

**WRAP Exams · wrapexams.com**

Prelims PYQ, Mains model answers, and copy evaluation. Write to the desk for this paper, a doubt, or the AI waitlist.

**ask@wrapexams.com · +91 85951 84903 · wrapexams.com**

Q5(d)

**Tribe as a colonial construct**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · 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 Tribe as a colonial construct
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length of about 150 words

**Revision summary**

**Colonial census** and forest law boxed diverse groups as tribes.

Risley racialised the box; Agency law needed it for land and timber.

Ghurye and Elwin fought over what to do with the same box.

The Constitution scheduled it for protection.

Tribe today is a legal-political identity with a colonial origin.

**Introduction**

Tribe as a colonial construct means the British census, forest, and criminal tribes files invented a boxed people. The box still exists as ST, but it was not a timeless Indian noun.

**Body****How the construct was built**

- **Census** and **Risley** turned fluid frontier groups into tribes versus castes.
- Forest acts and Agency administration needed a legal savage to take timber and to exempt some custom.
- **Ghurye** later said the same people were backward Hindus. **Elwin** used the box to protect land.

**Afterlife**

- The Constitution kept the construct as **Scheduled Tribe** with **Fifth** and **Sixth Schedules**.
- Anthropology now treats 'tribe' as a political-legal identity with a colonial birth, not as a stone-age essence.
- Unrest over lists and FRA shows the construct still distributes rights.

**Flow diagram**

Colonial census forest -> Tribe box

Tribe box -> Scheduled Tribe

Tribe box -> Protection and stigma

## Conclusion

Tribe was standardised by colonial government. Independent India reused it as protection. Critique the essence; keep the rights the box now carries.

## Facts & figures

### Colonial census

Enumerated tribe as a category opposite caste.

### Criminal Tribes Act

Extreme construct that branded mobile groups as born criminals.

### Scheduled Tribe

Constitutional reuse of the box for reservation and land shields.

### G. S. Ghurye

Argued the colonial tribe was often a Hindu caste on the margin.

---

WRAP Exams · Write. Read. Analyse. Practice. ·

<https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/anthropology-gs-2/2016/tribe-as-a-colonial-construct/> ·

[ask@wrapexams.com](mailto:ask@wrapexams.com) · [wrapexams.com](https://wrapexams.com)