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## Preface

There is an old Hindustani story of seven blind men. They had not seen an elephant. Not did they have any idea about this. Once they were all taken to see the elephant; one of them touched the trunk of the elephant. He said that the elephant was like a serpent. Another one touched the tail of the elephant and gave his explanation: The elephant was like a long rope. One of them who put his hand on the body of the elephant, called it like a wall. Thus, all the seven blind men provided their respective ideas about the elephant in parts. Nobody could see and explain the whole elephant. Similarly, Indian society is analysed partially, that is, in parts. The Indian Constitution is very clear in its definition of society. It is also clear about the government policies to be adopted and practised from time to time. Indian society is industrial, capitalistic, technological, secular and plural. Above all, it is democratic and is embedded in scientific spirit. This is precisely a constitutional, formal and official statement about the meaning of Indian society.



But, there are also other historical and intellectual definitions or projections of Indian society. Gandhiji and other national leaders all through the period of freedom struggle argued for a moral society. Gandhiji stood for the values of truth, non-violence and manual labour. There is another view about Indian society. It looks at it in the form of national culture, which is manifested in 'Hindutva' ideology. It described modernity, socialism and other secular values. Cultural nationalism labels modernity as reactionary modernity. There is yet another projection of Indian society. It is Naxalism. It argues that revolution comes only through the bullet of barrel. In another words, Indian society needs to be defined in terms of violence. India did not have any experience of bloodshed.

As a matter of fact, the Indian society, like a huge body of elephant, is interpreted differently in different ideologies. The basic problem for social scientists is to find out the meaning, truth and reality of Indian society. August Comte was the first sociologist to take up the task of defining society. Since then, gallons of ink have been put on the paper to define and redefine the Indian society. Those who worked on this issue are mostly sociologists. In the present work we have presented the analyses of society in both scientific and humane perspectives. The volume elicits the views of some of the leading Indian sociologists and a few western sociologists who have done research in India and developed the perspectives on Indian society. The volume includes historical, Indological/textual, structural-functional, Marxist, cultural and civilizational perspectives besides development of sociology in India and a discourse analysis. In the next edition, we will include some other perspectives, mainly, social stratification (André Beteille, K.L. Sharma, Dipankar Gupta), family, marriage and kinship (K.M. Kapadia, Irawati Karve, Leela Dube) etc. We believe that both teachers and students would be able to understand the contributions of our sociologists.

We have gone through the original writings of the scholars mentioned in this volume to understand their perspective about the Indian society and also consulted reference and textbooks, the most important amongst them are: Yogesh Atal (2003), *Indian Sociology: From Where to Where*; D.N. Dhanagare (1993), *Themes and*

*Perspectives in Indian Sociology*; S.L. Doshi (2003), *Modernity, Postmodernity and Neo-Sociological Theories*; Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1979), *Sociology of Indian Sociology*; Surendra Sharma, (1985), *Sociology in India: A Perspective from Sociology of Knowledge*; and N.K. Singhi (ed.) (1993), *Theory and Ideology in Indian Sociology*. Besides these books, we have also consulted some papers – both published and unpublished.

The book is dedicated to my teacher – Prof. Yogendra Singh, who taught me at M.Phil level (JNU, New Delhi) and inspired me not only during my doctoral research work but also throughout my academic life. I always found him up-to-date in readings and with refreshingly new ideas. He kindled my interest in sociology and made me understand that sociology should always include both theory and empirical research. I enjoyed his professional visibility with affection to make me fearless and created confidence in me whenever I consulted him.

In the preparation of this book, the inspiration has come from diverse sources, such as classroom teaching and several special lectures to different universities, participation in seminars and symposia, and interaction with scholars. Without naming each of them individually, I wish to acknowledge my grateful thanks to all of them.

The present work is thus, a kind of friendly venture. However, I am alone responsible for the shortcomings. My wife, Madhu, has assisted me enough. I highly feel obliged to her. My teachers and friends like Professors Yogendra Singh, K.L. Sharma, J.S. Gandhi, S.L. Doshi, Ravi Kapoor, I.P. Modi, Jayaram Panda, Satish Sharma and many others have provided me all insights in the presentation of sociological thinkers. I thank very much Bonny Doshi who devoted her time in the proper handling of the manuscript. Last but not least, my thanks to my son Gaurav and my daughter Radhika for their constant encouragement. Finally, I also wish to thank Shri Kailash Rawat and his son Pranit – the publishers – for publishing this volume in an attractive form. I look forward to receiving comments from teachers, students and readers to enable me to further improve this book.





## Introduction

India has a chequered history. It has grown from monarchy, feudalism, colonialism to democracy. It has a civilizational depth. All through its history the country has promoted certain values, traditions and ideologies. We believe that sociology, and for that matter, social sciences in India can be properly analysed with reference to its social background. Social thinkers in India are the products of prevailing reality and truth of particular point of time. India has witnessed the exploitation and authoritarianism of colonial rule. It is expected that our social thinkers will bear the stamp of colonialism and feudalism. Our objective in this work has been to evaluate the works of sociologists who have tried to understand or who have been products of the colonialism and feudalism.

Raymond Aron, in his two-volume classical and eventful work, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought* (1965) has taken a critical review of the pioneers of sociology. He concludes that social thinkers are those who dwell on the rising problems of their country and struggle to come with some solutions. If we follow Aron, we would argue that sociologists who are reckoned to the



social thinkers in India would dispassionately diagnose the ills or disorders of Indian society and provide a solution.

What have been the problems of Indian society? First and foremost, our millions of people have suffered a lot under the yoke of colonial and feudal rule. During the colonial rule in India, the native people were reduced to an inhuman life. Under the leadership of Gandhiji, the freedom movement mobilized the people to rise against the British power. And, all this revolution was charged by the values of non-violence, non-cooperation and *satyagraha*.

At the level of princely states, there was feudalism and in many parts of the country the *zamindari* system prevailed. At a broader plane, the whole country was bonded to exploitation and submission. The system of colonialism and feudalism had a long-standing imprint on the psychology of people. Sycophancy has now become an idiom of the mindset of the people. We believe that our sociologists and particularly social thinkers are the production of such a social background of the country. They should have a chilling urge to analyse our struggle for independence. They should have made critical case studies - *Chori-Chora*, *Jallianwala Bagh* and the martyrdom of our people. Feudalism was, it is said, much more ghostly.

In the freedom struggle, it must be observed throughout, there was no discrimination between the rich and the poor; between the high caste and the subaltern; between the urban and the rural countryside. The British took advantage of the social diversity of the country, and Gandhiji brought this diversity to unity. In any account of Indian society, a specific impact of India's struggle for freedom must occupy a prime place. Our writers of Hindi and regional languages have shown enough awareness and imprints of the national uprising. Munshi Premchand's *Godan*, a classical novel, very tacitly narrates the linguistics done by the *zamindars* on Hori. The whole fiction literature of Sharat Chandra describes how the Bengali society was made a victim of colonialism. Amrita Pritam, the Punjabi writer, clearly shows the imprint of foreign rule in her novels and stories.

The struggle for independence has been an event which has moved the masses of people and the intellectuals alike. What has been its impact on Indian social thinkers? This is our first question.

What is the situation of contemporary Indian society? Perhaps V.S. Naipaul (1990), not a sociologist but a fiction writer, has provided the profile: "With industrialization and economic growth people have forgotten old reverences. Men honour money now. The great investment in development over three or four decades led only to this: to 'corruption', to the criminalization of politics, in seeking to rise, India had undone itself. No one could be sure of anything now; all was fluid. Policeman, thief, politician, the roles had become interchangeable".

It is not that masses of people are unaware of such a kind of disorder. There is a wide network of social workers and NGOs spread over to the length and breadth of the country. They have a deep understanding about the reality or truth of the country. There has been an awakening in the country.

To quote Naipaul again, he says that people all over India are so much agitated that they are likely to commit 'mutiny' any time. And not one or two mutinies but a million one. Perhaps, Naipaul has exaggerated his predictions. But the matter of fact is that such a situation of contemporary Indian society cannot fail to 'influence' the thought process of our sociologists.

Have the happenings of post-independent India really brought about any impact on our present-day sociologists, this is our second question. What we have been arguing is that the social thinkers must respond to the callings of the nation. If there are refugees in the country, if there is disharmony among the sections of people, if there is genocide in Gujarat, if the community development fails in the country, if the green revolution ends up with the enrichment of propertied classes, and if our education system renders millions to unemployment, what do the sociologists write? Do they have any solutions? logic would say, these writings are not worth the salt.

Let us now take a short recapitulation of the social thinkers we have included in this work. To begin with, we would say that



Indian social thinkers/sociologists have discussed the Indian society in all its aspects. But they have dealt with the parts of the society, viz., family, kinship, caste, village, religion, and not the whole of the society. While discussing the society, they have suggested measures for reforms of the parts – untouchability, widow remarriage, demerits of caste, village factions and dominant caste and others. And doing this they have not touched by the current of freedom struggle or current problems.

Take for instance, N.K. Bose. He has studied tribals and their integration. For him, the method of tribal absorption seems to be quite suitable. He was very close to Gandhi but he did not take up the issue of the need for communal harmony. In fact, he was far away from the prevailing national mainstream.

Most of our social thinkers have preferred to take up the issue of caste. At the most, they are rich in depicting the caste ethnography. In fact, they have followed the officials-turned-anthropologists of British times, to depict caste which could be useful for the exploitation of the poorer masses of people for whom caste is not an institution but a way of social, ritual and sacramental life. It gives moral strength to bear the atrocities of the high castes, kings, *jagirdars* and *zamindars*. Such has been the contributions of caste sociologists.

McKim Marriott, M.N. Srinivas and S.C. Dube, the towering social thinkers, have made studies on caste along with the village studies. In fact, these social thinkers brought about a flood of village studies in our country. Admittedly, Dube opened up some new pathways in the much needed field of village development. He argued that people were prepared to accept development plan which suited them to their traditions. When Dube talks about the role of human factor in development, he actually stresses the importance of traditions in village life. As a matter of fact, tradition has been an obsession with Indian social thinkers. Even Yogendra Singh who sets out to study modernity, ends up with the conclusion that traditions die hard and are in turn become modern not in substance. Thus, the modernization of tradition is in reality a false modernization.

Srinivas makes an intelligent and excellent study of village Rampura. It is an anthropological study made with a prolonged stay in a village. He also studied the Coorgs of South India. His concepts of Sanskritization and Westernization have earned wide reputation. But, the usefulness of these concepts for a democratic-secular, capitalistic-socialistic Indian society is limited. What do we want to make out of Sanskritization from the lower sections of society? If the tribals become Hindus (and it is the mission of the Hindutva forces), how will they later get this identity? They do not get entry into the caste hierarchy. It appears that a section of our sociologists such as N.K. Bose, G.S. Ghurye and M.N. Srinivas has become protective of Hindu ideology. Their civilization is Hindu civilization, their history is *pedantic* history.

Marxism has been a powerful ideology among the world social thinkers. We may take up any social thinker of Europe; particularly France, Germany and Britain, we will find that at one time or the other in his/her life, he/she has been a Marxist. In Indian Marxism is rare and Hinduism is the affluent. A.R. Desai is a rare Marxist. He belongs to Bombay University which is renowned for liberal sociology. Among all the sociologists of the development such as G.S. Ghurye, K.M. Kapadia, D. Narain, Bopadhammi, Kulkarni, Desai was the lone Marxist. In his 'praxis' he was a field Marxian worker. He was adviser to a couple of trade unions. His house was always inundated by party workers. Doctrinaire Marxism was his credo. For him, state was a capitalistic organ. It exploited the people at large. He was so much buried in fundamental Marxism that he could not think about neo-Marxism which, then, had come to Europe and America.

Our objective in the present enquiry is to delineate the perspectives of different social thinkers on the reality of Indian society. Perspective means a particular standpoint in terms of ideology on the society. We found that a general perspective of Indian society is its evolutionary aspect. The 16th century in sociology has been a century of evolution. Indian thinkers were no exception. They looked Indian society from evolution. Civilization, traditions, caste, tribe, village, polity and economy, that is,



agriculture, industry and development, have been some of the major perspectives which help us to understand the Indian society. The nature of the society which is depicted in our Constitution and government policies of development plans, *Panchayati Raj*, decentralization, urbanization and capitalization along with democracy and secularism are some of the recent perspectives for understanding Indian society.

Indian society as the evolution theory has two major parts. Elite or the high castes, *ex-zamindars*, *ex-jagirdars*, landed peasants and the high-ups constitute the first part and second part includes the scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, the poor and the subalterns. In any analysis on the perspectives on Indian society, these parts cannot be overlooked or neglected.

Romila Thapar, as a traditional historian, has provided the ancient history of India. She talks about golden age of Indian history. She also informs us that India has always been a diversified country. Local battles were common narrative parts of this history. Alliances in these battles were brought by marriages. Ancient India was ruled by caste associations. In other words, the king or *zamindar* wielded his power through the caste association.

Ranajit Guha was the first subaltern historian who rejected the traditional history. He talked about the people's history in which he called subaltern history the history of the downtrodden people. Both Guha and David Hardiman have brought into light the subaltern people. One very powerful perspective on Indian society is that of subalternism. Hardiman who has worked on the Bhils of Panchmahals (Gujarat) brings out very substantive data. He says that even if there was famine in this area the Bhils never made an attack on the stores of food grains belonging to the *Sabukars*. He further says that the Bhils who feed the *Baniya* are tragically exploited by the latter.

It is difficult indeed to comment on all the thinkers included in this work at this place. We only want to stress that Indian society is very complex and a huge phenomenon. No single perspective can do justice to provide a holistic view of this society. It has a

civilizational depth. It is pluralistic and at the same time secular-democratic. With this understanding of the society we have employed several perspectives. And, these perspectives have been drawn from a large number of thinkers belonging to a variety of social sciences. We further have a strong conviction that social thinkers are the products of their time, age and era. With this conviction we have analysed them in this book. We believe that we are not wrong to bring out the perspectives which would help us to understand our society.



# 1

## Development of Sociology in India

This textbook, in fact, constructs the structural frame for understanding how sociology advanced in India. In this introduction, author's efforts are to construct profile of historical and contemporary development of sociology in India based on scholars' ideas and contributions. The present chapter is an attempt to assess the development of sociology in India. It describes the historical background of the growth of sociology. It also tries to identify the emerging trends in the development of various specialities and sub-specialities within the discipline and how they found together their way into teaching programmes. Thus, the chapter deals with the major trends in the discipline of sociology and the gaps, which need special attention and the new direction for strengthening teaching and research. In this context, the chapter discusses the development of sociology in India with focus on:

- (1) Sociology in Pre-Independence India
- (2) Sociology in Post-Independence India
  - (a) Developments in the Seventies

- (b) Perspectives in the Eighties
  - (c) Imperatives in the Nineties
- (3) Sociological Research in India

### Context

The origin of sociology and social anthropology in India can be traced to the days when the British officials realized the need to understand the native society and its culture in the interest of smooth administration. However, it was only during the twenties of the last century that steps were taken to introduce sociology and social anthropology as academic disciplines in Indian universities. The popularity that these subjects enjoy today and their professionalization is, however, a post-independence phenomenon. Attempts have been made by scholars from time to time to outline the historical developments, to highlight the salient trends and to identify the crucial problems of these subjects.<sup>1</sup>

### Development of Sociology and Social Anthropology in India

Sociology and social/cultural anthropology are cognate disciplines and are in fact indissoluble. However, the two disciplines have existed and functioned in a compartmentalized manner in the European continent as well as in the United States. This separation bears the indelible impress of western colonialism and Eurocentrism. However, Indian sociologists and anthropologists have made an attempt to integrate sociology and anthropology in research, teaching and recruitment. They have made a prominent contribution to the development of indigenous studies of Indian society and have set an enviable example before the Asian and African scholars. Another significant contribution of Indian sociology and social/cultural anthropology lies in their endeavour to synthesize the text and the context. This synthesis between the text and the context has provided valuable insights into the dialectic of continuity and change to contemporary Indian society (Momin, 1997).

It is difficult to understand the origin and development of sociology in India without reference to its colonial history. By the second half of the 19th century, the colonial state in India was



about to undergo several major transformations. Land, and the revenue and authority that accrued from the relationship between it and the state, had been fundamental to the formation of the early colonial state, eclipsing the formation of Company rule in that combination of formal and private trade that itself marked the formidable state-like functions of the country. The important event that took place was the revolt of 1857, which showed that the British did not have any idea about folkways and customs of the large masses of people. If they had knowledge about Indian society, the rebellion of 1857 would not have taken place. This meant that a new science had to come to understand the roots of Indian society. The aftermath of 1857 gave rise to ethnographic studies. It was with the rise of ethnography, anthropology and sociology which began to provide empirical data of the colonial rule.

Herbert Risley was the pioneer of ethnographic studies in India. He entered the Indian Civil Services in 1857 with a posting in Bengal. It was in his book *Caste and Tribes of Bengal* (1891) that Risley discussed Brahminical sociology, talked about ethnography of the castes along with others that the importance of caste was brought to colonial rulers. Nicholas Dirks (*In Post Colonial Passages*, Sourabh Dube, Oxford, 2004) observes:

Risley's final ethnographic contribution to colonial knowledge thus ritualized the divineness of caste, as well as its fundamental compatibility with politics only in the two registers of ancient Indian monarchy or modern Britain's 'benevolent despotism'.

Thus, the ethnographic studies came into prominence under the influence of Risley. He argued that to rule India caste should be discouraged. This whole period of 19th century gave rise to ethnographic studies, i.e., studies of caste, religion, rituals, customs, which provided a foundation to colonial rule for establishing dominance over India. It is in this context that the development of sociology in India has to be analysed.

Sociology and social anthropology developed in India in the colonial interests and intellectual curiosity of the western scholars on the one hand, and the reactions of the Indian scholars on the other. British administrators had to acquire the knowledge of

customs, manners and institutions of their subjects. Christian missionaries were interested in understanding local languages, folklore and culture to carry out their activities. These overlapping interests led to a series of tribal, caste, village and religious community studies and ethnological and linguistic surveys. Another source of interest in Indian studies was more intellectual. While some western scholars were attracted by the Sanskrit language, Vedic and Aryan civilization, others were attracted by the nature of its ancient political economy, law and religion. Beginning from William Jones, Max Muller and others, there was a growth of Indological studies. Karl Marx and Frederic Engels were attracted by the nature of oriental disposition in India to build their theory of evolution of capitalism. Similarly, Henry Maine was interested in the Hindu legal system and village communities to formulate the theory of status to contract. Again, Max Weber got interested in Hinduism and other oriental religions in the context of developing the theory, namely, the spirit of capitalism and the principle of rationality developed only in the West. Thus, Indian society and culture became the testing ground of various theories, and a field to study such problems as growth of town, poverty, religion, land tenure, village social organization and other native social institutions. All these diverse interests – academic, missionary, administrative and political – are reflected in teaching of sociology.

According to Srinivas and Panini (1973: 181), the growth of the two disciplines in India falls into three phases: the first, covering the period between 1773-1900 AD, when their foundations were laid; the second, 1901-1950 AD, when they become professionalized; and finally, the post-independence years, when a complex of forces, including the undertaking of planned development by the government, the increased exposure of Indian scholars to the work of their foreign colleagues, and the availability of funds, resulted in considerable research activity. Here, three major phases in the introspection in sociology, which have been discussed by Rege (1997) in her thematic paper on 'Sociology in Post-Independent India' may also be mentioned. Phase one is characterized by the interrogations of the colonial impact on the discipline and



nationalist responses to the same, phase second is marked by explorations into the initiative nature of the theoretical paradigms of the discipline and debates on strategies of indigenization. This phase also saw critical reflections on the deductive positivistic base of sociology and the need for Marxist paradigms and the more recent phase of post-structuralism, feminist and post-modern explorations of the discipline and the field. Lakshmana also (1974: 1) tries to trace the development of sociology in three distinctive phases. The first phase corresponds to the period 1917-1946, while the second and the third to 1947-1966 and 1967 onwards respectively.

### ***Sociology in the Pre-Independence Period***

As is clear by now that sociology had its formal beginning in 1917 at Calcutta University owing to the active interest and efforts of B.N. Seal. Later on, the subject was handled by Radhakamal Mukerjee and B.N. Sarkar. However, sociology could not make any headway in its birthplace at Calcutta. On the other hand, anthropology flourished in Calcutta with the establishment of a department and later on the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI). Thus, sociology drew a blank in the eastern parts of the country. But, the story had been different in Bombay. Bombay University started teaching of sociology by a grant of Government of India in 1914. The Department of Sociology was established in 1919 with Patrick Geddes at the helm of affair. He was joined by G.S. Ghurye and N.A. Tothi. This was indeed a concrete step in the growth of sociology in India. Another centre of influence in sociological theory and research was at Lucknow that it introduced sociology in the Department of Economics and Sociology in 1921 with Radhakamal Mukerjee as its head. Later, he was ably assisted by D.P. Mukerji and D.N. Majumdar. In South India, sociology made its appearance at Mysore University by the efforts of B.N. Seal and A.F. Wadia in 1928. In the same year sociology was introduced in Osmania University at the undergraduate level. Jafar Hasan joined the department after he completed his training in Germany. Another university that started teaching of sociology and social anthropology before 1947 was Poona in the late 1930s with Irawati Karve as the head. Between 1917 and 1946, the development of the

discipline was uneven and in any case not very encouraging. During this period, Bombay alone was the main centre of activity in sociology. Bombay attempted a synthesis between the Indological and ethnological trends and thus initiated a distinctive line of departments. During this period, Bombay produced many scholars who richly contributed to the promotion of sociological studies and research in the country. K.M. Kapadia, Irawati Karve, S.V. Karandikar, M.N. Srinivas, A.R. Desai, I.P. Desai, M.S. Gore and Y.B. Damle are some of the outstanding scholars who shaped the destiny of the discipline. The products of this university slowly diffused during this period in the hinterland universities and helped in the establishment of the departments of sociology.

Certain trends of development of sociology may be identified in the pre-independence period. Sociology was taught along with economics, both in Bombay and Lucknow. However, in Calcutta, it was taught along with anthropology, and in Mysore it was part of social philosophy. Teachers had freedom to design the course according to their interests. No rigid distinction was made between sociology on the one hand and social psychology, social philosophy, social anthropology, social work, and other social sciences such as economics and history, on the other. The courses included such topics as social biology, social problems (such as crime, prostitution and beggary), social psychology, civilization and pre-history. They covered tribal, rural and urban situations. At the general theoretical level, one could discern the influence of the British social anthropological traditions with emphasis on diffusionism and functionalism. In the case of teaching of Indian social institutions the orientation showed more Indological emphasis on the one hand and a concern for the social pathological problems and ethnological description on the other. Strong scientific empirical traditions had not emerged before independence. Sociology was considered a mixed bag without a proper identity of its own (Rao, 1982).

### ***Sociology in the Post-Independence Period***

The next phase, as mentioned by Lakshmana (1974: 45), in the growth of the subject, corresponds to the period between the



attainment of independence and the acceptance of the regional language as the medium of instruction in most states of the country. Towards the end of this period, we also witnessed the interest on the part of the Central Government to promote social science research through a formal organization established for the purpose. This phase alone experienced tremendous amount of interaction within the profession as two parallel organizations started functioning for the promotion of the profession. In Bombay, Indian Sociological Society was established and *Sociological Bulletin* was issued as the official organ of the society. This helped to a large extent in creating a forum for publication of sociological literature. Lucknow school, on the other hand, started the All India Annual Sociological Conference for professional interaction. Lakshmana (1974: 5) identifies that the research efforts mainly progress on three lines. First, there was large-scale doctoral research in the university. Second, the growing needs of the planners and administrators on the one hand and the realization of increasing importance of sociological thinking and research in the planning process on the other, opened up opportunities for research projects. Third, during this period, the growing importance of social science research also resulted in the establishment of research institutes. The development of research activity also meant the enlargement of the employment opportunities at all levels.

Correspondingly, there was also an increase in the number of universities and college departments. This period also noticed considerable vertical and horizontal mobility in the profession. Teaching of sociology got well established in the fifties. This period reflected three things as marked by Rao (1982). First, sociology achieved greater academic status. Not only many more universities and colleges began to teach at the postgraduate and graduate levels but the discipline itself became more focused in theoretical orientation and highly diversified in its specialization. Secondly, sociology established its identity as discipline by separating itself from psychology, anthropology, social philosophy and social work. Although, in some universities, still social pathology and social psychology are taught as a part of sociology courses. In many others, a highly diversified curriculum structure in proper sociology exists including such specialization as rural and urban

sociology, sociology of kinship, sociology of religion, sociology of stratification, sociology of education, political sociology, medical sociology, social demography and sociology of economic development. Thirdly, diversification followed the lines of extension of sociological approach to different areas of social life. It was related to the growing needs of development in independent India. Colonial legacy became a thing of the past and democratic processes were introduced at all levels. Sociologists soon become sensitive to problems of development in the contexts of tribal, rural and urban situations. Problems of rural development, industrialization, expansion of education, control of population, new political processes and institutions, social and political movements attracted their areas of social life. They started conducting empirical research with a view to understand the structure, dynamics and problems of development. All these concerns had a feedback on the teaching of sociology at various levels.

Another important change in the teaching of sociology, which came after independence, has been in regard to the external intellectual influences. Before independence the teaching of sociology and social anthropology was mainly, if not wholly, influenced by the then current theoretical concerns in Great Britain. We have already mentioned the influence of diffusionism and functionalism (of Malinowski). The syllabi also reflected traditions of ethnology, evolutionism and Indology. After independence, however, American sociological traditions had a major impact on the teaching of sociology in India. This is evident from such topics in the syllabi as structural-functional theory (Parsons and Merton) and research methodology. Besides the American, the French, German and Marxian intellectual influences also had an impact. In the midst of such diverse intellectual stimuli, Indian sociologists began to criticize, modify and develop diverse sociological approaches in the study of Indian society and culture, and these are reflected in the course of study of different universities (Rao, 1982).

#### *Developments in the Seventies*

There have been a few reviews of developments in sociology and social anthropology since earlier times till 1970s and onwards (see,



for example, the collection of essays in Unnithan, Singh et al., 1965; ICSSR, 1971, 1974, 1985; Rao, 1974; Mukherjee, 1977; Mukherjee, 1979; Singh, 1986; UGC, 1978, 1979, 1982; Lele, 1981; Oommen and Mukherjee, 1986; Dhanagare, 1993; Singhi, 1996). Of these, Ram Krishan Mukherjee's review has been more exhaustive and substantial for the discipline as a whole. The ICSSR trend reports covered in detail the developments in each of specializations. Rao (1982: 16-23) reviewed the developments in the seventies under three heads: (i) areas of the interests and specialization which got crystallized; (ii) areas of interest which have developed but not got crystallized; and (iii) emergence of new approaches in the established areas.

The seventies of the last century saw a further continued diversification of interests and specialization in substantive areas of research and teaching in the sixties. While, earlier, village community studies dominated researches, but the interests in the areas of agrarian relations, land reforms, peasants, agricultural labourers, and scheduled castes and tribes began to attract greater attention of sociologists and social anthropologists in the seventies. The problems of rural society were formulated in the Marxian framework of analysis emphasizing conflicts and contradictions. The other areas of interests that were crystallized in the seventies were industrial sociology, urban sociology and social stratification. Secondly, there were six areas of interest that started getting some attention in the seventies but have not really got off the mark. These were: sociology of profession, sociology of organization, medical sociology, social demography and studies on women, Muslims and Hindu-Muslim relations. Thirdly, it is significant to note that the seventies saw new approaches and foci in the large areas of research and teaching such as caste, kinship, religion, politics and tribal studies.

#### *Perspectives in the Eighties*

Many of the areas of specialization mentioned in the foregoing account, no doubt, gained strength in the eighties of the last century. Some areas of enquiry, such as social demography and medical sociology, were crystallized. A few other areas of

investigation opened up and more research in the established areas was undertaken on new lines. Some of the new areas have been introduced. These were: sociology of deviance, sociology of knowledge, sociology of science and technology, and historical sociology. Rao (1982) anticipated these areas for research in the eighties. There was an indication that interest in sociology of science and technology might get more widespread (Uberoi, 1978; Vishwanathan, 1977). The growing interest in historical sociology was reflected in Fox (1977). Damle (1982: 57-58) anticipated the task of sociology for the eighties in India, which was to analyse (1) the transformation of Indian society, (2) the limits of such transformation, and (3) the impact of these limits to such transformation, which was reflected either in the frustrations of the efforts to surmount the obstacles. In this context, new ideologies and protest movements acquired a special significance. In many of the newly developing branches of sociology, scholars have made notable but isolated contributions. There has been thinking that research should be promoted in the nineties in the areas of sociology of planning and development, sociology of professions, sociology of organizations, social dimensions of poverty, law and social change, sociology of national integration etc.

#### *Imperatives in the Nineties*

The country during the nineties of the last century was passing through radical political, economical and socio-cultural changes as a result of which the scope and focus of Indian sociology has expanded. Under the influence of such developments, the Indian government that adored the policy of mixed economy ever since independence and cherished the ideals of welfarism proceeded to allow the market-oriented policy to prevail. To achieve this goal, the government adopted a new policy of economic reforms in the year 1991 with a view to globalize its economy (Singh, 1997). Globalization is a move prompted by the leaders of the developed world. Liberalization policy, including the freedom accorded to the foreign companies and capital to enter into Indian market, are the two major steps of the government in this direction. The impact of globalization on Indian cultural heritage and general life situation



of the people of the country has generated new areas that deserve the attention of Indian sociologists who do seem to be attentive to such relevant areas as civic society (Gupta, 1997), crisis and resilience in the process of social change (Singh, 1993) and secularism and national integration (Joshi, 1997)<sup>2</sup> but specific social implication of the new economic policy is yet to be analysed. A few courses have been introduced recently on global themes in some of the universities. They are as follows: ecology and society, issues of human rights, sociology of management, human resource development, media and society, action sociology etc. There is also need to start some more new courses like sociology of public order; peace, security and development; security management and information technology etc. These courses are not only important for teaching but also for research in the construction of society and useful for the modern occupation and profession.

### Teaching of Sociology in India

The origin of sociology in India as a distinct discipline can be traced back to the period around 1920s. Teaching of sociology started in Bombay University as early as 1914 but the birth of current academic sociology took place only with the establishment of departments of sociology in Bombay and Lucknow. As for teaching and research, nothing such happened except nominal teaching of the discipline wherever it was introduced for almost a quarter of a century. What Parvathamma states about Mysore University remains true for the entire country and for the discipline of sociology as a whole. "The undergraduate syllabi in sociology as framed by Wadia continued almost for a quarter of a century. Only in the late 1950's, it was changed" (Parvathamma, 1978). Though one finds a nominal beginning, nothing of any consequence happened in the realm of sociology. It remained more or less static during the 1920-47 period. This was the last phase of the colonial rule in India when the national leaders were preoccupied with the liberation movement. Pre-independence scholars have contributed to the foundation of sociology by providing a tradition in which sociology in India could grow and evolve (Unnithan et al., 1967). Their contributions, however, began to make an impact only after

independence, though the number of universities increased from 11 in 1920 to 16 in 1945. However, the number of sociology departments remained just two and of these, only one was concerned for independent degree in sociology (Unnithan, 1982).

The percentage of universities, having sociology department, had been falling during 1920-50. It began to show a trend towards regular increase after 1950. By 1960, 23.8 per cent of universities in India had sociology departments. By 1965, this number rose to 29.6 per cent. Now, there are 95 universities including institutions that are deemed to be universities. Fifty-one of them or about 54 per cent accommodate departments of sociology. In spite of their relatively greater growth in sociology departments, it is interesting that 44 (46.3%) out of 95 universities do not have any sociology teaching at all. Of the 51 universities that teach sociology, only 32 have separate departments, whereas 14 conduct undergraduate and postgraduate programmes including PhD. There are 16 universities where sociology is combined with other social science departments but an independent degree is awarded; in three departments no degree is awarded though the subject is taught (Unnithan, 1982: 64). Besides these, according to the Universities Handbook of India, 1973, the 16 Agricultural Universities, the five All India Institutes of Technology, the three Institutes of Technology, the three Institutes of Management, the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and the Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Ahmedabad also offered sociology as a subject of study and/or research.

Sociology is very popular subject in the universities and colleges of India today. Currently, out of 133 traditional universities, about 85 have departments of sociology apart from other departments of social sciences related to sociology like population studies and women studies. A majority of students opt for sociology as one of their subjects at graduation level. It is considered as an easy subject to get through in examination. It is usually preferred by girls particularly those who are not much career conscious. Similarly, at the postgraduate level too, sociology receives a large number of students.





## Indological/Textual Perspective

Indology, more specifically, the branch dealing with interpretation of ancient texts, and linguistic studies of problems of ancient Indian culture would be more fruitful if supplemented by archaeological, sociological, anthropological, numismatic and ethnographic evidence and vice versa. Available data in each of these fields are to be augmented by a great deal of honest and competent field work. None of the various techniques can, by itself, lead to any valid conclusion about ancient India; combined empirical operations are indispensable (Siddiqi, 1978).

The Indological approach rested on the assumption that historically, Indian society and culture are unique and that this 'contextually' specificity of Indian social realities could be grasped better through the 'texts'. It may also be viewed that Indological approach refers to the historical and comparative method based on Indian texts in the study of Indian society. Therefore, Indologists use ancient history, epics, religious manuscripts and texts etc. in the study of Indian social institutions.



The texts basically included the classical ancient literature of ancient Indian society such as Vedas, Puranas, Manu Smriti, Ramayana, Mahabharata and others. Indologists analyse social phenomena by interpreting the classical texts. Apart from Sanskrit scholars and Indologists, many sociologists have also used extensively traditional texts to study Indian society. Therefore, it is called as "textual view" or "textual perspective" of social phenomena as it depends upon texts.

Thus, textual variety of ethnosociology\* that emerged in the late 1970s marks a noticeable shift from the European (à la Dumont) to the American tradition of social anthropology. The studies conducted during this period cover a wide range of subjects, such as social structure and relationships, cultural values, kinship, ideology, cultural transactions and symbolism of life and the world etc. The studies based on texts have been conducted by many scholars, such as, Bennett (1976), David (1973), Fruzzetti and Osler (1976), Inden and Nicholas (1972), Khare (1975, 1976), Murray (1971, 1973), Marriott (1979), Pocock (1985), Eck (1985), Gill (1985), Das and Nandi (1985) etc. Most of these studies are based on textual materials either drawn from epics, legends, myths, or from the folk traditions and other symbolic forms of culture. Most of them have been published in *Contribution to Indian Sociology* (New Series), edited by T.N. Madan, replacing Dumont and Pocock. A good number of studies following this method have been done by foreign-based scholars (Singh, 1986: 39).

Bernard S. Cohn has analysed orientalist's perspective to explain the textual view. The orientalist took a textual view of India offering a picture of its society as being *static, timeless* and *spaceless*. "In this view of the Indian society, there was no regional variation and no questioning of the relationship between perspective, normative statements derived from the texts and the actual behaviour of groups. Indian society was seen as a set of rules,

\* Ethnosociology seeks to explore the meanings and symbols, codes and substance that inhere in texts and languages of a people's own culture (Y. Singh, 1986: 37).

which every Hindu followed" (Cohn and Singer, 1968: 8). Bernard S. Cohn further writes. "The orientalist tended to be better educated and from the upper classes of Great Britain; same as Sir William Jones were trained as scholars before their arrival in India and they wanted to treat Sanskrit and Persian learning with the same methods and respect as one would treat European learning." (Cohn, 1998: 10-11).

When field studies in many areas of their interest in India became difficult, textual analysis, either of classics or ethics or field notes from an earlier date, represented a fruitful basis for continued analysis of Indian structure and tradition in the 1970s and 1980s (Singh, 1986: 41).

An Indological and culturological approach has also been the hallmark of several sociologists. They have hammered against the acceptance of theoretical and methodological orientations of the western countries. These scholars emphasized the role of traditions, groups rather than individual as the basis of social relations and religion, ethics and philosophy as the basis of social organization. For example, R.N. Saxena (1965: 1-13) agrees with this Indological or scriptural basis of studying Indian society. He stressed on the role of the concepts of Dharma, Artha, Kamma and Moksha. Dumont and Pocock (1957: 9-22) emphasize the utility of Indological formulations. They observe: "In principle, a sociology of India lies at the point of confluence of sociology and Indology". Indology is representative of people's behaviour or that guides people's behaviour in a significant way.

The use of the Indological approach during the early formative years of Indian sociology and social anthropology is seen in the works of S.V. Ketkar, B.N. Seal and B.K. Sarkar. G.S. Ghurye, Louis Dumont, K.M. Kapadia, P.H. Prabhu and Irawati Karve have tried to explore Hindu social institutions and practices, either with reference to religious texts or through the analysis of contemporary practices. Initially, Sir William Jones established the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1787 and also introduced the study of Sanskrit and Indology.



The knowledge of Sanskrit also helps to understand the great culture and philosophical tradition of India. The Indological writings dealing with the Indian philosophy, art, and culture are reflected in the works of Indian scholars like A.K. Coomarswamy, Radhakamal Mukerjee, D.P. Mukerji, G.S. Ghurye, Louis Dumont and others. In this context, we are discussing here Radhakamal Mukerjee, G.S. Ghurye and Louis Dumont who used Indological approach in their research. They have tremendously enriched the field of Indian sociology.



## Radhakamal Mukerjee



Radhakamal Mukerjee (1889-1968) along with D.P. Mukerji – his colleague in Lucknow University – and G.S. Ghurye of Bombay University, are considered a great pioneer in sociology in India. Lucknow University was a major centre of sociology and social anthropology. Under the scholarship of the triumvirate – Radhakamal Mukerjee, D.P. Mukerji and D.N. Majumdar – Lucknow soon emerged as a leading centre for social science studies and it remained so until the mid-1960s. Our discussion here is mainly on Radhakamal Mukerjee.

### Life Sketch

Radhakamal Mukerjee was born on 7th December in 1889 in a large Bengali Brahmin family at Berhampur (Murshidabad), a small country-town in Western Bengal. He spent the first sixteen years of his life in this town. His father was a lawyer and the leader of the bar. He was an accomplished scholar with a great interest in history.



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5

G.S. Ghurye



Govind Sadashiv Ghurye (1893-1984) is a towering figure in intellectual and academic circles for his unique contribution in the field of Indian sociology. He has often been acclaimed as the 'father of Indian sociology', 'the doyen of Indian sociologists' or 'the symbol of sociological creativeness'. Ghurye had been engaged in building up, almost single handedly, the entire first generation of Indian sociologists in post-independence period.

M.N. Srinivas has rightly said, "nothing disguises the fact that Ghurye was giant". Efforts of individuals, who have variously been regarded as the 'founding fathers', 'pioneers' 'first-generation sociologists' etc., constituted the most important factor in the growth of Indian sociology. These pioneers provided direction to shape the future of sociology in India. And, of all these, none did as much for sociology in India as Ghurye.

Two aspects of Ghurye's work are worth inquiring into:

- first, his role in promoting and directing the course of research in diverse fields of Indian society (as a teacher, as an institution builder and as a scholar); and



— second, his own substantive writings, his theoretical postulates, his vision of the role of sociology, etc.

Ghurye excelled in both of them. We would like to discourse upon these things in this chapter.

### Background

Ghurye was born on 12th December, 1893 in a Saraswat Brahmin family in Malavan, Maharashtra, the West Coast of India. He died on 28th December, 1983 at the age of 91 in Bombay. Sociology was not a school or college subject when Ghurye was a student. From the very early years, Ghurye showed a flair for Sanskrit. After passing the matriculation examination, Ghurye got himself admitted to the Elphinstone College, Bombay with Honours. He had a brilliant academic career throughout. He stood first class second at the BA examination and was awarded the Bahu Dazi prize – the blue ribbon of Sanskrit competence in the university. He stood first class first at the MA examination in English and Sanskrit in 1918 and was awarded the Chancellor's Gold Medal. None before that time had obtained a first class at the MA with Sanskrit. With this type of background in Sanskrit, Ghurye finally came to sociology, which profoundly influenced later Ghurye's own writings and the course of research made in the field of sociology under his leadership.

While teaching at the Elphinstone College, Ghurye submitted an essay to Patrick Geddes on "Bombay As An Urban Centre". It won him a foreign scholarship. The scholarship was instituted by the University of Bombay to train promising young men in sociology. Ghurye went to London School of Economics where he briefly worked with L.T. Hobhouse. He later moved to Cambridge where he worked with W.H.R. Rivers. Rivers died in 1922 before Ghurye completed his doctoral work. In 1923, he completed his PhD under A.C. Hadden on *Caste and Race in India*. His work was published by Routledge and Kegan Paul in 1932 in C.K. Ogden's *History of Civilization Series*. It immediately established Ghurye's reputation.

Sociology in Bombay developed under the leadership of G.S. Ghurye. Patrick Geddes was invited by the University of Bombay to start a Department of Sociology in 1919. Ghurye succeeded Geddes as head and as a Reader, took charge of the Department of Sociology at Bombay University in 1924. He was appointed as Professor in 1934 and retired in 1959. When he retired in 1959, the University of Bombay made him an Emeritus Professor. Ghurye was the first Emeritus Professor in Bombay University. He did not cease to be academically active after retirement from service. His last research student submitted thesis in 1971. During these about fifty years' span, he supervised as many as eighty theses. Of these, forty have been published as books.

As a *teacher*, Ghurye was very serious and meticulous in preparing his lectures notes. Many of his students have testified that his lectures were heavily documented. As a *research guide*, he was more impressive and more successful. He created a 'sociological awareness'. The 'second generation' of Indian sociologists was largely his creation. They include M.N. Srinivas, K.M. Kapadia, I. Karve, K.T. Merchant, I.P. Desai, A.R. Desai, Y.B. Damle, D. Narain, M.S.A. Rao, K.N. Venkatarayappa, A. Bopegamage, M.G. Kulkarni, K.C. Panchnadikar, M.L. Sharma, D.B. Unwalla and many others.

As an *institution-builder*, deservedly, the most profound impact on Indian sociology was made by Ghurye. Ghurye was the principal architect of the Department of Sociology of Bombay University and produced a batch of renowned scholars including M.N. Srinivas, who is now internationally known. His students headed (and many of them are still heading) the departments of sociology in many universities in India. Ghurye was the prime mover in the formation of Indian Sociological Society in 1952 and was also instrumental in the publication of its mouthpiece, *Sociological Bulletin*, as its official bi-annual journal. However, the first sociological journal in India, *The Indian Journal of Sociology*, was started in January 1920 under the editorship of Alban G. Widgery of Baroda College in Baroda.

Ghurye was elected the president of the anthropological section of the Indian Science Congress in 1934. In the same year, he



was also elected as the nominee to the Royal Asiatic Society and continued to hold this position till 1948. During his lifetime, he won several top honours accorded to any intellectual in India.

As a scholar, in fact, throughout his life, Ghurye has been active from the academic standpoint. His 16 books, out of a total of 31 books, published during his lifetime. His output is indeed prodigious by any standard. Several of them are noteworthy and pioneering contributions to the sociology field. Even so, Ghurye is most likely to be remembered by *Caste and Race in India* (title: *Caste and Class in India* in subsequent editions). His persistent research endeavour, wide ranging interest and upholding of the base of academic tradition made him the centre of sociological creativity and research for several generations of Indian sociologists. Ghurye's broad area of interest was general process of evolution of culture in different civilizations in general, and in Indian (Hindu) civilization in particular. The origin and subsequent proliferation of the different varieties of Indo-European civilization constitute the range of Ghurye's study.

Indian society, through its long historical process of growth, presents a picture of a vast mosaic of culture held together by religion, values and norms of Hinduism. As a sociologist, Ghurye feels the imperative of exploring this unifying and synthesizing process. In spite of many diversions, exploration and analysis of the process of cultural unity in India through ages constitutes the major thrust of Ghurye's writing. He moves to establish his thesis with perfect case, back and forth, from the Vedic to the present-day India.

#### Theoretical Approach and Methodological Application of Ghurye

Ghurye's rigour and discipline are now legendary in Indian sociological circles. In the application of theories to empirical exercises or in the use of methodologies for data collection that legendary rigour is not somehow reflected. To put it differently, Ghurye was not dogmatic in the use of theory and methodology. He seems to have believed in practising and encouraging disciplined eclecticism in theory and methodology. Despite his training at Cambridge under W.H.R. Rivers and his broad acceptance of the

structural-functional approach, Ghurye did not strictly conform to the functionalist tradition when interpreting the complex facets of Indian society and culture, which he chose to investigate.

The pioneers were 'armchair' or 'lecture room' sociologists. Even Ghurye had conducted village, town and community studies. It was said that "Ghurye insisted on fieldwork, though he himself was an armchair scholar" (Srinivas and Panini, 1973: 188). This was not intended as a pejorative comment (Srinivas, 1973), but it reflected the tremendous premium placed on single-handed 'anthropological fieldwork'. Therefore, it may be said that although trained in the craft of Indology, Ghurye was not averse to the fieldwork traditions of social and cultural anthropology. His field survey of *Sex Habits of Middle Class People in Bombay*, conducted in the 1930s and published in 1938 and the monograph on the *Mahader Kolis* (1963) demonstrated Ghurye was far from promoting an armchair textual scholarship. He was an empirical field worker also. Later generations of Indian sociologists and social anthropologists used Ghurye's inexhaustible themes for their researches.

It would be appropriate to characterize Ghurye as a practitioner of 'theoretical pluralism'. Basically interested in inductive empirical exercises and depicting Indian social reality using any source material - primarily Indological - his theoretical position bordered on laissez-faire. Similarly, when Ghurye conducted survey-type research involving primary data collection, he did not conform to accepted methodological canons. He often ventured into generalization on the basis of scanty and unrepresentative evidence, e.g., *Social Tensions in India* (Ghurye, 1968). It is also likely that Ghurye's flexible approach to theory and methodology in sociology and social anthropology was born of his faith in intellectual freedom, which is reflected in the diverse theoretical and methodological approaches that his research students pursued in their works. Ghurye also used historical and comparative methods in his studies which have also been followed by his students.

Ghurye was initially influenced by the reality of diffusionist approach of British social anthropology but subsequently he switched on to the studies of Indian society from indological and anthropological perspectives. He emphasized on Indological



approach in the study of social and cultural life in India and the elsewhere. This helps in the understanding of society through literature. Ghurye utilized literature in sociological studies with his profound knowledge of Sanskrit literature, extensively quoted from the *Vedas*, *Shastras*, epics, and poetry of Kalidasa or *Bhavabhuti* to shed light on the social and cultural life in India. He made use of the literature in vernacular, e.g., Marathi, and cited from the literature of modern writers like Bankimchandra Chatterjee as well.

### Works of Ghurye

Ghurye's writings have enormous diversity of themes and perspectives. The range is very wide, indeed. As the two principal branches of the Indo-European people subsequently prospered in India (the Indo-Aryan) and Europe (the Anglo-Saxon), for example, he has shown wide similarities between these two peoples as regards the two principal institutions, viz., the family and the caste. Not only this, a host of other things also came with Ghurye's range of interests. Rajput architecture and funerary monuments, sadhus in India and sex in America, Shakespeare and Kalidas, castes, tribes and races, metropolitan civilization – everything was grist to his sociological mill. His writings have been gathered from all sources – literary, historical, archaeological, sculptural, painting and iconography. This gives an extra dimension to his research.

Upto 1980, he authored thirty-one books; only five of them were written before 1950 and thirteen upto 1959 when he retired from the university service. The important works of Ghurye are as follows:

1. *Caste and Race in India* (1932, 1969)
2. *Culture and Society* (1947)
3. *Indian Sadhus* (1953)
4. *Bharatnatyam and Its Costume* (1958)
5. *Family and Kin in Indo-European Culture* (1955, 1961)
6. *Cities and Civilization* (1962)
7. *Gods and Men* (1962)
8. *Anatomy of a Rural-Urban Community* (1962)

9. *Scheduled Tribes* (first published as *The Aborigines So-called and their Future*) (1943, 1959, 1963)
10. *Religious Consciousness* (1965)
11. *Indian Costume* (1966)
12. *Social Tensions in India* (1968)
13. *I and Other Explorations* (1973)
14. *Whither India* (1974)
15. *Indian Acculturation* (1977)
16. *Vedic India* (1979)
17. *Bringing Cauldron of North East India* (1980)

The whole range of Ghurye's works can be classified into a number of broad themes. The classification has not always been a neat one, sometimes a little bit of discretion had to be used but this enabled us to arrange more systematically his ideas. Pramanick (1994) has divided Ghurye's writings into six broad areas. These are:

1. Caste
2. Tribes
3. Kinship, family and marriage
4. Culture, civilization and the historical role of cities
5. Religion
6. Sociology of conflict and integration

Besides these, there are a number of important writings of Ghurye, which could not be fitted into the above scheme. We would briefly discuss here the important works of Ghurye.

### Caste and Kinship

We first take up Ghurye's *Caste and Race in India* (1932), which cognitively combined historical, anthropological and sociological perspectives to understand caste and kinship system in India. He tried to analyse caste system through textual evidences using ancient texts on the one hand and also from both structural and cultural perspectives on the other hand.

Ghurye studied caste system from a historical, comparative and integrative perspective. Later on he did comparative study of



kinship in Indo-European cultures. In his study of caste and kinship, Ghurye emphasizes two important points:

1. The kin and caste networks in India had parallels in some other societies also.
2. The kinship and caste in India served in the past as integrative frameworks.

The evolution of society was based on the integration of diverse, racial or ethnic groups through these networks.

Ghurye highlights six structural features of caste system as follows:

1. Segmental division
2. Hierarchy
3. Pollution and purity
4. Civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections
5. Lack of choice of occupation
6. Restrictions on marriage

Besides the above characteristics, Ghurye laid particular stress on endogamy as the most important feature of the caste system. Any effective unit of the caste hierarchy is marked by endogamy. Every caste had in the past segmented into smaller sub-divisions or sub-castes. Each of these sub-castes practised endogamy. For example, Vaishya (Baniya or Mahajan) castes are divided into various sub-castes such as Agrawal, Maheshwari etc.

Caste is also linked with kinship through caste endogamy and also clan (*gotra*) exogamy. *Gotra* has been treated as thoroughly exogamous unit by the Brahmins and later by the non-Brahmins. The basic notion here is that all the members of a *gotra* are related to one another, through blood, i.e., they have *rishi* (sage) as their common ancestor. Therefore, marriage between two persons of the same *gotra* will lead to incestuous relationship. It will lead the lineage of the *gotra* to near extinction.

The relationship between caste and kinship is very close because (i) exogamy in our society is largely based on kinship, either real or imaginary, and (ii) the effective unit of caste, sub-caste

is largely constituted of kinsmen. To Ghurye, there are three types of marriage restrictions in our society, which shape the relationship between caste and kinship. These are endogamy, exogamy and hypergamy. Exogamy can be divided into two parts: (i) *spinda* or prohibited degrees of kin, and (ii) *sept* or *gotra* exogamy.

The *gotra* and *charna* were kin categories of Indo-European cultures which systematized the rank and status of the people. These categories were derived from *rishis* (saints) of the past. These *rishis* were the real or eponymous founder of the *gotra* and *charna*. In India, descent has not always been traced to the blood tie. The lineages were often based on spiritual descent from sages of the past. Outside the kinship, one might notice the *guru-shishya* (teacher-student) relationship, which is also based on spiritual descent. A disciple is proud to trace his descent from a master.

Likewise, caste and sub-caste integrated people into a ranked order based on norms of purity-pollution. The rules of endogamy and commensality marked off castes from each other. This was integrative instrument, which organized them into a totality or collectivity. The Hindu religion provided the conceptual and ritualistic guidelines for this integration. The Brahmins of India played a key role in legitimizing the caste ranks and orders through their interpretation of *Dharamashastras*, which were the compendia of sacred codes.

### Tribe

Ghurye's works on the tribes were general as well as specific. He wrote a general book on *Scheduled Tribes* in which he dealt with the historical, administrative and social dimensions of Indian tribes. He also wrote on specific tribes such as the Kolis in Maharashtra. Ghurye presented his thesis on tribes at a time when a majority of the established anthropologists and administrators were of the opinion that the separate identity of the tribes is to be maintained at any cost.

Ghurye, on the other hand, believes that most of the tribes have been Hinduized after a long period of contact with Hindus. He holds that it is futile to search for the separate identity of the tribes. They are nothing but the 'backward caste Hindus'. Their



backwardness was due to their imperfect integration into Hindu society. The Santhals, Bhils, Gonds, etc., who live in South-Central India are its examples (Ghurye, 1963).

There has been fierce debate between G.S. Ghurye and Verrier Elwin. Elwin in his book *Loss of Nerve* said that tribals should be allowed to live in isolation, whereas Ghurye argued that tribals should be assimilated into Hindu castes.

Thus, Ghurye holds the view that a grand historical process of merger between two communities has almost been completed. Consequently, tribes, now, may be regarded as 'backward Hindus'. The incorporation of Hindu values and norms into tribal life was a positive step in the process of development. The tribes in India had slowly absorbed certain Hindu values and style of life through contact with the Hindu social groups. Today, it is being considered a part of Hindu society. Under Hindu influence, the tribes gave up liquor drinking, received education and improved their agriculture. In this context, Hindu voluntary organizations, such as Ramakrishna Mission and Arya Samaj, played a constructive role for the development of the tribes. In his later works of north-eastern tribes, Ghurye documented secessionist trends. He felt that unless these were held in check, the political unity of the country would be damaged.

Ghurye presents a huge data on the thoughts, practices and habits of the tribes inhabiting the Central Indian region. He quotes extensively from various writings and reports to show that Kataris, Bhuiyas, Oraons, Khonds, Gonds, Korkus etc. have substantially adopted Hinduism as their religion. Ghurye suggests that the economic motivation behind the adoption of Hinduism is very strong among the tribes. They can come out of their tribal crafts and adopt a specialized type of occupation, which is in demand in society.

### Rural-Urbanization

Ghurye remained occupied all through his life with the idea of *rururbanization* securing the advantages of urban life simultaneously with nature's greenery. Therefore, he discusses the process of rural-urbanization in India. He views that the urbanization in

India was not a simple function of industrial growth. In India, the process of urbanization, at least till recent years, started from within the rural area itself. He traced Sanskrit texts and documents to illustrate the growth of urban centres from the need for market felt in a rural hinterland. Development of agriculture needed more and more markets to exchange the surplus in foodgrains. Consequently, in many rural regions, one part of a big village started functioning into a market. This led to a township, which in turn developed administrative, judicial and other institutions. In the past, urban centres were based on feudal patronage, which had demands for silk cloths, jewellery, metal artifacts, weapons etc. This led to the growth of urban centres such as Banaras, Kanchipuram, Jaipur, Moradabad etc.

In brief, it may be said that Ghurye's approach to 'rural-urbanization' reflects the indigenous source of urbanism. During colonial times, the growth of metropolitan centres altered the Indian life. The towns and cities were no longer the outlets for agricultural produce and handicrafts but they became the major manufacturing centres. These centres used rural areas for producing raw materials and turned into a market for selling industrial products. Thus, the metropolitan economy emerged to dominate the village economy. Therefore, the urbanization started making inroads into the rural hinterland in contrast to previous pattern. A large city or metropolis also functioned as the centre of culture of the territory encompassing it.

For Ghurye, the large city with its big complexes of higher education, research, judiciary, health services, print and entertainment media is a cradle innovation that ultimately serves cultural growth. The functions of the city are to perform a culturally integrative role, to act as a point of focus and the centre of radiation of the major tenets of the age. Not any city, but large city or metropolis having an organic link with the life of the people of its region can do this work well.

According to Ghurye, an urban planner must tackle the problems of (1) sufficient supply of drinking water, (2) human congestion, (3) traffic congestion, (4) regulation of public vehicles, (5) insufficiency of railway transport in cities like Mumbai,



(6) erosion of trees, (7) sound pollution, (8) indiscriminate tree felling, and (9) plight of the pedestrians.

### Culture and Civilization

There are two conflicting views about the growth and accumulation pattern of culture. One theory maintains that in any community culture grows quite independently of similar events happening elsewhere or predominantly with reference to local needs and local situation. The other group believes that culture grows by *diffusion*. A single invention or discovery is made at one place and ultimately this cultural trait diffuses throughout the world. Sir G.E. Smith was the most ardent advocate of the diffusion theory.

In one of his papers, "The Disposal of Human Placenta", published in 1937, Ghurye examines the practices of human beings with regard to the disposal of discard of human body like first out hair, nail pairing, first fallen teeth and the after birth. The purpose of this paper is, as he says, to compare the methods of disposal of the human placenta in the different regions of the world to see if they shed any light on the problem of diffusion of culture. Culture diffusion is essentially an anthropological theory, which is concerned with the nature of culture contact operating principally among the preliminary people. According to Ghurye, culture constitutes the central or core element for understanding society and its evolution. In fact, culture is a totality involving the entire heritage of mankind. Ghurye's abiding interest was to analyse the course of cultural evolution and the nature of heritage which mankind has denied from the past.

Culture relates to the realm of values. It is a matter of individual attainment of excellence and creativity. Ghurye had a strong faith in the power of man to preserve the best of his old culture, while creating from his own spirit of new culture. He was more concerned with the process of evolution of Hindu civilization, which has been termed as a 'complex civilization'. And, Ghurye thought that for analyzing the dynamics of culture in such a long historical civilization. In this context, the process of *acculturation* is more relevant than the process of diffusion. He thinks that

the challenging task of a sociologist is to analyse this complex acculturation process in India. According to him, India has been the home of many ethnic stocks and cultures from pre-historic times. In his analysis of caste, Ghurye refers to how caste system was developed by the Brahmins and how it spread to other sections of the population. The operation of the process of *Hinduization* also provides the general backdrop of his analysis of the trial phenomenon.

Ghurye was promoted by the belief that there is a "common heritage of modern civilization" and that civilization is a "collective endeavour of humanity". He holds that behind the rise and fall of civilization, there has occurred a steady growth of culture. Cutting across the vicissitudes of civilization growth, there are certain values, which have been established as final. These values have been termed by Ghurye as the 'foundations of culture'. He delineates five such values or foundations of culture. These are:

1. Religious consciousness
2. Conscience
3. Justice
4. Free pursuit of knowledge and free expression
5. Toleration

According to Ghurye, "civilization is the sum total of social heritage projected on the social plane". It is also an attribute of the society. Different societies can be differentiated with reference to their civilizational attainment. Ghurye makes four general conclusions with regard to the nature of civilization:

- Firstly, as yet, there has been no society, which has been either completely civilized or very highly civilized.
- Secondly, Ghurye believes in the law of continuous progress.
- Thirdly, gradation of civilization is also correlated with the distribution of values. In a high civilization, the humanitarian and cultural values will be accepted by a wide cross-section of population.
- Fourthly, every civilization, high or low, possesses some distinctive qualities.



### Sociology of Religion

Religion is fundamental to man. Man becomes conscious of some power beyond his comprehension almost at the dawn of civilization. This field has drawn the attention of sociologists like Weber (*The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, 1930) and Durkheim (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1915). Ghurye thinks that religion is at the centre of the total cultural heritage of man. He gives the five foundations of culture as mentioned earlier in the description of culture and civilization, out of which 'religious consciousness' is most important. It moulds and directs the behaviour of man in society.

Ghurye made original contribution to the study of Indian religious beliefs and practices. He wrote six books to bring out the role of religion in society. These are: *Indian Sadhus* (1953), *Gods and Men* (1962), *Religious Consciousness* (1965), *Indian Accumulation* (1977), *Vedic India* (1979), and *The Legacy of Ramayana* (1979). All these works reflect Ghurye's interest related to the sociology of religion. For example, in *Gods and Men*, Ghurye discusses the nature of the Hindu ideas of Godhead and the relations, if any, between the climate of an age and the type of Godhead favoured. In *Religious Consciousness*, Ghurye analyses the three oldest human civilizations, viz., the Mesopotamian, the Egyptian and the Hindu, in their various aspects of mythological beliefs, speculation, cosmology, life after death, view of Godhead, temple architecture, etc. And, in the *Indian Sadhus*, Ghurye considers the genesis, development and organization of asceticism in Hindu religion and the role ascetics have played in the maintenance of Hindu society.

### Indian Sadhus

*Indian Sadhus* (1953 and 1964) is an excellent sociography of the various sects and religious centres established by the great Vedantic philosopher Sankaracharya and other notable religious figures. In this work, Ghurye highlights the paradoxical nature of renunciation in India. A *sadhu* or *sannyasin* is supposed to be detached from all castes, norms and social conventions, etc. He is outside the pale of society. Yet strikingly enough, since the time of Sankaracharya,

the Hindu society has more or less been guided by the *sadhus*. These *sadhus* were not the lonely hermits. Most of them belonged to monastic orders, which have distinctive traditions. The monastic organization in India was a product of Hinduism and Buddhism. The rise of Buddhism and Jainism marked the decline of individual ascetics like Viswamitra. Indian *sadhus* have acted as the arbiters of religious disputes, patronized learning of scriptures and the sacred lore and even defended religion against external attacks.

### National Unity and Integration

Ghurye had interest in contemporary Indian situations. As a sociologist, he had been extremely concerned with the concept of integration, the process of national unity in India, and the contemporary challenges to the situation. This concern became apparent even at the time he wrote *Caste and Race in India* in 1932 and *The Aborigines-so-called-and their Future* in 1943. However, this concern with the present 'disturbing trends' in Indian society has come back in a big way in the later writings of Ghurye (Pramanick, 1994). There are three books of Ghurye, known as his 'trilogy' in this field, which are relevant in this connection. These are *Social Tensions in India* (1968), *Whither India* (1974) and *India Recreates Democracy* (1978). In these books he has developed a theoretical framework to explain unity at the social or cultural level.

Ghurye holds that though groups play an integrational role in society, this is true only up to a certain extent. In modern society, there are five sources of danger for national unity coming as they do form a sense of excessive attachment with groups:

- (1) The Scheduled Castes
- (2) The Scheduled Tribes
- (3) The Backward Classes
- (4) The Muslims as religious minority groups
- (5) The linguistic minorities

As we know, the main focus of Ghurye's writings is on culture. He thinks that it is largely as a result of Brahminical endeavour that cultural unity in India has been built up. All the major institutions of Hindu society originated among the Brahmins



and gradually they were accepted by other sections of the community. Though Ghurye calls it process of *acculturation*, it was basically a one-way flow, in which the Brahminical ideas and institutions infiltrated among the non-Brahmins. It is the background of such an approach that Ghurye analyses the problems and prospects of Indian unity in contemporary India.

Ghurye's concept of cultural unity is new one and is not secular in orientation. He is concerned with India of 'Hindu culture' and uses the terms 'Indian culture' and 'Hindu culture' synonymously. He is concerned with India, he says provided an excellent normative base for maintaining social and political unity in the country. Hinduism had brought within its fold widely different groups in India. The various sects of Hinduism constitute vast mosaic holding together millions of people in different parts of India. First, he analysed the normative structure of Hinduism, and the teaching of sacred religious texts such as the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Brahmins etc., to show how they provide the common cultural foundation. Second, the role of such great Hindu thinkers as Panini, Patanjali, Tulsidas etc. has also been discussed by Ghurye.

He blames the political leaders for this, because they followed a course of action, which was more or less exactly the one which should have been avoided but the foundation for this national cultural unity had been built and maintained by the Hindus for one hundred years. According to Ghurye, society is not just an aggregation of isolated individuals but that group life, which provides the bridge between the individual and society. An individual acquires social attributes and is socializes through groups. This is the integrative function of groups in society. When groups perform the function efficiently, integration is achieved. Tensions in the process of this integration in India arise today because the various groups of people have failed to transient their narrow group loyalties. Religious and linguistic minorities are the most potential source of danger to the unity in modern India. Religion and linguistic groups are the prime areas which came disintegration to India's cohesion.

Ghurye gives great importance to the role of language in the process of nation building in India. Even, in case of tribes, tribal life and culture can be improved only when the pick up developed language of a neighbouring community. Ghurye holds the view that the regional language has a symbolic integrational value of the region. The regional languages ensure the unity of territory at the local level and all efforts should be made to improve.

### Discourse

During his creative period of writing, Indian sociology was engaged in the debate on tradition and modernity. Ghurye neither entered into this controversy, nor he took up the issue of the role of tradition in Indian society. He further stressed that Indian traditions are actually Hindu traditions. One must know the Hindu traditions to understand Indian society. In fact, Ghurye created a special kind of *Hindu sociology*. The traditions of India are only Hindu traditions. He did not define traditions. He also did not discuss the impact of modernity. His main concern was the core of Hindu society. In this sense, the traditions of Indian society have its roots in scriptures, which is a very narrow vision about Indian society.

It has been argued that the most of Ghurye's works are based on textual and scriptural data. The choice of scripture and the way of writing may have bias towards one section of society to another. Ghurye further fails to recognize that qualitative change has occurred in modern India. Past is important for present. The question is that how much of the past is useful. Some argue that Ghurye did not have this realization as his knowledge of the India's past, instead of helping him, stood in his way of analysis. However, Ghurye was not only concerned with the past evolution of Indian society but also with its present tensions and problems. The task of sociologists, according to him, is to explore the social history of past. He says, one cannot understand the present without the reference of the past. Ghurye introduced a down-to-earth empiricism in Indian sociology and social anthropology. He was an ethnographer, who studied tribes and castes of India, using historical and Indological data. His knowledge of Sanskrit enabled



him to study the religious scriptures in the context of Indian society.

### Conclusion

The sweep of Ghurye's works and the wide range of his intellectual interests have had a profound influence on the development of the twin disciplines (sociology and social anthropology) in India. Like a discreet butterfly, Ghurye moved from one theme to another with equal interest, erudition and ability. He showed India to an inexhaustible mind where sociologists and social anthropologists could conduct endless explorations. He indicated innumerable but unexplored dimensions of Indian society, culture and social institutions, which would occupy social analysis for decades if they had both the desire and the ability to know.

Ghurye's basic discipline may be regarded as social anthropology, since his PhD was under W.H.R. Rivers at Cambridge (UK). The range of Ghurye's scholarly interests and research is astounding. Exploration of diverse aspects of Indian culture and society through the use of Indological sources permeated Ghurye's otherwise shifting intellectual concerns and empirical research pursuits. His erudition and versatility, therefore, are substantiated by the wide range of his research from Sanskrit text, through interpretation of Indian culture and society.

This rare spirit of inquiry and commitment to advancing the frontiers of knowledge was one of Ghurye's precious gifts to Indian sociology and social anthropology. His diversified interests are also reflected in the great variety of works of his research students produced on themes ranging from family, kinship structures, marriage, religious sects, ethnic groups, castes and aboriginals, their customs and institutions, to social differentiation and stratification, caste and class, education and society, the Indian nationalist movement, social structure and social change in specific villages or regions of India, and also urbanization, industrialization and related social problems in India.

The range of Ghurye's interests is encyclopaedic. His abiding interest is in the course of world civilization in general and in Hindu civilization in particular. He has analysed various aspects

like the origin and evolution of caste, the evolution of Indo-Aryan family structures and its connections with the Indo-European family structure, and specific institutions like *gotra* etc. Analysis of the diverse aspects of the evolution of Indian social history and culture thus constitutes the major preoccupation of Ghurye.

### Ghurye's Framework Summarized

#### Background

1. Educated and trained in Sanskrit and sociology
2. Academic career at Bombay
3. Interests in Indian civilization and culture, national movement

#### Aims

Ethnographic study of castes and tribes, rural-urbanization, religious phenomena, social tensions and Indian art.

#### Assumption

Analysis of evolution and growth of social institutions in India

#### Methodology

1. Indological and textual
2. Inductive-empirical method
3. Historical-comparative method

#### Theoretical perspective

1. Functional approach

#### Typology

1. Classical textual categories
2. Literary data

#### Issues

Different aspects of Indian society such as:

1. Indian culture and civilization
2. Race
3. Religion



4. Caste and kinship system
5. Tribal studies
6. Rural-urbanization
7. Indian sadhus
8. Social tensions
9. Indian costume
10. Sociology of conflict and integration

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## Structural-Functional Perspective

Sociological functionalism is closely related to the structural-functionalist approach in anthropology, which tries to explain the various social forms found in tribal societies in terms of their contributions to social cohesion.

The followers of this perspective focus on the understanding of the 'ordering' and 'patterning' of the social world. Their focus of attention is mainly the 'problem of order' at a societal level. Their theoretical and empirical analyses have generally been based on the assumption that societies can be seen as persistent, cohesive, stable, generally inherited wholes differentiated by their culture and social structural arrangements. They even pose the questions: How did various institutions or customs originate? How does it fill in the broader context? How does the part relate to the whole? Regarding this perspective, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown says that the total social structure of a society, together with the totality of social usages,



constituted a functional unity, a condition in which all parts work together with a sufficient degree of harmony or internal consistency, that is, without producing persisting conflicts which can neither be resolved nor regulated. Further, to explain any belief, rule, custom or institution demanded an analysis which linked the elements functionally with the structure of the culture as a system.

This perspective of society stresses the element of harmony and consistency not those of conflict and contradiction. The functional unity of a system is defined in terms of social order. In defining society in holistic terms, structural-functional implies that as everything within the system is necessarily functional for the whole. They are the believers of the fact that society is a relatively persisting configuration of elements and consensus is a ubiquitous element of the social system. It treats changes as a slow, cumulative process of adjustment to a new situation. Its explanation consists essentially of pointing out how the different types of activity fit on top of one another, and are consistent with one another, and how conflicts are contained and prevented from changing the structure.

M.N. Srinivas is to be credited for initiating the new line of structural-functional analysis in sociological and social anthropological research in India. Structural-functionalism is brought into sociology by borrowing concepts from biological sciences. Structure in biology refers to organisms meaning a relatively stable arrangement of relationships between different cells and the consequences of the activity of the various organs in the life process of the organism as their function. Spencer goes further and points out that not only analogy exists between the body social and body human but the same principle and the same definition of life is applied to both. Durkheim insisted on the importance of structure over elements. He has pointed to the importance of social morphology or structure. A new departure was marked in the thirties of the 19th century by the works of a number of British social anthropologists (Srinivas, 1964). Evans-Pritchard describes social structure in terms of persistent social groups and Radcliffe-Brown indicates that social structure is based on network of relations of person to person through genealogical connections. According to Srinivas, "In the recent British social anthropology,

the two important concepts - structure and function - imply that every society is a whole and that its various parts are interrelated. In other words, the various groups and categories which are part of a society are related to each other" (Srinivas, 1964).

The structural-functional perspective relies more on the field work tradition for understanding the social reality so that it can also be understood as 'contextual' or 'field view' perspective of the social phenomena. The important followers of this perspective are M.N. Srinivas, S.C. Dube, McKim Marriott, I.P. Desai, D.N. Majumdar and others. In this section, we would discuss the structural-functional approach adopted by M.N. Srinivas, S.C. Dube and McKim Marriott in the study of Indian society.





M.N. Srinivas



Mysore Narsimhacharya Srinivas (1916-1999) was born in a Brahmin family in Mysore on 16th November, 1916 and died at the ripe age of 83 at Bangalore on 30th November, 1999. Srinivas, who was himself from a Brahminic background, emerged as a breath of fresh air in the over-Brahminized world of Indian scholarship. Srinivas had initiated the tradition of basing macro-sociological generalizations on micro-anthropological insights and of giving a sweep and perspective to anthropological investigations of small-scale communities (Srinivas, 1996:22). He obtained MA, LLB and PhD from Bombay, and DPhil from Oxford. He was Professor of Sociology at Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda and University of Delhi; and Senior Fellow, Sociology Unit at Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore; and J.R.D. Tata Visiting Professor, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore.

M.N. Srinivas, an internationally renowned scholar, was a student of G.S. Ghurye at the Department of Sociology of Bombay

University. He was an institution-builder, a creative researcher and a devoted teacher in a remarkable manner. He took up the challenge of building a Department of Sociology at M.S. University Baroda, which involved starting from scratch in every respect instead of choosing to be a lecturer at Oxford with all the prestige. Later on, he also helped in the setting of the Department of Sociology at Delhi University. However, he went to Oxford afterwards but he did not stay much and left in 1951. He joined the Institute of Social and Economic Change at Bangalore after leaving Delhi School of Economics. Srinivas was one of the few who preferred to be a professor and remained one all his life rather than accepting the offer of joining the powerful and prestigious post in the government.

#### Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

Srinivas has initiated the tradition of macro-sociological generalizations on micro-anthropological insights and of giving a sociological sweep and perspective to anthropological investigations of small-scale communities (Joshi, 2000). Srinivas wanted to understand his countrymen not on the basis of western textbooks or from indigenous sacred texts but from direct observation, field study and field experience. He made intensive field study of Coorgs between 1940-42. In his study, he describes the concept of functional unity by explaining the interaction in ritual context of different castes of Coorgs, mainly Brahmins (priests), Kaniyas (astrologers and magicians) and Bannas and Panikas (low castes). In the context of the study of Rampura also, he describes that the various castes in a village are interdependent.

Srinivas studies of caste and religion (1952, 1959, 1962, and 1966) highlighted not only their structural-functional aspects, but also the dynamics of the caste system in rural setting. He proposed conceptual tools like 'dominant caste', 'sanskritization-westernization' and 'secularization' to understand the realities of inter-caste relations and also to explain their dynamics. The concept of 'dominant caste' has been used in the study of power



relations at the village level. Srinivas (1960) presents the results of a number of studies on the structure and change in the village society. Srinivas has written articles in the 1940s on Tamil and Telugu folk-songs.

Srinivas explains two basic concepts to understand our society. They are: (a) book view, and (b) field view.

- (a) Book view (bookish perspective): Religion, *varna*, caste, family, village and geographical structure are the main elements, which are known as the bases of Indian society. The knowledge about such elements is gained through sacred texts or from books. Srinivas calls it book view or bookish perspective. Book view is also known as Indology, which is not acceptable to Srinivas and he emphasized to the field view.
- (b) Field view (field work): Srinivas believes that the knowledge about the different regions of Indian society can be attained through field work. This he calls field view. Consequently, he prefers empirical study to understand our society. Srinivas took the path of small regional studies rather than the construction of grand theories. In this context, field work plays an important role to understand the nativity of the rural Indian society.

Srinivas also realized the need for a mathematical and statistical orientation in sociology. His self-analysis (1973) underlines this point. There are cogent reasons of both an ideological and a practical nature which explain why the secondary level of analysis described above is not usually pursued by scholars. The practical considerations are easy to detect. Perhaps, more in the past than at present, the fear of mathematics drive many brilliant and diligent scholars to the 'humanistic' disciplines like sociology.

### Writings of Srinivas

Srinivas has written on many aspects of Indian society and culture. He is best known for his work on religion, village community, caste and social change. He was influenced by Radcliffe-Brown's

notion of structure, who was his teacher at Oxford. He studied Indian society as a 'totality', a study which would integrate "the various groups in its interrelationship, whether tribes, peasants or various cults and sects" (Patel, 1998). His writings are based on intensive field work in South India in general and Coorgs and Rampura in particular (Shah, 1996). Srinivas produced outstanding works, for instance:

1. *Marriage and Family in Mysore* (1942)
2. *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India* (1952)
3. *India's Villages* (1955)
4. *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (1962)
5. *Social Change in Modern India* (1966)
6. *The Remembered Village* (1976)
7. *India: Social Structure* (1980)
8. *The Dominant Caste and Other Essays* (1987)
9. *The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization* (1989)
10. *On Living in a Revolution and Other Essays* (1992)
11. *Village, Caste, Gender and Method* (1996)
12. *Indian Society through Personal Writings* (1996)

Srinivas has also written many other important essays including 'On Living in a Revolution' (1986), 'Some Reflections on Dowry' (1984), 'The Insider and the Outsider in the Study of Cultures' (1984) - all illuminating dimensions of ongoing social change in India. Thus, Srinivas' writings are interdisciplinary in nature. We would like to discuss here on the following themes of Srinivas' contribution:

1. Social change: Brahminization, sanskritization, westernization and secularization
2. Religion and society
3. Study of village
4. Views on caste
5. Dominant caste

### Social Change

'Social change' as a theme continues to be a significant concern of Indian sociologists and social anthropologists. This holds true not



only for the pre-1950 phase but also for post-1950 period. Srinivas (1966) attempted to construct a macro-level analysis using a large number of micro-level findings on the processes of 'sanskritization', 'westernization' and 'secularization'. Interestingly enough, Srinivas returned to his micro-empirical setting – a village – after nearly a quarter of century and in a diachronic frame highlighted the nature of social change in that village over a period of time (Srinivas, 1977).

### **Religion and Society**

Srinivas' work *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (1952) led him to formulate the concept of 'Brahminization' to represent the process of the imitation of life-ways and ritual practices of Brahmins by the lower-caste Hindus. The concept was used as an explanatory device to interpret changes observed in the ritual practices and life-ways of the lower castes through intensive and careful field study. The notion of Brahminization, however, had implicit possibilities of further abstraction into a higher level concept, 'sanskritization', which Srinivas introduced because his own field data and those of many others indicated limitations of using only Brahminic model as frame of reference. Later, sanskritization, as a concept, thus, replaced Brahminization at a more abstract level.

Srinivas achieved this through enlarging the meaning of sanskritization and by distinguishing it from another concept, westernization, using both terms in a systematic manner to explain the processes of social change in India. This conceptual scheme, though referring mainly to the processes of cultural imitation, has a built-in structural notion, that of hierarchy and inequality of privilege and power, since the imitation is always by the castes or categories placed lower in social and economic status. We find a systematic formulation of the two concepts in Srinivas' *Social Change in Modern India* (1966), wherein he defines 'sanskritization' as the process by which a 'low' caste or tribe or other group takes over the custom, ritual, beliefs, ideology and style of life of a high and, in particular, a 'twice-born' (*dwija*) caste. The sanskritization of a group has usually the effect of improving its position in the

local caste hierarchy. The major emphasis in study of social change through concepts of sanskritization and westernization and of the levels of traditions is on the changes in cultural styles, customs and ritual practices. There are, however, some presuppositions in the processes of both sanskritization and westernization, which do imply precedent or concomitant structural changes, such as improvement in economic position of the sanskritizing caste, superiority and dominance of the caste being emulated and psychological disenchantment among the low castes from their own position in the caste hierarchy. Nonetheless, sanskritization brought changes within the framework of Indian tradition whereas westernization was a change resulting from the contact of British socio-economic and cultural innovations. Along with these concepts, Srinivas has used the term 'secularization' to denote the process of institutional innovations and ideological formulation after independence to deal with the question of religious groups and minorities. This became a national ideology.

Srinivas considers village as the microcosm of Indian society and civilization. It is the village, which retains the traditional composition of India's tradition. Srinivas occupies an eminent place among the first-generation sociologists of India. He belongs to the galaxy of G.S. Ghurye, R.K. Mukherjee, N.K. Bose and D.P. Mukerji. He conducted field work among the Coorgs and came out with his publication, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (1952). Dumont and Pocock consider the book as a classic in India's sociology. It is in this work that Srinivas provides a basic structure of India's traditions. T.N. Madan hails the publication in these words:

The strength of the *Coorgs* lies in its being firmly grounded in a clearly defined theoretical framework which happened to be essentially the one developed by Radcliffe-Brown who suggested the theme of the dissertation to Srinivas. *Religion and Society* is a very lucid exposition of the complex interrelationship between ritual and social order in Coorg society. It also deals at length and insightfully with crucial notions of purity and pollution as also with the process of incorporation of non-Hindu communities and cults in the Hindu social order and way of life.



In *Religion and Society*, Srinivas was concerned with the spread of Hinduism. He talked about 'Sanskritic Hinduism' and its values. Related to this was the notion of 'sanskritization' which Srinivas employed "to describe the process of the penetration of sanskritic values into the remotest parts of India. Imitation of the way of life of the topmost, twice-born castes was said to be the principle mechanism by which lower castes sought to raise their own social status". Curiously, Srinivas did not take up for consideration the phenomenon of the persistence of the masses of Hindus of low or no status within the caste system. For him, the most significant aspect of the history of the Coorgs, worthy of being recorded, was the history of this incorporation into the Hindu social order. Srinivas thinks that the only meaningful social change is that which takes place among the weaker sections for attaining higher status by imitating values of twice-born. And, those of the lower castes and tribal groups, who fail in this race of imitation, are doomed to remain backward. Srinivas spells the doom as below:

Splinter groups like Amma Coorgs are decades, if not centuries, in advance of their parent groups; the former have solved this problem by sanskritizing their customs entirely while the latter are more conservative.

What Srinivas spells out about the imitating lower castes seems to be the announcement of a new age. If we attempt to identify traditions of Indian society, according to Srinivas, these are found among the higher castes – the twice-born. In other words, the traditions, rituals and beliefs, which are held and shared by the Brahmins, the Baniyas and the Rajputs, constitute Indian traditions. And, the beliefs of the lower sections of society, the untouchables and the tribals, do not have any status as tradition. For him, Indian traditions are high-caste Hindu traditions, lower-caste traditions are no Indian traditions. Obviously, but he anchors tradition into sanskritization, Srinivas was actually interested in caste. He considered it to be the 'structural bases of Hinduism'. He was not fascinated by Hinduism in its holistic form. He looked for it in the caste system. Thus, his thesis of Indian traditions runs something like this: "Indian traditions are Hindu

traditions, and Hindu traditions are found in caste system. Holistic Hinduism is beyond his scope of discourse."

### *Study of Village*

Besides religion and caste, the third tradition component of Srinivas' study is village. Srinivas got the seed idea of studying India's villages from his mentor Radcliffe-Brown in 1945-46. When settled in India after his return from Oxford, he conducted the study of Rampur – a Mysore village – which gave him the concept of 'dominant caste'. The study has been contained in *The Remembered Village* (1976), it is here only that Srinivas takes some time to discuss social and economic changes, which have taken place in Rampura. He informs:

Technological change occupied a prominent place in the life of the people of Rampura soon after independence. Technological change, of course, went hand in hand with economic, political and cultural changes.

The main aim of Srinivas has been to understand Indian society. And, for him, Indian society is essentially a caste society. He has studied religion, family, caste and village in India. He was a functionalist and was influenced by Radcliffe-Brown, Robert Redfield and Evans Pritchard. These anthropologists were functionalists of higher stature. Ideologically, they believed in status quo: let the Dalits survive and let the high castes enjoy their hegemony over subaltern. Srinivas' search for the identity of traditions makes him infer that the Indian traditions are found in caste, village and religion. For him, it appears that Indian social structure is on par with the advocates of *Hindutva*, say, the cultural nationalism.

Srinivas though talks about economic and technological development, all through his works he pleads for change in caste, religion and family. Even in the study of these areas he sidetracks lower segments of society. They are like 'untouchables' for him. Srinivas has extensively talked about the social evils of the caste society, he pleads for change in caste system and discusses westernization and modernization as viable paradigms of changes.



But his perspective of change is Brahminical Hinduism or traditionalism. In his zeal for promoting sanskritization, he has marginalized and alienated religious minorities. For him, Indian traditions are those, which are manifested in caste and village. His traditions are Hinduized traditions, and in no sense secular ones. Srinivas, in a straightforward way, rejects secularism and stands in favour of Hindu traditions. In his critique of Indian secularism, which appeared in a short article in the *Times of India* in 1993, he finds secularism wanting because he believes that India needs a new philosophy to solve the cultural and spiritual crises facing the country and that philosophy cannot be secular humanism. It has to be firmly rooted in God as creator and protector. Srinivas' construction of sanskritization and dominant caste put him closer to *Hindutva* ideology of cultural nationalism. At this stage of discussion, Doshi (2003) comments regarding India's traditions, it can be said that any tradition emanating from caste system cannot be nation's tradition as the constitution has rejected caste.

Srinivas' widely known classic, *The Remembered Village*, has all the qualities of a classic novel on changing village in a part of South India. Srinivas has portrayed the character types in 'Three Important Men of Village Rampura': the village headman and the landlord of the old type; the broker between village and the outside world, Kulle Gowda; and the powerful enterprising landlord of the new type, Nadu Gowda.

Srinivas concentrated on the study of some vital aspects of Hindu society and culture and his study did it explore the dimensions of interaction and interface between the Hindu and non-Hindu segments. The area that he studied did not have a large non-Hindu presence. He hoped that other sociologists would take up the study of the non-Hindu segments of Indian society and culture without which an Indian sociology, Indian in the sense of being comprehensive and authentic and hence truly representative of the plurality and complexity of India, would not emerge. In this context, Joshi (2000) viewed that Srinivas' self-definition and self-perception was never that of a Hindu sociologist but that of an Indian sociologist studying Hindu religion and its social

institutions in a specific area through intensive fieldwork at the ground level.

### Views on Caste

Srinivas views caste as a segmentary system. Every caste, for him, is divided into sub-castes which are:

1. the unit of endogamy;
2. whose members follow a common occupation;
3. the units of social and ritual life;
4. whose members share a common culture; and
5. whose members are governed by the same authoritative body, viz., the panchayat?

Besides these factors of the sub-caste, for Srinivas, certain other attributes are also important. These are:

1. *Hierarchy*: To Srinivas, hierarchy is the core or the essence of the caste system. It refers to the arrangements of hereditary groups in a rank order. He points out that it is status of the top-most or Brahmins and the bottom-most or untouchables, which is the clearest in terms of rank. The middle regions of hierarchy are the most flexible, who may be defined as members of the middle ranks.
2. *Occupational differentiation*: Srinivas finds a close relationship between a caste and its occupation. He says that caste is nothing more the "systematization of occupational differentiation". Castes are known by their occupations and many derive their name from the occupation followed, e.g., Lohar, Sunar, Kumhar, Teli, Chamar etc. He also stresses that occupations are placed in a hierarchy of high and low.
3. *Restrictions* on commensality, dress, speech and custom are also found among castes. There is a dietic hierarchy and restrictions on acceptance of food.
4. *Pollution*: The distance between castes is maintained by the principles of pollution. Srinivas too argues that the castes must not come into contact with anything that is polluted whether an object or being. Any contact with polluted renders a caste impure and demands that the polluted caste undergo



purification rites. If pollution is serious such as when a high caste person has sexual relations with an untouchable, the person involved may be removed from his or her caste.

5. *Caste Panchayats and Assemblies*: Besides the above mentioned attributes of a caste, every caste is subject to the control of an order maintaining body or a Panchayat. Elder of each caste in a village together maintain the social order by exercising their authority collectively. Further, every caste member is answerable to the authority of its Caste Assembly. The authority of a Caste Assembly may extend beyond village boundaries to include in its jurisdiction of caste in other villages.

From the above, we can infer that the attributes of a caste definitely determined the nature of inter-caste relations. These attributes or customs of caste also determine the rank of a caste. This becomes obvious in the work of Srinivas on caste mobility or sanskritization.

### ✓ **Sanskritization**

We have seen above that how every caste is assigned in the caste rank order on the basis of the purity and impurity of its attributes. In his study of a Mysore village, Srinivas finds that at some time or the other, every caste tries to change its rank in the hierarchy by giving up its attributes and trying to adopt those of castes above them. This process of attempting to change one's rank by giving up attributes that define a caste as low and adopting attributes that are indicative of higher status is called 'sanskritization'. This process essentially involves a change in one's dietary habits from non-vegetarianism to vegetarianism, and a change in one's occupation habits from an 'unclean' to a 'clean' occupation. The attributes of a caste become the basis of interaction between castes. The creation of pattern of interaction and interrelations is best expressed in Srinivas' use of the concept of 'dominant caste'.

### ✓ **Idea of Dominant Caste**

Besides caste, Srinivas looks for yet another source or manifestation of tradition. He found it in the notion of 'dominant caste'. He first

proposed it in his early papers on the village of Rampura. The concept has been discussed and applied to a great deal in work on social and political organization in India. He had defined dominant caste in terms of six attributes placed in conjunction:

- (1) sizeable amount of arable land;
- (2) strength of numbers;
- (3) high place in the local hierarchy;
- (4) western education;
- (5) jobs in the administration; and
- (6) urban sources of income.

Of the above attributes of the dominant caste, the following three are important: (i) numerical strength, (ii) economic power through ownership of land, and (iii) political power. Accordingly, a dominant caste is any caste that has all three of the above attributes in a village community. The interesting aspect of this concept is that the ritual ranking of a caste no longer remains the major basis of its position in the social hierarchy. Even if a caste stands low in the social hierarchy because of being ranked low, it can become the dominant ruling caste or group in a village if it is numerically large, owns land and has political influence over village matters. There is no doubt that a caste with relatively higher in ritual rank would probably find it easier to become dominant. But this is not the case always.

We take an example from the village Rampura in Mysore to illustrate the above. In this village, there are a number of castes including Brahmins, peasants and untouchables. The peasants are ritually ranked below the Brahmins, but they own lands and numerically preponderant and have political influence over village affairs. Consequently, we find that despite their low ritual rank, the peasants are the dominant caste in the village. All the other castes of the village stand in a relationship of service to the dominant caste, i.e., they are at the back of the dominant caste.

Srinivas was criticized for this concept with the charge that it was smuggled from the notion of dominance, which emerged from African sociology. Repudiating the critique, Srinivas asserted that the idea of dominant caste given by him had its origin in the field



work of Coorgs of South India. His field work had impressed upon him that communities, such as the Coorgs and the Okkaligas, wielded considerable power at the local level and shared such social attributes as numerical preponderance, economic strength and clean ritual status. He further noted that the dominant caste could be a local source of sanskritization, or a barrier to its spread. Sanskritization and dominant caste are therefore representation of Indian tradition. And, in this conceptual framework, the traditions of the lower castes and Dalits have no place, nowhere in village India; the subaltern groups occupy the status of dominant caste.

### Criticism

The life mission of Srinivas has been to understand Indian society. He though talks about economic and technological development but in the study of these areas sidetracks lower segments of society. In his endeavour for promoting sanskritization, he has marginalized and alienated religious minorities. For him, Indian traditions are those, which are manifested in caste and village. His traditions are Hinduized traditions and in no sense secular ones. The construction of sanskritization and dominant caste put him closer to *Hindutva* ideology of cultural nationalism. One can say that his understanding was more elitist or presents only upper caste view.

The indigenous concepts of social change prevailing among sociologists in the 1950s and, to a large extent also in the 1960s were formulated by M.N. Srinivas under the labels 'sanskritization' and 'westernization', which he regarded as "limited processes in modern India and it is not possible to understand one without reference to the other" (see *Caste in Modern India*, 1966: 8-9). Srinivas had evolved the concept of sanskritization while preparing his doctoral dissertation under the guidance of Radcliffe-Brown and Evans Pritchard at Oxford (1952). He finally formulated the concept as denoting the process by which a 'low' Hindu caste or tribal or other group, changes its customs, rituals, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently 'twice-born caste'.

In 1956 Srinivas posited the concept of westernization as follows: "The British conquest of India set free a number of forces - political, economic, social and technological ... (which) affected the country's social and cultural life profoundly and at every point, and that the withdrawal of the British from India not only did not mean the cessation of these forces but, meant on the contrary, their intensification" (Srinivas, 1966: 53).

Now, as a summary of certain characteristics spontaneously observable in society, these concepts cannot claim any originality (Mukherjee 1979: 50). What Srinivas characterized as sanskritization in the idiom of sociology currently fashionable, had been described by the proto-sociologists Lyall and Risley as 'Aryanization' and 'Brahminization', as mentioned by Mukherjee in the first chapter of his book *Sociology of Indian Society* (1979). Possibly, sanskritization is a more precise expression of the process under reference, as is claimed by Srinivas who does not deny the antecedents to his concept (Srinivas, 1962: 42-43). Similarly, the process of westernization was noted by several proto-sociologists mentioned by Mukherjee (1979) and described in virtually the same manner as done by Srinivas.

The pioneers also were not unaware of the two processes and took particular note of them in the context of their respective value preferences, theoretical formulations and research orientation (e.g., Coomaraswamy and D.P. Mukerji). The two processes have, respectively, two levels of meaning - 'historic-specific' and 'contextual-specific', as Yogendra Singh has remarked regarding sanskritization (1973: 6) and Milton Singer had noted earlier (1959: 179).

### Conclusion

Srinivas occupies an eminent place among the first-generation sociologists of India. His focus on 'field view' over the 'book view' is a remarkable step in understanding the reality of Indian society. This reflects sociology of nativity. His field work among the Coorgs relates his approach as structural-functional and represents



an exposition of the complex interrelationship between ritual and social order in Coorg society. It also deals with the crucial notion of purity and pollution as also with the process of incorporation of non-Hindu communities into the Hindu social order. This refers to the concept of 'sanskritization' which he used to describe the process of the penetration of Sanskritic values into the remotest parts of India.

### Srinivas' Framework Summarized

#### Background

1. Educated and training in sociology.
2. Academic career at Bombay, Baroda, Delhi, Bangalore and Oxford.
3. His interest in understanding the rural social life.

#### Aim

1. Dynamics of caste system in rural setting

#### Assumptions

1. Structure and change.
2. The tradition of basing macro-sociological generalizations on micro-anthropological insights.
3. To understand his countrymen not on the basis of western textbooks or from indigenous sacred texts but from direct observation, field study and field experience.

#### Approach

1. Structural-functional approach
2. Macro-micro perspective

#### Methodology

1. Anthropological investigations of small-scale communities
2. Functional unity
3. Field investigations
4. Descriptive study

### Typology

1. Dominant caste
2. Brahminization
3. Sanskritization
4. Westernization
5. Secularization

### Issues

Different aspects of Indian society and culture:

1. Indian society and culture
2. Religion and society
3. Village study
4. Inter-caste relations
5. Social change

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## IV

### Marxist Perspective

The dialectical-historical orientation is related primarily to Marxist methods and propositions for the analysis of social reality. Yogendra Singh (2004) has used the term dialectical and not Marxist because in Indian sociology, Marxist approach comprises several adaptive models; many innovations have been made on classical Marxist formulations for the study of Indian society. Also, among Indian sociologists, there is a growing awareness that Marxist categories and paradigms will have to be reformulated and tested against societal realities of various historical origins to validate them as universal or particular categories in sociology. In this perspective, when we look at the growth of dialectical-historical orientation in theory, we find that comparatively it is a less developed branch of Indian sociology. Most basic Marxist thinking in India was done in the forties and fifties by non-sociologists (Singh, 1973, 1977).

The study of Indian social reality from the Marxian perspective has been conducted by scholars such as, M.N. Dutta,



S.A. Dange, D.D. Kosambi, A.R. Desai, D.P. Mukerji, P.C. Joshi, R.S. Sharma, Irfan Habib, D.P. Chattopadhyay and others. Among the early sociologists who emphasized the significance of the dialectical model were D.P. Mukerji, A.R. Desai and Ramkrishna Mukherjee. In this section, we would concentrate on the dialectical-historical approach adopted by D.P. Mukerji, A.R. Desai and Ramkrishna Mukherjee in the study of Indian society.

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D.P. Mukerji



Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji (1894-1961), popularly called as DP, was one of the founding fathers of sociology in India. He was born on 5 October 1894 in West Bengal in a middle class Bengali family that had a fairly long tradition of intellectual pursuits. According to Satyen Bose, the famous physicist, when DP passed the entrance examination of Calcutta University, he, like Bose, wanted to study the sciences, but finally settled for economics, history and political science. He got MAs in economics and history, and was to have proceeded to England for further studies, but the outbreak of the First World War precluded this.

DP began his career at Bangabasi College, Calcutta. In 1922 he joined the newly founded Lucknow University as a lecturer in economics and sociology. He stayed there for a fairly long period of thirty-two years. Radhakamal Mukerjee, the first professor in the department, had been responsible for bringing DP to Lucknow. He retired as Professor and Head of the Department in 1954. For one year (1953) he served as a Visiting Professor of Sociology at the International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague. After his



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A.R. Desai



Akshay Ramanlal Desai (1915-1994) was born on April 16, 1915 at Nadiad in Gujarat and died on November 12, 1994 at Baroda in Gujarat. In his early years, he was influenced by his father Ramanlal Vasantlal Desai, a well known litterateur who inspired the youth in Gujarat in the thirties. A.R. Desai took part in student movements in Baroda, Surat and Bombay. He graduated from the University of Bombay, and also obtained a law degree and a PhD in sociology under G.S. Ghurye from the same university in 1946. Later on, he taught at the Bombay University and also became head of the department. In 1947, he got married to Neera Desai, who has done pioneering work in the field of women's studies. In 1953, he took the membership of the Trotskyites Revolutionary Socialist Party and resigned from its membership in 1981.

### Methodology

Among Indian sociologists one who has consistently advocated and applied dialectical-historical model in his sociological studies is A.R. Desai. Desai closely studied the works of Marx and Engels and

the writings of Leon Trotsky by whom he was very much influenced. He may be regarded as one of the pioneers in introducing the modern Marxist approach to empirical investigations involving bibliographical and field research.

In the above context, Desai alone among Indian sociologists has consistently applied Marxist methods in his treatment of Indian social structure and its processes. He is a doctrinaire Marxist. He rejects any interpretations of tradition with reference to religion, rituals and festivities. It is essentially a secular phenomenon. Its nature is economic and it originates and develops in economics. He finds it in family, village and other social institutions. He also does not find the origin of tradition in western culture. His studies mainly of nationalism and its social configuration (1966), his examination of community development programmes for economic development in villages (1959), his diagnosis of the interface between state and society in India or the relationship between polity and social structure (1975), his treatment of urban slums and their demographic problems (1972), and finally his study of peasant movements (1979) are all based on a Marxist method of historical-dialectical materialism. He considers that the emerging contradictions in the Indian process of social transformation arise mainly from the growing nexus among the capitalist bourgeoisie, the rural petty-bourgeoisie and a state apparatus, all drawn from similar social roots. This thwarts the aspirations of the rural and industrial working classes by sheer of its power and of its skilful stratagems. The contradiction, however, is not resolved. It only takes new cumulative forms and re-emerges in the form of protests and social movements. The social unrest is rooted in the capitalist path of development followed by India, bequeathed to it as a legacy of the national movement.

### Writings of Desai

A refreshingly new perspective to evaluate changes in Indian society was brought about by a few Marxist sociologists. A.R. Desai, a student of Ghurye, stands out in this respect with his devoted and sustained endeavours to understand the diverse aspects of Indian social reality: *The Social Background of Indian Nationalism*



(1948); currently operating (1973); and immanent features of Indian nationalism (1975); the issue and problems of *Rural Sociology in India* (1969); *Slums and Urbanization of India* (1970, 1972); and the implications of the modernization of Indian society in the world context (1971), *State and Society in India* (1975), *Peasant Struggle in India* (1979), *Rural India in Transition* (1979), and *India's Path of Development* (1984). Desai also developed the field of political sociology in 1960s. In an anthology, Desai (1979) included the studies on peasant struggles, which have also been carried out by historians and social scientists of diverse orientations.

Like D.P. Mukerji (1958), A.R. Desai (1976) studied Indian society from Marxian perspective and also used history fruitfully. Desai and Pillai (1972) conducted a study of slums, which constitutes a separate category within the area of city studies. In 1969 Desai published an edited volume on *Rural Sociology in India*, which was a major turning point and pacesetter in the field of agrarian studies.

Closely related to the new trend in agrarian sociology has been the trend of studying social movements, particularly among the peasantry. Sociology and social movements remained for a long time a neglected area. Desai's (1948) study of the Indian National Movement – its class character and inherent contradictions – was of course a noteworthy and pioneering contribution of the pre-1950 era. Here, in this chapter, we would discuss the important contributions of Desai on major themes as follows:

1. Village structure
2. Transformation of Indian society
3. Social background of Indian nationalism
4. Peasant struggles
5. State and society

### **Village Structure**

It is viewed that Indian village was a self-sufficient unit in pre-British period. The village population was mainly composed of peasants. The peasant families enjoyed traditional hereditary right to possess and cultivate his holding from generation to generation.

Therefore, village was based on agriculture carried on with the primitive plough and bullock-power and handicraft by means of the primitive equipment.

The village council was the *de facto* owner of the village land, which represented the village community. All exchange of products produced by the village workers was limited to the village community. The village did not have any appreciable exchange relations with the outside world. Further, the pre British Indian society almost completely subordinated the individual to the caste, family and the village *panchayat*. The culture of pre-British India was feudal in nature, which was predominantly mystical in character. This was due to the fact that the society was economically on a low level, stationary and socially rigid. Whatever changes occurred were quantitative and not qualitative in character.

### **Transformation of Indian Society**

The transformation of the pre-British India from feudal economy to capitalist economy was a result of the British conquest of India. The British government adopted the capitalist path of development in their political and economic policies at three levels, viz., trade, industry and finance.

The introduction of new economic reforms of the British government disrupted the old economic system. Consequently, it decayed the old land relations and artisans with the emergence of new land relations and modern industries. In place of village commune appeared modern peasant proprietors or *zamindars*, as private owner of land. The class of artisans disappeared with modern industry. New classes like the capitalist, industrial workers, agricultural labourers, tenants, merchants etc. emerged. Thus, the British impact not only led to the transformation of the economic anatomy of Indian society, but also its social physiognomy. Further, the new land revenue system, commercialization of agriculture, fragmentation of land etc. also led to the transformation of Indian village.

At higher level, this resulted in growing polarization of classes in agrarian areas, poverty in rural areas and exploitation by the owners of land. It gives rise to new class structure in agrarian



society with categories like *zamindars*, absentee landlords, tenants, peasant proprietors, agricultural labourers, moneylenders and merchant class. Similarly, in urban society, there were capitalist industrial working class, petty traders, professional class like doctors, lawyers, engineers etc.

The British government also introduced railways, postal services, centralized uniform law, English education, modern industry and many more, which brought qualitative change in Indian society. It is said that although the British government had various exploitative mechanisms in India, but unintentionally these efforts led to unification of Indian society. The role of railways and press is significant in this direction. It has brought the scattered and disintegrated Indians into the mainstream. The implication was social movements, collective representations, national sentiments, and consciousness among Indian people and formation of unionism at various levels. Such a social infrastructural set-up gave rise to nationalist freedom movement and awakening of Indian nationalism.

### *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*

Desai applies the Marxist approach to the study of 'nationalism' in India during the British rule. He spells out historical-dialectical materialism and applies it to the study of various types of movements - rural and urban, caste and class structure, social mobility, education and other aspects of Indian society. Though Desai's book was published in 1948, it became more popular in the late sixties and the seventies perhaps due to the increased consciousness of Indian social scientists towards social self-consciousness.

Desai's first full-length work *The Social Background of Indian Nationalism* was a trendsetter not only for its Marxist academic orientation, but also for the way in which it cross-fertilized sociology with history. Quite like other Marxists, he employs production relations for the explanation of traditional social background of Indian nationalism in his classical work.

The book is an excellent effort to trace the emergence of Indian nationalism from dialectical perspective. According to

Desai, India's nationalism is the result of the material conditions created by the British colonialism. The Britishers developed new economic relations by introducing industrialization and modernization. This economic relationship is predominantly a stabilizing factor in the continuity of traditional institutions in India, which would undergo changes as these relations would change. Desai thinks that when traditions are linked with economic relations, the change in the latter would eventually change the traditions. It is in this context that he thinks that caste will disintegrate with the creation of new social and material conditions, such as industries, economic growth, education, etc.

Desai's definition of tradition is a watershed. He does not trace it from caste, religion or ritual. The dialectical history of India that he presents very clearly shows that traditions have their roots in India's economy and production relations. Despite merits of the dialectical approach applied by Desai in the definition of tradition, Yogendra Singh argues that the merits are not without weaknesses. What is wrong with Desai is that he was very profound when he applies principles of Marxism in analyzing Indian situation but fails at the level of empirical support. In other words, his theoretical framework can be challenged by the strength of substantial data. The critique of Yogendra Singh runs as under:

The important limitation of the dialectical approach for studies of social change in India is the lack of substantial empirical data in support of his major assertions, which are often historiographic and can easily be challenged. In theoretical terms, however, this approach can be more visible for analysis of the processes of change and conflict in India provided it is founded upon a sound tradition of scientific research. Despite this limitation, some studies conducted on this model offer useful hypotheses, which can be further tested in course of the studies on social change.

The large amount of work produced by Desai is testimony to the missionary zeal with which he carried on his endeavour. He authored, edited and compiled a large number of books. His pioneering studies were *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*



(1948) and *Recent Trends in Indian Nationalism* (1960). In these works, he developed the Marxian framework to outline the growth of capitalism in India. He provided an analysis of the emergence of the various social forces, which radically altered the economy and society in India within the context of colonialism. The state which emerged in India after independence, he postulated, was a capitalist state. The theme of the relation between the state and the capitalist class was explored in his writings. To him, the administrative level apparatus of the state performed the twin functions of protecting the propertied classes and suppressing the struggles of the exploited classes. In *India's Path of Development* (1984) he took on the traditional communist parties and the Marx scholars who spoke of the alliance with the progressive bourgeoisie, of semi-feudalism, of foreign imperialist control over Indian economy, and who postulated a 'two-stages theory of revolution' or accepted a 'peaceful parliamentary road to socialism' in India. Desai's works include a number of edited volumes on rural sociology, urbanization, labour movements, peasant struggles, modernization, religion, and democratic rights. They are a rich source of reference material for students, researchers and activists.

### **Peasant Struggles**

In his two volumes entitled *Peasant Struggles in India* (1979) and *Agrarian Struggles in India after Independence* (1986), Desai has compiled excellent material on peasant struggles in India during colonial rule and after independence. The difference in the character of struggles then and now is highlighted. Agrarian struggles, at present, Desai suggests, are waged by the newly-emerged propertied classes as well as the agrarian poor, especially the agrarian proletariat, whereas the former fight for a greater share in the fruits of development. The poor comprising pauperized peasants and labourers belonging to low castes and tribal communities struggle for survival and for a better life for themselves. Thus, Desai maintained, progress could be achieved only by radically transforming the exploitative capitalist system in India. The theme of the state was explored in several of his studies.

### **State and Society**

In *State and Society in India* (1975), Desai provided a critique of the theories of modernization accepted by a large number of academic establishments. He clearly stated that in reality the concept assumed "modernization on capitalist path a desirable value premise". It, however, served as a valuable ideological vehicle to the ruling class pursuing the capitalist path. Desai remarked on the absence of a comprehensive analysis of the class character, class role and the economic, repressive, ideological functions of the post-independence Indian state by Marxist scholars. In many of his later works he pursued the theme of the repressive role of the state and the growing resistance to it. In *Violation of Democratic Rights in India* (1986), *Repression and Resistance in India* (1990), *Expanding Governmental Lawlessness and Organized Struggles* (1991) and *State and Repressive Culture* (1994), jointly with Wilfred D'Costa, he highlights the violation of the democratic rights of minorities, women, slum dwellers in urban India, press and other media by the state (Munshi and Saldanha, 1994).

In his studies of nationalism, analysis of rural social structure, the nature of economic and social policies of change in India and the structure of state and society, he has consistently tried to expose the contradictions and anomalies in policies and process of change resulting from the capitalist-bourgeoisie interlocking of interest in the Indian society (Desai, 1959, 1966, 1975). According to Desai, the polarization of class interest, especially of the bourgeoisie, is the foundation of modern society in India. It has thus inherent in it the class contradictions and the logic of its dialectics. This has been thoroughly exposed by Desai in his several writings.

### **Relevance of Marxist Approach**

In the fifties and early sixties, American structural-functionalism and British functionalism dominated social sciences in general and sociological researches in particular. However, Desai undeterred by these imperialistic influences continued to write on Indian society and state from the perspective of an involved scholarship.



In his presidential address to the XV All India Sociological Conference, Desai narrates about twenty-seven points referring to the assessment of Indian sociology. He finds that the dominant sociological approaches in India are basically non-Marxist, and the Marxist approach has been rejected on the pretext of its being dogmatic, value-loaded and deterministic in nature. The relevant approach, according to Desai, is the Marxist approach as it could help to study of government policies, the classes entrenched into state apparatus and India's political economy. Desai writes: "I wish the social science practitioners in India break through the atmosphere of allergy towards this profound and influential approach and create climate to study the growing body of literature articulating various aspects of Indian society, the class character of the state and the path of development."

Thus, in his presidential address, Desai focused on the relevance of the Marxist approach to the study of Indian society. According to him, the Marxist approach helps one to raise relevant questions, conduct researches in the right direction, formulate adequate hypotheses, evolve proper concepts, adopt and combine appropriate research techniques and locate the central tendencies of transformation with its major implications.

Desai highlights certain crucial aspects of Marxist approach to the study of Indian society. The Marxist approach helps to understand the social reality through the means of production, the techno-economic division of labour involved in operating the instruments of production, and social relations of production or what are more precisely characterized as property relations. Thus, the Marxist approach focuses on understanding the type of property relations which existed on the eve of independence in India. These are being elaborated by the state as the active agent of transformation of post-independent India. Hence, the Marxist approach will help the Indian scholars to designate the type of society and its class character, the role of the state and the specificity of the path of development with all the implications.

Desai argues that property relations are crucial because they shape the purpose, nature, control, direction and objectives underlying the production. Further, property relations determine the

norms about who shall get how much and on what grounds. For understanding the post-independence Indian society, the Marxist approach will focus on the specific type of property relations, which existed on the eve of independence and which are being elaborated by the state as the active agent of transformation both in terms of elaborating legal-normative notions as well as working out actual policies pursued for development and transformation of Indian society into a prosperous developed one.

In brief, the Marxist approach gives central importance to property structure in analyzing any society. It provides "historical location or specification of all social phenomena". Moreover, "this approach recognizes the dialectics of evolutionary as well as revolutionary changes of the breaks in historical continuity in the transition from one socio-economic formation to another". In this context, Desai tried to understand the Indian society which also reflects in his works. Desai not only did give notice to the mainstream that Marx has a place in sociology, but also, he provided a forum for radical-minded scholars to broaden their horizon of research.

### Analysis of Indian Society through Marxist Approach

Marx pointed out that different sub-formations within a society could not be understood adequately if seen in the context of the historical level. Thus, the Marxist approach endeavours to locate, within a specific society, the forces which preserve and forces which prompt it to change, i.e., the forces driving to take a leap into a new or a higher form of social organization, which would unleash the productive power of mankind to a next higher level. Further, Desai argues that the methodology adopted by social scientists is apt to understand social reality from the ideology of capitalism. But that is a false finding. He further argues that changes need to be interpreted from the perspective of production relations. And it is precisely the method he has applied.

The Marxist approach further considers that focusing on the type of property relations prevailing in the Indian society as crucial-axial element for properly understanding the nature of



transformation that has been taking place in the country. This approach does not demand crude reducing of every phenomenon to economic factor; it also does not deny the autonomy, or prevalence of distinct institutional and normative features peculiar to a particular society. For instance, according to Desai, it does not deny the necessity of understanding the institution like caste system, religions, linguistic or tribal groups or even specific cultural traditions which are characteristics of the Indian society. The Marxist approach, in fact, endeavours to understand their role and the nature of their transformation in the larger context of the type of society, which is being evolved, and understand them in the matrix of underlying overall property relations and norms implicit therein, which pervasively influence the entire social economic formation. Desai feels that adoption of the Marxist approach will be helpful in studying the industrial relations, not merely as management-labour relations, but as capital-labour relations, and also in the context of the state wedded to capitalist path of development, shaping these relations. Similarly, it will help understand the dynamics of rural, urban, educational and other developments, better as it will assist the exploration of these phenomena in the larger context of the social framework, which is being created by the state shaping the development on capitalist path of development. The Marxist approach will also assist in understanding why institutions generating higher knowledge-products, sponsored, financed and basically shaped by the state, pursuing a path of capitalist development, will not basically allow the paradigms and approaches to study, which may expose the myth spread about state as welfare neutral state and reveal it as basically a capitalist state. The constitution evolved its bourgeois constitution and the leadership is representing capitalist class and is reshaping the economy and society on capitalist path. The slogan of socialistic pattern is a hoax to create illusion and confuse the masses. The real intentions and practices are geared to the development on capitalist lines.

According to Desai, the bourgeoisie is the dominant class in India. The Indian society is based on the capitalist economy. The

dominant culture in our country is therefore the culture of the dominant capitalist class. Indian capitalism was a by-product of imperialist capitalism. Indian capitalism was born during the declining phase of world capitalism when, due to the general crisis of capitalism, even in advanced capitalist countries, the ruling bourgeoisie, not cognizant of the cause of the crisis, have been increasingly abandoning rationalism and materialist philosophies and retrograding to religio-mystical world outlooks. Desai argues that Indian bourgeoisie built up a fundamentally secular bourgeois democratic state, which has been imparting modern scientific, technological and liberal democratic education. This class and its intelligentsia have been, in the cultural field revivalist and more and more popularizing supporting and spreading old religious and idealistic philosophic concepts among the people. The idealistic and religio-mystical philosophies of the ruling bourgeois class, further reinforced by crude mythological culture rampant among the masses, constitute the dominant culture of the Indian people today. The social role played by this culture is reactionary since it gives myopic picture of the physical universe and the social world, a misexplanation of the fundamental causes of the economic and social crises, opiates the consciousness of the masses and tries to divert the latter from advancing on the road of specific solutions of their problems.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, we have tried to focus upon the works of A.R. Desai, which show that how Marxist approach can be applied in understanding Indian social reality. The *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* reflects on the economic interpretation of Indian society. Desai applies historical materialism for understanding the transformation of Indian society. He explains that how the national consciousness emerged through qualitative changes in Indian society. It must be observed by the concluding words that in all his writings Desai has examined the usefulness of Marxian framework to understand Indian's reality. Desai's all other writings also reflect the Marxist approach to understand the Indian society.



## Desai's Framework Summarized

### Background

1. Educated at Baroda and Bombay.
2. Academic career in Gujarat and Bombay.
3. Interests in social movements, Indian National Movement, agrarian system etc.
4. Active in student movements in Vadodara, Surat and Bombay.

### Aim

Analyse the emerging contradictions in the Indian process of social transformation.

### Assumption

Social unrest is rooted in the capitalist path of development.

### Methodology

Marxist method of historical-dialectical materialism.

### Typology

Dialectical-historical model.

### Issues

Different aspects of Indian society, namely,

1. National movement
2. Peasant struggles
3. Slums and urbanization
4. State and society
5. Democratic rights

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