagined Communities, 1983) treats the nation as an imagined political community, limited and sovereign, made thinkable by print capitalism. Neither fits India cleanly, since Indian nationalism preceded industrialisation and worked across many print languages.
- Sudipta Kaviraj's distinction is the Indian correction: colonial enumeration turned 'fuzzy' communities, with no clear boundary and no head count, into 'enumerated' ones with censuses, majorities and minorities. Majority and minority are not natural facts; they are artefacts of counting, which is why census categories are politically explosive.
- T.H. Marshall (Citizenship and Social Class, 1950) gave the sequence civil, then political, then social rights across three centuries in England. India reversed it: political rights came first and complete in 1950, civil

rights are unevenly enforced (an untouchability offence in a village is a civil-rights failure), and social rights arrived late and partially, as statutory entitlements (RTE 2009, MGNREGA 2005, NFSA 2013). Ambedkar's warning of 25 November 1949 about political democracy without social democracy is the same point stated in advance.

- Citizenship in Indian law: Articles 5 to 11 and the Citizenship Act, 1955, originally *jus soli*, progressively narrowed by the amendments of 1986 (after the Assam Accord), 2003 (introducing the illegal migrant category, the NRIC and the OCI) and 2019 (a religion-linked fast track to naturalisation for specified non-Muslim migrants from three countries, which triggered the largest citizenship protests since independence). The Assam NRC updated in 2019 is the concrete instance of documentary citizenship.
- The sociological point about documentary citizenship: when belonging must be proven on paper, those without archives (the poor, the migrant, women whose names change at marriage, the flood-displaced) are the ones at risk. Citizenship becomes a function of record-keeping, which is itself class- and gender-stratified.
- Substantive versus formal citizenship: Aadhaar-linked entitlement, portability failures for migrants (the 2020 exodus), and Chatterjee's political society all show that the formal citizen with a vote may still be a supplicant for a ration. Nation building therefore depends on strengthening pluralities rather than dissolving them, which is the 2017 question and the constitutional design (linguistic states, Sixth Schedule, Articles 29 and 30, Article 371 provisions).
- The 'religion in nation building' question (2025) needs both sides: religion supplied nationalism's mass idiom (Gandhi's Ram Rajya, the reform movements, the vocabulary of sacrifice) and simultaneously supplied the ground of Partition. Religion is not external to Indian nation building; it is one of its constitutive materials, which is exactly why the constitutional settlement is equal respect rather than a wall of separation.
- The democratic profile has changed, and Yogendra Yadav's 'second democratic upsurge' names how: from the 1990s, turnout among Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs, the rural and the poor came to exceed that of the urban upper-caste elite, reversing the usual global pattern in which the privileged vote more. Democracy in India deepened socially before it deepened institutionally.

KEY TERMS

Fuzzy and enumerated communities — Kaviraj's contrast between pre-colonial identities without countable boundaries and colonial census identities with majorities and minorities.

Second democratic upsurge — Yadav's term for the post-1990 rise in participation by Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs and the rural poor above elite participation levels.

Documentary citizenship — Belonging established by paper (NRC, Aadhaar, legacy data) rather than by residence, which excludes those without archives.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Analyze the issues related to the citizenship in contemporary India. Give suitable illustrations. (2020)
- To what extent does nation building depend on strengthening of pluralities in Indian society. (2017)
- Comment on the changing democratic profile of India. (2019)
- What do you mean by nation building? What is the role of religion in nation building? Elaborate your answer. (2025)
- Is social democracy a precondition for political democracy? Comment. (2021)

Political parties, pressure groups, and the social and political elite

Indian democracy did not dissolve caste; it recruited caste. The parties, the pressure groups and the elite circulation all run through primordial ties that were supposed to disappear, and the theoretical payoff is that modernity used tradition as its vehicle.

- Rajni Kothari's 'Congress system' (Politics in India, 1970) is the founding description: one-party dominance in which real competition happened inside the Congress through factions, and opposition parties functioned as pressure groups on the margin. It explains stability without authoritarianism, and its breakdown after 1967 and 1989 explains coalition politics.
- M.N. Srinivas coined 'vote bank' (in his 1955 study of Rampura) for the bloc of votes a patron could deliver through dependence. The concept is now used loosely; use it precisely, as a patron-client transfer, and note that the second democratic upsurge broke exactly this transfer by giving clients their own parties.
- Rudolph and Rudolph (The Modernity of Tradition, 1967) argued caste associations are modernising, not reactionary: they aggregate interests, run schools and hostels, and lobby. Their three types of mobilisation are essential: vertical (patron mobilises client, the old order), horizontal (caste association mobilises its own members across villages) and differential (parties mobilise across castes on issues). In In Pursuit of Lakshmi (1987) they add 'demand groups' and the 'bullock capitalists', the middling agrarian proprietors who became a national pressure bloc.
- Christophe Jaffrelot's India's Silent Revolution (2003) tracks the outcome in north India: the transfer of political power to lower castes through the Mandal moment and the OBC parties, decades after it had happened in the south through the non-Brahmin and Dravidian movements. Sudha Pai on the BSP in Uttar Pradesh documents the Dalit variant.
- Elite theory to name and use: Vilfredo Pareto's circulation of elites (lions and foxes), Gaetano Mosca's organised ruling minority, C. Wright Mills's power elite as an interlocked military, corporate and political directorate. In India the fruitful question is composition and circulation, not existence: from a Congress national elite of Western-educated, upper-caste professionals, to a regional, agrarian and OBC political class after the 1960s, to a business-and-media-connected elite after 1991.
- So the changing structure of political elites (asked in 2022 and 2024) has a shape: vernacularisation (English to regional language), ruralisation and then re-urbanisation, the rise of the OBC and Dalit politician, criminalisation and the rising cost of contesting, dynasticism as a party-organisational device, and the growing weight of corporate finance after electoral bonds. Political power has broadened socially while economic power has narrowed.
- Pressure groups in India: business (FICCI, CII, ASSOCHAM), labour (AITUC, INTUC, BMS, CITU), farmers (BKU, Samyukt Kisan Morcha), professionals (IMA, bar associations), students (NSUI, ABVP, SFI), caste associations (Nadar Mahajana Sangam, Jat and Patidar mobilisations), and religious bodies (VHP, Jamiat, AIMPLB). Most are party-affiliated, which is the Indian peculiarity and the reason they lobby less and agitate more.
- The balanced verdict for 'do pressure groups strengthen democracy': they do by aggregating interests, informing policy and providing between-election voice; they weaken it when they are anonymous, unequally resourced (business outspends labour), captured by a party, or able to convert street power into veto power. Say which groups, on which issue, and with what resources.
- Caste in politics is not the survival of tradition but its transformation. Caste as a ritual hierarchy has weakened; caste as an interest group, an association and a vote-mobilising identity has strengthened. Srinivas called this the secularisation of caste, and it is the single most useful sentence for this section.

KEY TERMS

Congress system — Kothari's model of one-party dominance with intra-party factional competition and opposition parties acting as pressure groups.

Horizontal mobilisation — Rudolph and Rudolph's type in which a caste association mobilises its own members across villages for political ends, as against vertical patron-client mobilisation.

Bullock capitalists — Rudolph and Rudolph's middling, self-employed agrarian proprietors who became a durable national demand group.

Secularisation of caste — Srinivas's point that caste loses ritual content while gaining organisational and political function.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Who are the elites? Discuss their roles in bringing social transformation. (2014)
- Discuss the role of pressure groups in strengthening democracy. (2022)
- Discuss the changing nature of structure of political elites. (2022)
- Discuss the changing nature of political elites in India. (2024)
- Comment on the increasing significance of caste in politics. (2016)
- Discuss the social bases of political mobilization in Independent India. Has some change occurred in these during the last 60-70 years? (2025)
- Give an account of the problems relating to the 'creamy layer'. (2017)

Regionalism and decentralisation of power

Indian regionalism has mostly been accommodated rather than crushed, and accommodation is why it rarely became secession. The exam wants the link between the two halves: does regional assertion actually devolve power, or only relocate its centre?

- Regionalism has several distinct forms, and conflating them is the standard error: demand for statehood within the union (Telangana, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand), demand for autonomy (Nagaland, Sixth Schedule councils, Gorkhaland), sons-of-the-soil nativism (Shiv Sena in Bombay, the anti-Bihari and anti-Bengali agitations in Assam), inter-state disputes over rivers and boundaries (Cauvery, Belagavi), and secession (the Naga and Mizo undergrounds, Khalistan). Only the last is anti-national; the rest are demands made in the union's own idiom.
- The linguistic settlement: the Dhar Commission (1948) and the JVP Committee (1949) opposed linguistic states as a threat to unity; Potti Sriramulu's fast unto death forced Andhra in 1953; the Fazl Ali Commission (1953-55) led to the States Reorganisation Act, 1956. The lesson to argue is counter-intuitive and examinable: conceding language defused it. Language ceased to be a secessionist issue precisely because it was granted.
- Myron Weiner (Sons of the Soil, 1978) explains nativism structurally: conflict arises where a locally rooted but educationally lagging group faces a migrant group holding the modern-sector jobs, so the demand becomes preference in employment. It is competition over a modern resource, not primordial hatred, and it takes ethnic form because ethnicity is the available organising boundary.
- Paul Brass's instrumentalism reads regional and ethnic identity as elite-mobilised: leaders select and objectify a symbol (language, script, dress, a saint) from a range of available markers, and mobilise it because it wins state resources. Against the primordialists (Geertz, Shils) and with Barth's boundary approach, the identity is real but the boundary is made.

- Decentralisation's statutory arc: Balvantray Mehta (1957) three-tier, Ashok Mehta (1978) two-tier, G.V.K. Rao (1985) district as the planning unit, L.M. Singhvi (1986) constitutional status, then the 73rd and 74th Amendments (1992, in force 1993): five-year terms, State Election Commissions, State Finance Commissions, reservation for SC, ST and not less than one-third for women, the Eleventh Schedule (29 subjects) and the Twelfth (18). PESA, 1996 gives gram sabha primacy in Fifth Schedule areas.
- The gap: the Schedules are permissive lists, not a transfer of jurisdiction, so states devolve functions without funds or functionaries. Parallel bodies (district agencies, mission societies, MP and MLA local area development funds) route money around panchayats. Municipal finance is worse: cities cannot tax, so they depend on transfers and land monetisation, which is why urban decentralisation is weaker than rural.
- The honest answer to 'does regionalism essentially lead to decentralisation of power' is no, not essentially. Regionalism transfers power to the state or regional capital, and regional parties in office have often been the most centralising within their state (Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh have all been reluctant devolvers). Regionalism decentralises the union while frequently centralising the region. Kerala's People's Plan Campaign is the counter-example because there a party ideology, not regional sentiment, drove devolution.
- Decentralisation's democratic value, argued honestly: it widens the political class enormously (roughly three million elected local representatives, over a million of them women), builds a training ground for leadership, and brings SC, ST and women into office. It is captured where local inequality is sharp, since a gram sabha in a village with one dominant landholding caste is not a level forum. Devolution deepens democracy in proportion to how equal the local society already is, which is the paradox to state.

KEY TERMS

Sons of the soil — Weiner's model of nativist conflict where a local group lagging in modern-sector credentials demands job preference against better-placed migrants.

Instrumentalism — Brass's view that ethnic and regional identities are selected and mobilised by elites competing for state resources, rather than being given by primordial attachment.

PESA, 1996 — The Act extending panchayats to Fifth Schedule areas, giving the gram sabha primacy over minor forest produce, minor minerals and land alienation.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Does regionalism essentially lead to decentralization of power? Substantiate your answer with relevant examples. (2021)
- 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)
- Discuss the sociological aspects of movements for separate States. (2013)

Secularization: the Western thesis and the Indian case

The single most examined trap in this unit is the double meaning of the word. In Western sociology secularization means the declining social significance of religion. In Indian sociology, following Srinivas, it means the declining ritual content of social institutions, which is not the same thing at all, and religion in India has grown more public while caste has grown more secular.

- The classical Western thesis has three components: structural differentiation (education, law, medicine and welfare detach from religious institutions), rationalisation and Weber's disenchantment (the world ceases to be explained by magic), and privatisation (religion retreats to conscience). Peter Berger (*The Sacred Canopy*, 1967) is the canonical statement, and Bryan Wilson defined it as the loss of religion's social significance.
- The thesis has been abandoned by its own author. Berger's *The Desecularization of the World* (1999) concedes the world is 'as furiously religious as ever' and that the exception is Western Europe, not the rest. Jose Casanova (*Public Religions in the Modern World*, 1994) makes the decisive move: unbundle the thesis. Differentiation holds; decline and privatisation do not. Religion has 'deprivatised', returning to the public sphere as a voice in politics.
- M.N. Srinivas (*Social Change in Modern India*, 1966) uses secularization as one of the processes of change alongside sanskritization and westernization, and he means something specific: the shift from a ritual to a secular idiom, the shortening and simplification of ritual, the loosening of pollution and purity in public spaces (buses, offices, tea shops), and, crucially, the conversion of caste from a ritual order into an interest group. Caste secularises and thereby becomes politically more powerful, not less.
- So the two senses run in opposite directions in India. Religion has not declined; it has become more visible, more organised, more televised, more political, more consumed (the mega-pilgrimage, the sect, the godman, the digital darshan). Meanwhile the ritual content of everyday social organisation has thinned. An answer that does not separate these two is the standard failure on this topic.
- Indian secularism is not the American wall of separation. Donald Eugene Smith (*India as a Secular State*, 1963) tested India against the classical definition; the Indian settlement is instead equal respect (*sarva dharma sambhava*) plus a reforming state: Article 25(2)(b) explicitly empowers throwing Hindu religious institutions open to all classes, which is state interference in religion for the sake of equality. It is a secularism of intervention, not of abstention.
- The Indian critique to name accurately. T.N. Madan ('*Secularism in Its Place*', 1987): secularism is alien and impossible in South Asia because religion here is not a private matter of belief but a way of life, so a secularism that ignores religion becomes a cover for majoritarianism. Ashis Nandy ('*An Anti-Secularist Manifesto*', and '*The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance*', 1988): statist secularism is an ideology of a westernised elite, and the real resource for tolerance is faith itself, since the intolerant are the modernised, not the devout.
- The defence, also to name: Rajeev Bhargava's 'principled distance' and 'contextual secularism' argue Indian secularism is a superior model precisely because it is not strict separation. The state may engage or disengage with any religion, and may treat them differently, provided the reason is a principled one grounded in freedom and equality, not the majority's preference. Amartya Sen argues for symmetric treatment rather than an abstract wall.
- Does modernisation necessarily bring secularisation (asked in 2024)? Argue no, and give the mechanisms rather than the assertion: education has produced new religious publics rather than fewer believers, technology has scaled the sect and the pilgrimage, the market has commodified religiosity, urban anomie has produced sects and cults as substitute communities, and democratic competition has made religion an efficient mobilisation resource. India is the standing refutation of the assumption that modernity and religion trade off.

Two senses of secularization

	Western sense	Indian sense (Srinivas)
What declines	The social significance and authority of religion	The ritual content of social institutions
Mechanism	Differentiation, rationalisation, privatisation	Ritual shortening, weakening of pollution and purity in public space
Effect on religion	Retreat to private conscience	Religion becomes more public and more organised
Effect on caste	Not applicable	Caste becomes an interest group and gains political force
Verdict on the thesis	Berger recanted (1999); Casanova: keep differentiation, drop decline and privatisation	Holds descriptively; misread constantly as 'religion is declining in India'

KEY TERMS

Deprivatisation — Casanova's term for religion's return to the public sphere as a legitimate voice, without any loss of differentiation.

Principled distance — Bhargava's model in which the state may engage or disengage with religions, and treat them differently, but only for reasons grounded in freedom and equality.

Sarva dharma sambhava — Equal respect for all religions, the Indian constitutional idiom, as against a wall of separation.

Secularisation of caste — Srinivas's finding that caste sheds ritual meaning and gains associational and political function.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- How do you account for the increasing significance of religion in public and personal spheres in the context of secularization thesis in India? Explain. (2023)
- Examine different understandings of secularisation in India. (2022)
- With increase in education and economic development is Indian society becoming more secular? (2018)
- 'Secularism was an outcome of 20th century humanistic radicalism.' Comment on this statement. (2020)
- Do modernization and secularization necessarily go together? Give your views. (2024)

Last-mile revision

- Deindustrialisation is a debate: Naoroji and R.C. Dutt for, Morris D. Morris against, Bipan Chandra in reply. Do not assert it as settled.
- Singer: compartmentalisation, ritual neutralisation of the work sphere, vicarious ritualisation. Sheth: caste and kin organise the shop floor. Tradition adapted rather than retreated.
- Chakrabarty: Bengal jute workers' consciousness was community-structured, not deficient. Chandavarkar: the neighbourhood was itself a site of class action. Ramaswamy: the union as political brokerage.
- The Bombay textile strike of 1982-83 under Datta Samant is the endpoint of the classical industrial working class as a political actor.
- Census urban rules: statutory town versus census town (5,000 population, 75 per cent non-agricultural male main workers, 400 per square kilometre). Census 2011: 31.16 per cent urban, 3,894 census towns against 1,362 in 2001.
- Over-urbanisation is Davis and Golden; Sovani attacked the concept. Wirth's urbanism travels badly to India; use the rural-urban continuum (Redfield, M.S.A. Rao) instead.
- Informal sector: Hart coined it, the ILO Kenya report (1972) spread it. NCEUS (2007) is the Indian anchor. Breman: one continuum, not two sectors. Harriss-White: socially regulated, not unregulated.
- Weiner: child labour persists because of a belief system about the social order, not because of poverty alone. The 2016 amendment's family enterprise exemption is the hole.
- Slums: Census 2011 notified, recognised, identified; about 65 million residents. Chatterjee's political society explains patronage; Appadurai's politics of patience explains the federations.
- Marshall's civil, political, social sequence is inverted in India. Kaviraj: fuzzy communities became enumerated ones. Yadav: second democratic upsurge.
- Kothari's Congress system; Srinivas's vote bank; Rudolph and Rudolph's vertical, horizontal and differential mobilisation plus bullock capitalists; Jaffrelot's silent revolution.
- Regionalism does not essentially decentralise: it devolves the union and often centralises the region. Kerala's People's Plan is the counter-case, and its driver was party ideology, not regional feeling.
- The two senses of secularization: Western (religion's significance declines) versus Srinivas (ritual content declines while caste secularises into an interest group). Berger recanted in 1999; Casanova's deprivatisation is the current frame.
- Madan and Nandy attack Indian secularism from opposite ends of the same claim; Bhargava defends it as principled distance.

Common errors to avoid

- Writing that religion is declining in India because 'secularization is happening'. Srinivas means the ritual content of institutions is thinning, and he simultaneously shows caste getting politically stronger by becoming secular.
- Treating deindustrialisation as an established fact. Morris D. Morris contested it in 1963 and the reply from Bipan Chandra is part of the expected answer.
- Defining a census town by population alone. All three criteria must hold together: 5,000 people, 75 per cent non-agricultural male main workers, 400 per square kilometre.
- Applying Wirth's urbanism to India without qualification. Indian cities are dense with primary ties; caste and kin allocate housing, credit and jobs inside them.
- Treating formal and informal as two sectors. Breman's point is that they are one production system linked by subcontracting, and Harriss-White's is that the informal is socially regulated rather than unregulated.
- Explaining child labour by poverty alone. Weiner's whole argument is that poorer countries abolished it and India did not, because of beliefs about who is educable.
- Describing slums as an undifferentiated mass of the poor. Internal hierarchy, slum landlordism, caste clustering and enterprise are the sociological content.
- Saying regionalism leads to decentralisation. It relocates the centre; regional parties in power are often the least willing to devolve to panchayats.
- Confusing Indian secularism with the American wall of separation. Article 25(2)(b) is a power to interfere in religion for equality's sake.
- Naming Madan and Nandy as if they say the same thing. Madan argues secularism is impossible in a religious society; Nandy argues statist secularism is itself the intolerant ideology and that faith is the resource for tolerance.
- Listing urban schemes (JNNURM, RAY, PMAY, AMRUT, Smart Cities) without the recurring mechanism of failure, which is peripheral relocation destroying the livelihood that made the location worth living in.