Modern History · GS - I

Why indentured labour was taken by the British from India to their colonies? have they been able to preserve their cultural identity over there?

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2018	GS - I	Modern History

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Abolition of slavery; labour demand; plantation economy; indenture system; colonial migration; cultural preservation; diaspora identity; religious and linguistic continuity

Model Answer

Introduction

After the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833, colonial plantation economies required alternative labour supplies. India became a major source of indentured workers during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Why Were Indian Labourers Taken?

1. **Plantation labour demand:** Sugar, tea and rubber plantations required large, relatively inexpensive workforces.
2. **Post-slavery labour shortages:** Employers sought replacement labour after emancipation.
3. **Colonial recruitment networks:** British authorities and private recruiters mobilised workers from regions such as Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh and southern India.

4. **Economic distress:** Poverty, indebtedness, famine and limited employment pushed many Indians towards migration.
5. **Contractual control:** Indenture contracts tied workers to employers under restrictive conditions, often involving harsh treatment and limited freedom.

Preservation of Cultural Identity

Indian communities in Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad, Guyana and other colonies preserved aspects of their heritage through:

1. **Religion:** Hindu and Muslim practices, festivals and places of worship.
2. **Language:** Bhojpuri, Tamil and other linguistic traditions influenced community life, although some languages declined or evolved.
3. **Food and customs:** Traditional cuisine, marriage practices, music and festivals maintained cultural continuity.
4. **Community institutions:** Religious organisations, associations and educational initiatives sustained collective identity.

However, cultural identities also changed through interaction with local populations, colonial institutions and new national identities.

Conclusion

Indian indentured labour was a product of colonial economic demands and unequal power relations. Its descendants preserved important cultural traditions while developing distinctive identities in their adopted societies.

BECOME IAS
AI POWERED UPSC PREP