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Q1(d)

Verrier Elwin's philosophy with respect to Arunachal Pradesh

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · 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

- State Elwin's NEFA philosophy in his own terms
- Show how it was written for Arunachal (then NEFA) rather than as a pan-Indian slogan
- Place it against Ghurye and later integration policy
- Note what remains live in **Inner Line**, custom and development debates

Revision summary

A Philosophy for NEFA is Elwin's working policy for today's Arunachal, allied to **Nehru's tribal Panchsheel**.

It rejects museum isolation and sudden assimilation, and it guards land, art and village council.

Ghurye wanted tribes absorbed as backward Hindus; Elwin said NEFA was not a plains jati.

After 1962, roads and statehood thickened administration; **Inner Line** and custom still structure land.

Dam, settlement and outsider-land debates are the living form of the same argument.

Introduction

Verrier Elwin's A Philosophy for NEFA (1957, with a foreword associated with **Jawaharlal Nehru**) was a field policy for the North-East Frontier Agency, today's Arunachal Pradesh. It is not a vague love of tribes. It is a set of working rules for a border hill tract after Independence and before 1962.

Body**The philosophy**

Elwin, once a missionary and then a Government anthropologist, rejected both **isolation as a museum** and **sudden assimilation**. For NEFA he argued: let people grow in their own genius; respect tribal land, art and village council; send a few carefully chosen officers rather than a crowd of contractors; build roads and schools without wrecking the village; avoid flooding the hills with plains settlers.

Nehru's tribal Panchsheel - development along their own genius, respect for rights in land and forest, training of a tribal team, no over-administration, judging results by human quality not money - is the same family of ideas. Elwin gave it a NEFA address: **Monpa, Adi, Nyishi**,

Apatani, Wancho worlds, **Inner Line**, and a frontier with Tibet and Burma.

He admired Apatani wet-rice terraces and village discipline, and he feared that unregulated trade and timber would strip the hills faster than any school could repair.

Against Ghurye, and after 1962

G. S. Ghurye called Elwin a no-changer and wanted tribes absorbed as "backward Hindus". Elwin answered that NEFA was not a caste village of the plains. Language, wet-rice, clan and monastery or shamanic cults were not waiting to become a jati.

After the 1962 war, security and road-building sped up. Arunachal became a Union Territory and then a state (1987). **Inner Line** stayed. Customary land is still largely outside a full zamindari-style record. Christianity grew in some central and eastern belts; Buddhist monasteries remained strong in Tawang and West Kameng. Elwin's "few officers" became a full state secretariat, still thin on the ground.

What remains live

Arunachal debates on **large dams (Siang, Subansiri)**, on outsider land purchase, on Chakma-Hajong settlement, and on a uniform civil code versus customary marriage, all replay Elwin's worry: can the hill village keep land while the frontier is militarised and electrified? **PESA does not apply** as in **Fifth Schedule** belts; **Sixth Schedule** was never extended to Arunachal. Protection works through **Inner Line**, customary courts, and political guarantees rather than a Tribes Advisory Council of the Gujarat-Jharkhand type.

Elwin can be criticised for romanticising chiefs and underplaying women's land rights and internal inequality. The philosophy still names a real choice: development as partnership with village genius, or development as a road that arrives before the people are asked.

Flow diagram

Elwin NEFA -> Panchsheel
Elwin NEFA -> Inner Line and custom
Ghurye -> Assimilation
Elwin NEFA -> Dams roads schools

Conclusion

- **Elwin's NEFA philosophy is a borderland ethic:** grow from inside, guard land, limit the rush of outsiders, measure success in human terms. Ghurye wanted absorption. Arunachal still lives between those poles, with **Inner Line** and dams as the present test.

Facts & figures

A Philosophy for NEFA

Elwin's 1957 policy book for the North-East Frontier Agency, the direct ancestor of Arunachal tribal administration debates.

Tribal Panchsheel

Nehru's five principles: own genius, land and forest rights, tribal teams, no over-administration, human quality over money.

Inner Line

Colonial regulation still requiring a permit for non-residents to enter Arunachal, aimed at controlling settlement and trade.

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