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Q8(c)

## **How can a balance be struck between livelihood concern and environmental degradation in the context of shifting cultivation?**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Anthropology GS 2 · 15 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**

- How can a balance be struck between livelihood concern and environmental degradation in the context of shifting cultivation?
- Keep the answer to a 15-mark length of about 200 words

### **Revision summary**

Shifting cultivation is hill livelihood and, when fallow shortens, a slope risk.

Elwin treated bewar as economy, not laziness.

FRA community title can legalise rotation.

Terrace rice, longer fallow, and local council rules are the balance kit.

Blanket bans and eviction fail both people and the forest.

### **Introduction**

Shifting cultivation, or **jhum**, is a rotational forest-farm livelihood in many hill tribes. Balance means a live fallow and a live household, not a ban that starves or a short cycle that strips the slope.

### **Body**

#### **The two pressures**

- **Livelihood:** grain, vegetables, and ritual plots for **Naga**, Mizo, Baiga, and other hill groups. **Elwin** defended Baiga bewar as economy, not as waste.
- **Degradation:** shortened fallow after population rise, timber reservation, and cash ginger or oilseed on steep plots. The **Forest Act** tradition treated **jhum** as offence, which pushed it onto worse slopes.

#### **How balance is struck**

- Restore fallow length with community forest, not only with a planting target. **FRA, 2006** community titles can legalise the rotation instead of chasing it.
- Mix settled wet rice in terraces, as in some North-East valleys, with a smaller **jhum** for ritual and vegetables.
- **Pay for ecological service:** longer fallow, fire lines, and seed banks through **ITDP** and hill council funds, not a one-time rubber monocrop.

- Gram Sabha under **PESA** and traditional councils must set the cycle. A distant working plan cannot.
- **Chipko** taught that local women may defend the tree that the contractor calls surplus. **Jhum** policy needs that local veto.

### What fails

- Blanket ban, free seedlings of a single market tree, and eviction in the name of carbon all break livelihood and then fail the slope.

### Flow diagram

Jhum -> Livelihood grain ritual  
Jhum -> Short fallow erosion  
FRA PESA council -> Longer fallow mix

### Conclusion

Balance is a long fallow under community title, plus terrace and wage buffers. Criminalising **jhum** without a living alternative is not conservation.

### Facts & figures

#### Jhum

North-East term for shifting cultivation on hill slopes with a fallow cycle.

#### Elwin on Baiga

Defended bewar shifting plots as a tribal livelihood against forest reservation.

#### FRA 2006

Can recognise community forest resource rights that make a legal fallow possible.

#### PESA 1996

Gives Gram Sabha a say in local resources, including how hill villages manage plots.

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