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Q3(b)

Discuss the impact of Hinduism on the status of tribal women in Central India

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Anthropology GS 2 · 15 marks · Impact of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and other religions on tribal societies.

8.1 Impact of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and other religions on tribal societies.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the impact of Hinduism on the status of tribal women in Central India
- Keep the answer to a 15-mark length of about 200 words

Revision summary

Hindu contact in Central India often means **Sanskritisation** of Gond and Bhil groups.

Srinivas's model predicts purity, dowry, and curbs on widow remarriage.

Elwin warned that tribal women's customary freedoms would shrink.

Ghurye treated the same process as Hindu absorption.

Forest work and FRA still keep women economically central.

Introduction

Hinduism reaches Central Indian tribes as temple, jati rank, and purity rules, not as a single conversion event. For women the impact is mixed: new honour and new seclusion.

Body

What changes

- **Sanskritisation**, in **M. N. Srinivas's** sense, spreads among Gond, Bhil, and neighbouring groups as vegetarian public style, dowry talk, and restrictions on widow remarriage.
- **Bride-price**, freer divorce, and women's field work, once common in many Central Indian tribes, shrink where Rajput or Brahman models are copied.
- **G. S. Ghurye's** "backward Hindus" thesis named this pull. **Verrier Elwin** feared it would cost tribal women their customary space.

What persists

- Market work, forest collection, and **FRA** claims still need women's labour. Status in the field lags the new purity talk at the feast.
- **L. P. Vidyarthi's** sacred complex draws tribal families to Gaya and regional shrines. Women go as pilgrims, yet pandas and purity ranks are male-heavy.
- Christian and reform sects in the same belt offer rival gender scripts, so Hindu impact is not the only story.

Net status

- Hinduisation often lowers women's rural freedom while raising household prestige in the regional caste map.

Flow diagram

Hindu models -> Sanskritisation
Sanskritisation -> Less divorce bride-price
Elwin -> Warns loss of customary space

Conclusion

Hinduism in Central India frequently Sanskritises tribal households. Women's mobility and divorce custom weaken even as family rank in the Hindu order may rise.

Facts & figures

Sanskritisation

Srinivas's process of copying a high-caste style, including gender seclusion.

Verrier Elwin

Defended tribal custom, including relatively open women's status, against rapid Hinduisation.

G. S. Ghurye

Saw Central Indian tribes as backward Hindus moving into the caste order.

Bride-price

A tribal marriage payment that often yields to dowry under Hindu ranking.

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