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Q1(e)

How would you appropriate to characterise G. S. Ghurye as a practitioner of 'theoretical pluralism'?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · 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

- Define theoretical pluralism in Ghurye's practice
- Show Indology, diffusion, ethnography, urban and caste-tribe work as several methods, not one dogma
- Give book-level illustrations
- **Note limits:** Hindu-centric tilt, less class analysis

Revision summary

Ghurye combined Indology, historical diffusion, ethnography and urban survey rather than one school.

Caste features, sadhus, gotra, **Mahadev Kolis** and tribal assimilation show the range.

He is not Srinivas's structural functionalist, Desai's Marxist, or Dumont's structuralist.

Pluralism is a practice visible in the books, not a slogan he coined.

Limits include a Hindu civilisational tilt and relatively weak class analysis.

Introduction

G. S. Ghurye is often boxed as the Indologist of caste. That box is too small. He practised **theoretical pluralism**: he used texts, history, diffusion, field observation and urban survey as the problem required. The unity is a civilisational curiosity about India, not a single ism.

Body

Several tools, one workshop

As Indologist he read Sanskrit and classical features of **caste**. As historian-diffusionist he wrote on Indian Sadhus, Gotra and Charana, and cultural spread across regions. As ethnographer-sociologist he supervised and wrote on **Mahadev Kolis** and urban groups in Bombay, bringing the city into a discipline that others left to the village. On **tribes** he argued assimilation into Hindu society, using both colonial ethnography and his reading of custom. He wrote on **dress, occupation and social tensions**, which are empirical themes, not shlokas.

Pluralism here means **problem-driven method**. Caste history needed texts and the census. Urban poor needed survey. Civilisation needed comparison. He did not become a structural-functionalist like Srinivas, nor a Marxist like **A. R. Desai**, nor a Dumontian

ideologist. Students at Bombay received a wide syllabus: Indology plus sociology.

Why "practitioner" matters

Ghurye did not write a manifesto of pluralism. We characterise him that way because his **oeuvre is mixed**. That is a strength against one-theory imperialism. It is also a limit. The Hindu civilisational frame can swallow tribe and minority as residual. Class, gender and the colonial state as a structure get less systematic treatment than in Desai or later subaltern work. **Dumont** accused Indian sociology of mixing empiricism without a theory of hierarchy; Ghurye's reply is the archive itself: many theories, patiently used.

To call him only "Indologist" is to miss the Kolis and the city. To call him only empiricist is to miss the shastra. Pluralism is the accurate label.

Flow diagram

Ghurye -> Indology of caste
Ghurye -> Diffusion and history
Ghurye -> Urban ethnography
Ghurye -> Tribe as backward Hindu

Conclusion

Ghurye is a practitioner of theoretical pluralism because caste, tribe, city and civilisation each drew a different kit-text, diffusion, survey-under one Indian sociology. The price of that breadth is a Hindu-centred synthesis and a thinner political economy.

Facts & figures

Caste and Race in India

Ghurye's classic mixing textual, historical and ethnographic argument on caste.

Mahadev Kolis

Urban and community study that shows Ghurye beyond the shastric armchair.

The Aborigines-So-Called

States the assimilation thesis against isolationist tribal policy.