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Q5(d)

**Elwin-Ghurye Debate on Tribes**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · 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 Elwin-Ghurye Debate on Tribes
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length of about 150 words

**Revision summary**

Elwin defended tribal land, forest, and custom against rapid absorption.

Ghurye treated tribes as backward Hindus to be integrated.

**Nehru's** Panchsheel took Elwin's caution into state policy.

**Fifth Schedule** and FRA continue the protection limb.

The debate still organises assimilation versus rights talk.

**Introduction**

The Elwin-Ghurye debate is the classic fight over whether Indian tribes should be protected as distinct peoples or absorbed as backward Hindus. It still frames policy language.

**Body****Two positions**

- **Verrier Elwin** argued for protection of land, forest, and custom, against missionaries and land-grabbers. Isolation was a shield, not a zoo, in his mature view.
- **G. S. Ghurye** called tribes backward Hindus and wanted national integration through Hindu society, roads, and law.
- **Nehru's Panchsheel** borrowed Elwin's caution while rejecting a museum.

**Stakes today**

- **Fifth Schedule**, PESA, and FRA are Elwin's heirs in statute.
- Assimilation talk in schooling and temple politics still speaks Ghurye's line.
- **Anthropology keeps both:** tribes are historically linked to caste civilisation, yet they need territorial rights.

**Flow diagram**

Elwin protection -> Panchsheel FRA  
Ghurye absorption -> Backward Hindus  
Elwin protection -> Debate  
Ghurye absorption -> Debate

## Conclusion

Elwin wanted protection of difference. Ghurye wanted Hindu-national absorption. Indian law mixed them: integration with Scheduled Area shields.

## Facts & figures

### Verrier Elwin

Anthropologist-administrator who argued protection of tribal genius and resources.

### G. S. Ghurye

Sociologist who wrote of tribes as backward Hindus and favoured assimilation.

### Nehru Panchsheel

Official middle path: development along tribal genius with land rights.

### Fifth Schedule

Constitutional protection that leans toward Elwin's territorial caution.

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