

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

Q2(a)

Differentiate between 'Western' and 'Indological' perspectives on the study of Indian society. Bring out the major aspects of G. S. Ghurye's contribution to 'Indological' approach

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · 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

- Define Western and Indological perspectives as methods for studying Indian society
- Contrast assumptions, sources, and typical conclusions
- Then present Ghurye's major Indological contributions with books and themes
- Note his mix of text and ethnography and the limits of a Hindu-civilisational frame

Revision summary

Western perspectives start from class, function, modernisation or Marxism and then read India.

Indological perspectives start from shastra and civilisational categories such as varna and jati.

Ghurye used Indology to specify caste features, gotra, sadhus and cultural history.

He combined texts with urban and tribal ethnography and an assimilation thesis on tribes.

The method is strong on continuity and weak on class, gender and minority as independent structures.

Introduction

Two professional habits have organised the sociology of India. A **Western** perspective starts from concepts forged in European and American debates-class, bureaucracy, modernisation, structure-function, Marxism-and asks how India fits or fails those concepts. An **Indological** perspective starts from **Indian texts and civilisational categories**-varna, jati, ashrama, dharma-and treats them as the first grammar of the social system. **G. S. Ghurye** is the central Indian name for the second habit, though he never worked as a pure philologist.

Body

The Western perspective

Colonial administrators and early anthropologists often used Western race science, evolutionism and later functionalism. After Independence, **A. R. Desai used Marxist political economy: Indian society as a class structure shaped by colonialism and the state. M. N. Srinivas**, trained in the Oxford structural-functional tradition, used the **field view** of the village, dominant caste, sanskritization and westernization. **Yogendra Singh** used modernisation theory, recast as orthogenetic and heterogenetic change. **Louis Dumont** is a partial exception: a Western scholar who insisted on Indian ideological categories, which is

why he sits on the border of the two perspectives.

The Western kit is strong on **power, class, state and observed practice**. It is tempted to treat Indian categories as epiphenomena, or to read the village as a delayed Europe. Marxists sometimes reduced caste to class. Functionalists sometimes underplayed conflict. The gain is comparison and a language for capitalism and bureaucracy.

The Indological perspective

Indology reads Dharmashastra, epics, Puranas, Buddhist and Jain canons, inscriptions and later commentaries as maps of social order. **McKim Marriott** and Dumont-Pocock's "**For a Sociology of India**" argued that Indian facts need Indian thought. The method explains long continuities: hierarchy, ritual rank, joint-family duty, and the idea of a ranked cosmos. Its risk is the **book view** that Srinivas criticised: Brahmanical texts over-represent priests and under-represent women, artisans, Adivasis and bargaining in the field.

Ghurye's contribution

Ghurye, at Bombay, made Indology sociological. In **Caste and Race in India** he used Sanskrit and historical materials to fix **features of caste**: segmental division, hierarchy, restrictions on feeding and marriage, civil and religious disabilities, and lack of unrestricted occupational choice. He discussed race and caste without reducing the system to a simple racial stock tale. Gotra and Charana, work on sadhus, Indian costume, and civilisational diffusion showed a **historical-Indological** method: texts plus the spread of custom.

He did not stop at the library. Studies of **Mahadev Kolis** and urban groups brought ethnography in. On tribes he argued **assimilation** into Hindu society (The Aborigines-So-Called), against **Verrier Elwin's** isolation. That thesis is Indological in spirit: tribes as backward Hindus rather than as a separate civilisation. It is also political: it shaped integrationist policy talk.

- **Major aspects, then:** (1) caste as a civilisational institution described from texts and history; (2) diffusion and cultural history of Indian social forms; (3) a Hindu-centred synthesis of tribe, sect and city; (4) theoretical pluralism in method-text, survey, diffusion-without a single imported ism. Limits follow the same list. Class and gender are thinner than in Desai or later feminism. Minorities can appear as residuals. Dumont later accused Indian sociology of mixed empiricism; Ghurye's reply is the archive of books, not a tight theory of hierarchy.

Ghurye's Hindu-civilisational frame also shaped how later Bombay students read sect, costume and urban types as Indian facts first, Western labels second. That pedagogical contribution is easy to miss if one only lists books. **S. C. Dube** and village sociologists who followed still had to answer Ghurye's archive even when they chose the field. **Yogendra Singh** later placed Indology inside a map of Indian sociological traditions rather than treating it as pre-sociology.

Critics remain necessary. A purely Indological Ghurye can under-describe mill labour, Partition, and Muslim and Christian personal worlds. A purely Western class analysis can miss why a factory worker still needs a caste match. The productive use of the contrast is sequential: read the text for the claimed order, then read the field for land, gender and the state.

The contrast should not be turned into a war. Srinivas needed Indology to name sanskritization. Ghurye needed observation to write the Kolis. Indian sociology still works by **holding the two perspectives in tension**.

Flow diagram

Western concepts -> Class field modernisation

Indology texts -> Caste dharma varna

Ghurye -> Caste dharma varna

Ghurye -> Ethnography Kolis city

Class field modernisation -> Sociology of India

Caste dharma varna -> Sociology of India

Conclusion

Western perspectives explain India with class, field and modernisation; Indological perspectives explain it with texts and civilisational categories. Ghurye made the second into a university sociology of caste, gotra, sadhus and tribe-as-Hindu, using texts with ethnography. The approach is indispensable for hierarchy and continuity, and incomplete for labour, gender and the state.

Facts & figures

Caste and Race in India

Ghurye's classic statement of caste features from textual, historical and ethnographic materials.

Book view / field view

Srinivas's warning that shastric models must be checked against village and urban practice.

Elwin versus Ghurye

Isolation and protection of tribal culture versus assimilation into Hindu society.

WRAP Exams · Write. Read. Analyse. Practice. · <https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/sociology-gs-2/2024/differentiate-between-western-and-indological-perspectives-on-the-study-of-indian-society-bring-out-the-major-aspects-of-g-s-ghuryes-contribution-to-indological-approach/> · ask@wrapexams.com · wrapexams.com