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Q3(a)

What is ethno-nationalism? Examine the critical factors responsible for tribal discontent in India

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Tribal communities in India

Tribal communities in India: Definitional problems; Geographical spread; Colonial policies and tribes; Issues of integration and autonomy.

Core demand of the question

- What is **ethno-nationalism**? Examine the critical factors responsible for tribal discontent in India

Revision summary

Ethno-nationalism is political selfhood built on ethnic peoplehood.

Tribal discontent is fed by land alienation and extractive development.

Colonial and later schedules created a legal identity that still lacks power.

PESA and FRA are under-implemented self-rule tools.

Assimilation theses deepen the wound they claim to heal.

Introduction

Ethno-nationalism is the claim that a people defined by language, origin, or culture should be a political self, sometimes a nation, sometimes an autonomous region. Tribal discontent in India is often this claim meeting a developmental state that arrives as dispossession.

Body

Ethno-nationalism

- It organises solidarity around ethnicity rather than around class alone. Naga, Mizo, Bodo, and Jharkhand movements show the range from sovereignty talk to statehood inside India.
- It is not automatically secession. Democratic federalism can absorb it as councils and states.
- G. S. Ghurye's Hinduisation thesis treats such identity as a lag to be assimilated. That reading itself feeds discontent.

Critical factors of tribal discontent

- **Land and forest:** alienation, mines, and dams in the central Indian belt make the nation appear as a taker of the commons.
- **Administrative othering:** the 1935 colonial segregation and later Scheduled Tribe lists created a legal people, then often a neglected people.
- **Cultural disrespect:** language, faith, and council ignored in school and police practice.
- **Uneven citizenship:** reservation without title, PESA and FRA on paper, **Fifth Schedule** governors who do not shield.

- **Elite capture and splintering:** a small tribal middle class enters office while the majority remain on the fringe, which Andre Beteille's inequality lens would expect.
- **Security response:** insurgency and counter-insurgency thicken distrust where the first grievance was land.

Link

- **Ethno-nationalism** becomes the language of discontent when class poverty is lived as a people's wound, not only as a household's wage.

Flow diagram

Ethno-national people claim -> Discontent
Land mines dams -> Discontent
Weak PESA FRA -> Discontent
Autonomy councils -> Remedy

Conclusion

Ethno-nationalism names a people as a political unit. Tribal discontent in India is driven by land loss, cultural misrecognition, weak self-rule laws, and a state that plans over the village. Autonomy with title is the sociological remedy, not assimilation as backward Hindus.

Facts & figures

Ethno-nationalism

A people defined by culture or origin demanding political recognition or autonomy.

Fifth and Sixth Schedules

Constitutional devices for tribal areas that discontent measures against lived power.

Narmada and mining belts

Public faces of displacement-driven tribal anger.

PESA / FRA

Legal remedies whose gap with practice is itself a grievance.