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Q6(b)

Discuss the impact of globalization on the economic systems of indigenous communities.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Anthropology GS 1 · 15 marks · Economic Organization

3. Economic Organization: Meaning, scope and relevance of economic anthropology; Formalist and Substantivist debate; Principles governing production, distribution and exchange (reciprocity, redistribution and market), in communities, subsisting on hunting and gathering, fishing, swiddening, pastoralism, horticulture, and agriculture; globalization and indigenous economic systems.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the impact of globalization on the economic systems of indigenous communities
- Write at 15-mark length

Revision summary

Wolf already placed local peoples inside world markets.

Globalization intensifies land commodification, wage labour, and branded culture.

Niyamgiri and dam displacement are Indian cases of resource enclosure.

Remittances and tourism can feed and hollow the same household.

New brokers create internal inequality.

Friction, law, and cooperatives are the counter-moves, not a return to a closed isolate.

Introduction

Indigenous economies were already inside colonial markets, as **Eric Wolf** showed. Globalization intensifies that enclosure through price, land, media, and law, and it does not have one single effect.

Body**What is hit**

- Subsistence mixes of hunting, shifting cultivation, pastoralism, and craft meet cash crops, wage labour, and packaged food, which **Marshall Sahlins's** domestic mode of production no longer describes as a closed circuit.
- Land and forest become commodities through mines, dams, plantations, and conservation fences, so tenure is the first economic fact, not only income.

Typical impacts

- **Dispossession:** Dongria Kondh resistance at **Niyamgiri**, Narmada displacement ethnography, and Amazon oil frontiers show that global demand for bauxite, electricity, and crude rewrites local livelihood.
- **Labour and cash:** Gulf and city migration from highland and island communities sends remittances that both feed households and empty fields, a pattern **Arjun Appadurai** would read

as ethnoscaples of labour.

- **Commoditised culture:** tourism, fair-trade coffee, and patented seed can raise cash while stripping ritual control of knowledge, as in many Andean and north-east Indian craft markets.
- **New inequality:** brokers, contractors, and educated youth capture rents; elders and women who held common resources often lose.
- **Health and food:** market starch and alcohol replace diverse forest diets, which nutritional anthropology records as a biological cost of the same economic shift.

Not only loss

- Indigenous firms, cooperatives, and legal victories such as community forest rights can use global courts and NGOs, which **Anna Tsing** would call friction rather than a steamroller.
- Some pastoralists and fishers specialise for urban markets and stay on the land under new terms.

How to write the impact

- **Name the local system first:** jhum, herd, reef, or forest.
- **Then name the global chain:** metal, tourist, carbon, or garment.
- Then say who captures the cash.

Flow diagram

Global markets -> Land mines dams
 Global markets -> Wages remittances
 Indigenous economy -> Land mines dams
 Indigenous economy -> Wages remittances
 Land mines dams -> Unequal outcomes

Conclusion

Globalization pulls indigenous economies into longer commodity chains and weaker tenure. The impact is dispossession and cash together, and the anthropological task is to show which households gain and which commons fail.

Facts & figures

Eric Wolf

Europe and the People without History argued that indigenous communities were already inside global political economy.

Niyamgiri

Dongria Kondh case of a sacred hill versus bauxite demand in a global aluminium chain.

Appadurai's ethnoscaples

A way to read migrant labour as a global cultural-economic flow, not as a one-village economy.

Anna Tsing

Friction names the awkward, unequal encounters of global supply and local livelihood, as in commodity frontiers.

Forest Rights Act, 2006

A legal counter-instrument that can, where implemented, defend community economic access to forest.

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