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Q4(a)

## **Analyse the perspectives of Isolation, Assimilation and Integration in understanding the trajectories of Indian Tribal Development**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · 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**

- Analyse Isolation, Assimilation and Integration as perspectives on Indian tribal development
- Name the main thinkers and the trajectory each implies
- Give a reasoned preference for democratic integration with land and voice

### **Revision summary**

Isolation, associated with **Elwin**, seeks protection from destructive contact.

Assimilation, associated with **Ghurye**, treats many tribes as a Hindu frontier to be absorbed.

Integration, associated with **Nehru's** Panchsheel and the Schedules, seeks citizenship without forced cultural erasure.

Practice often mixes market assimilation with project-led dispossession.

Integration is credible only with land rights and political voice.

### **Introduction**

Tribal policy in India has been argued as three paths. Isolation would protect Adivasi worlds from the plains. Assimilation would absorb them into the Hindu or national mainstream. Integration would keep cultural difference while joining tribes to equal citizenship and the economy on fairer terms.

### **Body**

#### **Isolation**

- Verrier **Elwin**, especially in his earlier advocacy, feared that contact would destroy tribal land, language, and dignity.
- The National Park or 'leave them to themselves' tone treated tribes as fragile wholes.
- Isolation underestimates internal inequality, the already long history of trade, and the impossibility of a sealed forest in a developmental state.

#### **Assimilation**

- G. S. **Ghurye** argued that many tribes are backward Hindus, already on a caste frontier, so the task is absorption into the wider Hindu society.
- Sanskritization of some tribal groups looks like evidence for **Ghurye**, as Srinivas's concept would predict.

- Assimilation risks losing language and land, and it can mean Hinduisation without equal property or honour, which Desai would read as class incorporation on unfair terms.

## Integration

- **Jawaharlal Nehru's** tribal Panchsheel asked for development without imposition, respect for land and forest rights, and work through tribal institutions.
- Constitutional **Fifth and Sixth Schedules**, reservations, and later the Panchayats Extension to **Scheduled Areas Act** try to institutionalise integration.
- Integration can become a slogan while mines, dams, and roads practise dispossession, as Narmada and many mining belts show.

## Trajectories in practice

- Isolation never became full state policy; inner-line and schedule areas are partial fences.
- Assimilation happens socially through markets, missions, and dominant neighbours even when policy says integration.
- **Andre Beteille's caution about simple types applies:** tribe and caste are a continuum in many regions, so policy must be local.
- **Yogendra Singh would place tribal change inside modernization of tradition:** new elites, new faiths, and old kin groups together.

## A sociological judgement

- Isolation romanticises and cannot stop capital.
- Assimilation denies difference and often denies land.
- Integration is the only constitutional language, but it is real only with recorded rights, schools in the mother tongue, and veto over destructive projects.

## Flow diagram

Isolation Elwin -> Protect from contact

Assimilation Ghurye -> Absorb into mainstream

Integration Nehru schedules -> Difference plus citizenship

Integration Nehru schedules -> Test land forest voice

## Conclusion

Isolation, assimilation, and integration are three policy ideologies for Adivasi futures. Indian experience supports integration with enforceable land and political voice, not a museum isolation or a one-way assimilation.

## Facts & figures

### Elwin

Advocated protection of tribal life against reckless contact and dispossession.

### Ghurye

The Scheduled Tribes of India as often a backward Hindu fringe; assimilationist reading.

**Nehru Panchsheel**

Principles for tribal development without imposing plains institutions blindly.

**Fifth and Sixth Schedules**

Constitutional devices for scheduled areas and some northeastern autonomous arrangements.

**PESA 1996**

Extends panchayat powers to scheduled areas, on paper a tool of integration.

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