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Q1(b)

Relevance of tribe-caste continuum

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Anthropology GS 2 · 10 marks · Caste system in India

3.2 Caste system in India-Structure and characteristics, Varna and caste, Theories of origin of caste system, Dominant caste, Caste mobility, Future of caste system, Jajmani system. Tribe-caste continuum.

Core demand of the question

- Write a note on the relevance of the tribe-caste continuum
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length of about 150 words

Revision summary

Tribe-caste continuum places tribe and caste on one gradient.

Bailey and Sinha described highland groups moving toward caste society.

Bose's absorption thesis is the civilisational version of that slope.

The idea explains ritual and economic change.

It must not erase ST law, PESA, or forest rights.

Introduction

The tribe-caste continuum treats tribe and caste as poles of one Indian social field, not as two sealed races. It remains useful for change, and it remains dangerous if it erases Scheduled Tribe rights.

Body**The idea**

- **F. G. Bailey** showed highland Odisha groups moving along a political and economic gradient toward caste society.
- **Surajit Sinha** spoke of a tribe-caste continuum and of tribes as a **Hindu peasant** type in the making, especially in central India.
- **N. K. Bose's** Hindu method of tribal absorption is the civilisational story behind the same slope: festival, occupation, and rank pull a community toward the caste order.

Relevance and limit

- **Census** and reservation still need a legal tribe. Continuum thinking explains Sanskritisation and market mixing, but it cannot decide a **ST** list by itself.
- **G. S. Ghurye** called tribes backward Hindus. That over-absorption reading is why **Verrier Elwin** and later **Fifth Schedule** politics defended a tribal pole.
- The concept is relevant for marriage, land, and ritual change. It is not a licence to deny distinct language, forest rights, or **PESA**.

Flow diagram

Tribe pole -> Caste pole
Bailey Sinha -> Tribe pole
Bailey Sinha -> Caste pole
Bose absorption -> Caste pole

Conclusion

The continuum is a good field model of Indian social movement. Rights policy must still name a tribal pole, or absorption becomes dispossession.

Facts & figures

F. G. Bailey

Odisha highland work that treated tribe and caste as a political-economic continuum.

Surajit Sinha

Used tribe-caste continuum and the tribe as a peasant type in central India.

N. K. Bose

Hindu method of tribal absorption: caste civilisation draws tribes inward.

G. S. Ghurye

Called tribes backward Hindus, the strongest absorption reading of the continuum.

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