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Q7(b)

Discuss the impact of Islam on scheduled tribes of India

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · Anthropology GS 2 · 15 marks · Impact of Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity on Indian society.

3.4 Impact of Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity on Indian society.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the impact of Islam on scheduled tribes of India
- Keep the answer to a 15-mark length of about 200 words

Revision summary

Islam met tribes through trade, state, and reform, not one wave.

Lakshadweep and some western Himalayan groups show deep mix.

Central Indian ST conversion is limited; list politics still matters.

Inheritance and mosque may strain clan land and groves.

Elwin's caution applies to any rapid creed that splits territory.

Introduction

Islam reached Indian tribes as trade, conquest, and later tabligh, not as one conversion wave. Impact varies from Kashmir and **Lakshadweep** to Central Indian pockets.

Body**Where impact is deep**

- Some Himalayan and western groups became Muslim while keeping clan and custom, as with parts of the north-west frontier of the old map.
- **Lakshadweep** and some Kerala margins mixed Islam with matriliney, a compromise already noted in kinship studies.
- North-**Eastern plains** and Assam show Muslim peasants beside tribal hills more than a mass ST conversion.

Central India and the lists

- A few communities sit near the ST/Muslim edge; listing politics is itself an impact.
- **Ghurye's** Hindu-absorption thesis missed this third path. **Elwin** worried about any sudden creed that split land.

What changes

- Male-centred inheritance can strain clan land. Saints and mosques join, not always replace, grove ritual.
- Education and urban networks may rise. So may a new minority stigma in a **communal belt**.
- Impact is incorporation into a translocal umma plus local syncretism, not a total cultural wipe.

Flow diagram

Islam -> Syncretic custom
Islam -> Law marriage
Scheduled tribes -> Regional variation

Conclusion

Islam's impact on Scheduled Tribes is regional and layered. It can remake law and marriage, while clan and forest custom often persist under a Muslim name.

Facts & figures

Lakshadweep

Muslim island societies with strong older matrilineal custom.

G. S. Ghurye

Hindu-absorption frame that underplayed Islamic paths for some groups.

Verrier Elwin

Warned against sudden religious capture of tribal land and custom.

ST list politics

Where Muslim identity and tribal listing collide in entitlements.

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