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Q5(c)

**Socioeconomic characteristics of shifting cultivators**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Anthropology GS 2 · 10 marks · Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization

1.1 Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization-Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic), Protohistoric (Indus Civilization). Pre-Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan cultures. Contributions of the tribal cultures to Indian civilization.

**Core demand of the question**

- Write a note on socioeconomic characteristics of shifting cultivators
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length of about 150 words

**Revision summary**

Shifting cultivation rotates ash plots and **fallow** on clan or village land.

Households mix crops, forest produce, and wages.

Elwin treated **jhum** as a forest adaptation, not laziness.

FRA and **Fifth Schedule** are the legal files for title.

Markets and bans are turning the type into a squeezed mixed economy.

**Introduction**

Shifting cultivators in India rotate forest plots, ash, and **fallow**. Their economy is mixed, communal in land, and now squeezed by the state and the market.

**Body****Economy and labour**

- Plots are cleared, burnt, cropped, and left to recover. Rice, millets, and vegetables mix with hunt, forest produce, and wage work.
- Land is often clan or village territory, not a saleable title, which **Elwin** defended against forest reservation.
- Labour is household and kin. Surplus is small; ritual feast still organises prestige.

**Social and political squeeze**

- **FRA 2006** can recognise cultivation and community forest, but many **jhum** villages lack titles.
- **Fifth Schedule** belts of the North-East and Central India show both **jhum** and its criminalisation as "waste".
- Cash crops and mines pull youth out, so the socioeconomic type is no longer a closed isolate.

**Flow diagram**

Jhum fallow -> Kin clan land  
Jhum fallow -> Forest produce  
Title FRA -> Squeeze by state market

## Conclusion

Shifting cultivators combine **fallow** agriculture with forest and wage. Their characteristic problem today is title and stigma, not a primitive mind.

## Facts & figures

### Jhum

Regional name for shifting cultivation in much of tribal India.

### Verrier Elwin

Defended shifting cultivation as ecological custom against blanket reservation.

### FRA 2006

Can record cultivation and community forest rights of jhum villages.

### Fallow

Rest years that restore the plot; shortened fallow is a current crisis.