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Q16

Inequality in the ownership pattern of resources is one of the major causes of poverty. Discuss in the context of 'paradox of poverty'

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · GS II · 15 marks · Poverty and Hunger

Issues relating to poverty and hunger.

Core demand of the question

- State the paradox of poverty in a resource-and-growth setting
- Link it to unequal ownership of land, forest, water, minerals and human capital
- Use Indian regional and social examples
- Bring in FRA, land reform and MPI without turning the answer into GS3 growth tables

Revision summary

- **Paradox of poverty:** national or local natural and growth wealth beside household want, because ownership is concentrated.

Land, forest, water, minerals and schooling are the asset bases.

Mining States and landless hamlets are the Indian picture; caste and gender structure titles.

FRA, PESA, **Samata** and coparcenary judgments attack ownership; MPI and DBT measure or cushion, they do not reassign the lease.

Governance of the file and the Gram Sabha is the GS2 core.

Introduction

- **The paradox of poverty here is simple and ugly:** a country, a district or a household can sit on **wealth in the ground and still be poor**, because **someone else owns the wealth**. Inequality of **ownership**, not only of income this month, is what keeps poverty sticky. India grew. Many Adivasi mining blocks, landless Dalit hamlets and tenant tracts did not own the growth.

Body

The paradox

Textbook growth says a rising pie lifts the poor. **Sen's** entitlements and India's **resource curse** belts say otherwise. Odisha and Jharkhand export ore; **NFHS and MPI** maps still light up the same blocks. A city skyline rises on land whose original occupants hold a **slum-pad** or nothing. This is not a mystery of culture. It is **titles, leases and exclusion**.

- **Call it paradox: plenty at the national accounts, want at the kitchen. Or: natural abundance, human scarcity** where the mine and the forest are legally elsewhere.

Ownership as cause

Land: tenancy insecurity, reverse tenancy, and incomplete reform (except pockets like Operation Barga's better chapters) mean the tiller does not own the surplus. **Forest:** until **FRA 2006**, millions were encroachers on their own commons; eviction is poverty production. **Water:** canal heads versus tail-enders; groundwater with those who can drill. **Minerals:** **Samata** tried to stop easy transfer of Scheduled Area land; practice still concentrates royalties in treasuries and contractors. **Education and health** are ownership of **human capital**; ST-SC gaps in both reproduce income poverty.

- **Caste and gender structure ownership:** women as workers without coparcenary until **Vineeta Sharma**; Dalit landlessness as a social fact, not a market outcome.

Policy that touches ownership

Land reform remains unfinished. **FRA** and **PESA** are ownership statutes if implemented. **DBT** without an asset is consumption support - needed, not a paradox-breaker. **NITI MPI** tracks deprivation; it does not by itself reassign a mining lease. **MGNREGA** is a floor. **Common property** (tanks, pastures) revival is anti-poverty because it is anti-dispossession.

- **Governance belongs in this GS2 answer: who sits on the lease-granting file**, whether Gram Sabha consent is real, whether a slum dweller can get a **property document**. Poverty programmes that ignore the cadastral map treat the paradox as a character flaw of the poor.
- **The honest line: growth with concentrated ownership reproduces poverty next to the plant gate.**

Flow diagram

Unequal ownership -> Sticky poverty
 Aggregate growth -> Sticky poverty
 FRA PESA titles -> Unequal ownership

Conclusion

The paradox of poverty is wealth without title for those who live on it. Unequal ownership of land, forest, water and minerals is a first cause. FRA, PESA, land records and women's property rights attack that cause; income schemes only bandage it.

Facts & figures

Forest Rights Act, 2006

Recognises individual and community forest rights; weak titling keeps the paradox alive in forest districts.

Multidimensional Poverty Index

NITI-linked MPI shows deprivation clusters that often overlap resource-extraction belts.

Samata (1997)

Restricted transfer of tribal land in Scheduled Areas, a judicial attempt to keep ownership from sliding to non-tribals.

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