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Q5(b)

Issues of tribal agricultural labourers

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · 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 issues of tribal agricultural labourers
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length of about 150 words

Revision summary

Tribal agricultural labourers are Adivasis who live mainly by farm wages.

Forest law and land transfer produced that class.

Low pay, bondage-like advances, and migration are the daily issues.

FRA helps forest cultivators more than the landless farmhand.

MGNREGA is a buffer when it is not captured.

Introduction

Tribal agricultural labourers are Adivasi households who live by wage work on others' fields more than by their own plough. Land loss and seasonal migration are the core issues.

Body**How they were made**

- Colonial forest reservation and landlord revenue turned many cultivators into labour on their old soil, a process **Verrier Elwin** recorded as dispossession rather than as lazy custom.
- After independence, moneylender and non-tribal land alienation continued in **Fifth Schedule** tracts despite transfer bans.
- **FRA, 2006** aims at forest plots and commons. It often misses the purely landless labourer on private farms.

Present issues

- Low wages, delayed pay, and women paid less for the same harvest work.
- Bonded and attached labour survive as advance-against-harvest, which the Bonded Labour law names but does not always reach.
- Seasonal migration to brick kilns and cane belts, mapped in western India by **Jan Breman**, breaks schooling and union.
- **MGNREGA** is a partial counter. Capture by contractors still leaks the wage.

Limit

- Not every Scheduled Tribe household is a labourer. The note is about the land-poor, not the whole ST census.

Flow diagram

Land alienation -> Wage labour

Wage labour -> Seasonal migration

FRA PESA MGNREGA -> Incomplete buffer

Conclusion

Tribal agricultural labour is the wage face of land alienation. Law on Schedule, forest rights, and rural work exists. Possession and a living wage still lag.

Facts & figures

Fifth Schedule

Land-transfer controls that still fail many tribal labour households in practice.

FRA 2006

Forest Rights Act that titles some forest plots but not all farm wage workers.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

Public wage work that can reduce distress migration if paid on time.

Jan Breman

Documented circular migration and unfree labour in western Indian rural capitalism.

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