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Q2(a)

Critically examine GS Ghurye's Indological approach to the understanding of Indian society.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 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

- Critically examine G. S. Ghurye's Indological approach to the understanding of Indian society
- Use Caste and Race, the **Hinduisation** thesis, and later field critiques

Revision summary

Ghurye's Indological approach reads Indian society through texts, history, and **Hindu civilisation**.

Caste and Race rejected a crude racial theory while listing caste's structural features.

Tribe was often treated as a backward Hindu awaiting assimilation.

Srinivas's field view and Beteille's Sripuram show living rank and power that books do not fix.

Desai adds class; Adivasi politics refuse **Hinduisation** as destiny.

Introduction

G. S. Ghurye built Indian sociology from Sanskrit texts, historical reconstruction, and a civilisational Hindu frame. The Indological approach gave caste a long memory. It also risked treating living India as a footnote to the book.

Body

What Ghurye did

- **He listed caste's structural features:** segmentation, hierarchy, restrictions on feeding and marriage, civil and religious disabilities, and lack of unrestricted occupation.
- **Caste and Race in India** argued against a simple racial theory of caste, yet kept Aryan migration and Brahmanical organisation as historical keys.
- Tribe, for Ghurye, was often a backward Hindu; integration meant **Hinduisation** rather than a separate political path.
- Cities, sadhus, and family also appeared in his work, so Indology here is not only village-blind, but it is text-led.

Strengths

- He professionalised a sociology of India that could speak to law, census, and reform, not only to colonial ethnography.
- Attributes of caste remain a teaching grid. **Ambedkar**'s legal struggle also needed a clear picture of disability and exclusion.

- He refused to reduce caste to class alone, which later Marxist village studies sometimes did.

Critiques

- M. N. Srinivas's field view from Rampura showed dominant caste and Sanskritization as observed processes that texts do not dictate.
- Louis Dumont used texts too, but as ideology of purity; Ghurye's catalogue can miss that underlying binary and also miss class, which A. R. Desai placed first.
- Andre Beteille's Sripuram separated caste, class, and power. Ghurye's civilisational Hindu whole can blur those distinctions and can underplay Muslim, Christian, and Dalit self-definitions.
- The tribe-as-Hindu thesis weakens **Fifth Schedule** politics and Adivasi movements that refuse assimilation.

Balanced close

- Use Ghurye for history, features, and the anti-race argument.
- Do not let Indology replace interaction, land, and the Constitution.

Flow diagram

Indology texts history -> Ghurye caste features
Ghurye caste features -> Hinduisation of tribe
Field view Srinivas Beteille -> Critique
Desai class -> Critique
Critique -> Ghurye caste features

Conclusion

Ghurye's Indology made caste a historical structure instead of a racial myth. It is a necessary archive. It is not a sufficient method for a disharmonic, democratic India that Srinivas, Beteille, and Desai studied on the ground.

Facts & figures

Caste and Race in India

Ghurye's major book on caste features, history, and a critique of racial explanations.

Six features

Segmental division, hierarchy, commensality and marriage rules, disabilities, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation, and allied restrictions.

Hinduisation

Ghurye's view that many tribes are backward Hindus who should be integrated into Hindu society.

Srinivas contrast

Rampura replaced book view with dominant caste and Sanskritization as field processes.

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