



Mains Practice Question

Q. How has the increasing commercialization of agricultural practices influenced rural social structures and gender relations? **(150 words)**

24 Feb, 2025 GS Paper 1 Indian Society

Approach

- Introduce the answer by briefing about the impact of Commercialization of Agriculture
- Highlight the Impact on Rural Social Structures and Gender Relations
- Conclude with a forward looking approach.

Introduction

The commercialization of agriculture, driven by **market-oriented production, mechanization, and agribusiness integration**, has significantly transformed rural social structures and gender relations. While it has increased rural incomes and agricultural productivity, it has also widened **socio-economic inequalities, altered traditional labor dynamics, and reinforced gender disparities** in rural India.

Body

Impact on Rural Social Structures:

- **Emergence of Agrarian Capitalism and Class Stratification**
 - The shift from subsistence farming to **cash crops and contract farming** has benefited **large landowners** while marginalizing small and landless farmers.
 - **Tenant farmers and sharecroppers** often struggle due to rising input costs, leading to rural indebtedness and migration.
- **Decline of Traditional Caste-Based Occupations**
 - Commercialization has **reduced dependence on the jajmani (traditional service) system**, leading to the **breakdown of caste-based labor divisions**.
 - **Mechanization** has displaced **Dalits and lower-caste laborers**, who historically worked as manual agricultural laborers.
- **Changes in Land Ownership Patterns**
 - The rising demand for land for **agribusiness, contract farming, and corporate farming** has led to **land consolidation in the hands of a few**.
 - **Land leasing and tenancy agreements** have become common, leading to **insecure land tenure for small and marginal farmers**.

Impact on Gender Relations:

- **Feminization of Agriculture without Empowerment**
 - Due to male migration, **75% of women workers in rural India** are now employed in agriculture, but they **lack land ownership and access to credit, technology, and inputs**.

- Women's increased workload has **not translated into greater financial autonomy**, as land titles remain **male-dominated (only 13% of women own land in India)**.
- **Shift in Household Gender Roles**
 - Women have taken up additional responsibilities in farming, yet they continue to bear the burden of **domestic chores and caregiving**.
 - Decision-making in agricultural activities is still **dominated by male family members**, despite the increasing role of women in agricultural production.
- **Gender Disparities in Wages and Employment Opportunities**
 - Women agricultural workers are **paid 20-30% less** than men for the same work.
 - Commercialization has led to **job losses for women** in traditional farm-based activities like seed preservation, food processing, and livestock rearing, which are now mechanized or industrialized.
- **Rise of Women's Cooperatives and SHGs**
 - To counter male-dominated agricultural policies, women have organized into **Self-Help Groups (SHGs)** and cooperatives (e.g., **SEWA, Kudumbashree in Kerala**) to gain financial and social empowerment.
 - Initiatives like **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP)** aim to recognize and strengthen women's role in agriculture.

Conclusion

The commercialization of agriculture in rural India has **widened class and gender inequalities, favoring large landowners while marginalizing small farmers and women**. Despite rising female participation, institutional barriers persist in **land rights, credit, and decision-making**. Policy measures like **land reforms, gender-sensitive policies, and inclusive credit access** are crucial for equitable rural development.

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/mains-practice-question/question-8686/pnt>

