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Q1(a)

Verrier Elwin's views on freedom for the tribals

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Perspectives on the study of Indian society

Perspectives on the study of Indian society: Indology (G.S. Ghurye); Structural functionalism (M.N. Srinivas); Marxist sociology (A.R. Desai).

Core demand of the question

- Verrier Elwin's views on freedom for the tribals
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Elwin defined tribal freedom as protection of land, language, and self-rule.

He rejected Ghurye's assimilation of tribe into Hindu society.

Isolation was a shield, not a museum, until contact was fair.

Nehruvian Panchsheel borrowed this caution.

Law now tries to keep that freedom as rights inside the state.

Introduction

Verrier Elwin treated tribal freedom as the right to keep land, language, and council, not as a gift of sudden assimilation. Isolation for him was a shield until Adivasis could meet the plains on fair terms.

Body**Freedom as protection**

- Elwin argued that colonial and Hindu plains pressure stole forest, liquor custom, and self-rule. Freedom meant a National Park style of protection, later softened into a slower joining.
- He opposed G. S. Ghurye's view of tribes as backward Hindus. For Elwin, Hinduisation was often loss, not uplift.
- Nehru's tribal Panchsheel later echoed this: develop without imposing, and leave land and dance intact.

What freedom was not

- It was not museum freeze. Elwin wanted medicine and schools that did not erase the village.
- It was not missionary or contractor freedom to enter as they pleased.

Limit

- Critics said isolation could stall citizenship and reservation. Integration through Schedules, PESA, and the Forest Rights Act tries to keep Elwin's land-freedom inside the republic.

Flow diagram

Elwin -> Protect land language council
Ghurye -> Hinduisation
Protect land language council -> Panchsheel FRA PESA

Conclusion

Elwin's tribal freedom is autonomy of habitat and custom against assimilation. The useful remainder is rights-based integration, not Ghurye's Hinduisation as destiny.

Facts & figures

Elwin

Anthropologist-administrator who defended Adivasi autonomy against rapid assimilation.

Ghurye contrast

Ghurye treated many tribes as backward Hindus; Elwin treated them as distinct communities.

Panchsheel

Nehru's five principles of tribal development without cultural imposition.

National Park idea

Elwin's early protective image, later criticised as isolationism.

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