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Q8(c)

Discuss the sociocultural, economic and psychological constraints responsible for low literacy in tribal areas

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Anthropology GS 2 · 20 marks · Tribal situation in India

6.1 Tribal situation in India-Bio-genetic variability, linguistic and socio-economic characteristics of the tribal populations and their distribution.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the sociocultural, economic and psychological constraints responsible for low literacy in tribal areas
- Keep the answer to a 20-mark length of about 250 words

Revision summary

Low tribal literacy comes from language mismatch and school calendars that ignore jhum.

Poverty, migration, and teacher vacancies are economic brakes.

Distrust of the state and shame of custom are psychological brakes.

Elwin and Vidyarthi warned against schools that erase forest culture.

FRA security and mother-tongue teaching are the practical counters.

Introduction

Low literacy in tribal areas is not a racial defect. It is a pile of school-language mismatch, poverty, and distrust built by a state that often arrived as the forest officer.

Body

Sociocultural constraints

- Mother tongue is rarely the medium. Indo-Aryan or English primers meet Austroasiatic, Dravidian, or Tibeto-Burman homes.
- Seasonal jhum, festival, and girl-child labour clash with a rigid school calendar.
- **Elwin** already saw boarding schools as cultural shock. Sanskritising or mission schools may shame custom.

Economic constraints

- Hunger, migration, and forest work pull children out. A literate job is distant; the mine or the field is near.
- Teacher vacancies in **Fifth Schedule** interiors make the school a building without a class.
- Opportunity cost is higher where **FRA** titles and wages are still insecure.

Psychological constraints

- Repeated failure in a foreign tongue produces withdrawal, not stupidity.
- Parents who met the state as eviction may treat the school as another office.

- **Vidyarthi's** cosmos is oral and ritual. Print feels like someone else's sacred complex.

What follows

- Constraints are structural. Ashram schools and multilingual primers help only if land and teachers exist.

Flow diagram

Low literacy -> Language calendar

Low literacy -> Poverty migration

Low literacy -> Distrust shame

Conclusion

Tribal illiteracy is produced by language, livelihood, empty posts, and historic distrust. Panchsheel would judge literacy by whether the school respects genius, not by enrolment tables alone.

Facts & figures

Mother-tongue gap

Tribal homes often do not speak the state's school language.

Verrier Elwin

Warned that crude schooling can destroy confidence and custom.

Fifth Schedule interiors

Zones where teacher absence and forest conflict stack together.

Nehru Panchsheel

Asked that education follow tribal genius, not only enrolment targets.

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