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# PERSPECTIVES ON THE STUDY OF INDIAN SOCIETY

- Indology (G. S. Ghurye)
- Structural functionalism (M. N. Srinivas)
- Marxist sociology (A.R. Desai)

## WHAT IS INDOLOGY?

Indology is branch of social sciences dealing with interpretation of ancient texts and linguistic studies of problems of ancient Indian culture. It becomes more comprehensive 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).

## FEW MARKED CHARACTERISTICS OF INDOLOGICAL APPROACH

- The Indological approach rested on the assumption that historically, **Indian society and culture are unique. This uniqueness of Indian society could be grasped better through the texts.**
- Indological approach refers to the historical and comparative method based on Indian texts in the study of Indian society.
- Indologists use ancient history, epics, religious manuscripts and texts etc. in the study of Indian social institutions.
- The texts which indologists refer 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 text 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 sociology that emerged in the late 1970s marks a noticeable shift from the European 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.** 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' edited by T.N. Madan. A good number of studies following this method have been done by foreign-based scholars.

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.***

- **Yogendra Singh** has argued that 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 data, represented a fruitful basis for continued analysis of Indian structure and tradition in the 1970s and 1980s.
- **R.N. Saxena** agrees with this Indological or scriptural basis of studying Indian society. He stressed on the role of the concepts of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.
- **Dumont and Pocock** emphasize the utility of Indological formulations. 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 **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.

## **G. S. GHURYE**

**Govind Sadashiv Ghurye is remembered for his marked 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 generations of Indian sociologists in post-independence period. M.N. Srinivas has rightly said, "Nothing disguises the fact that Ghurye was a giant".**

***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 institutions builder and as a scholar); and
- **Second**, his own substantive writings, his theoretical postulates, his vision of the role of sociology, etc.

Efforts of individuals, who have variously been regarded as the 'founding fathers', 'pioneers' 'first-generations 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.

Ghurye excelled in both of them. We will discuss these things in this chapter.

## **THEORETICAL APPROACH 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 practicing 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 of Indian sociology were 'armchair' or 'lecture-ism' sociologists. But

**Ghurye had conducted village, town and community studies.**

- **Srinivas and Panini are of the view that "Ghurye insisted on fieldwork, though he himself was an armchair scholar".** This was not intended as a pejorative comment, 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 and the monograph on the Mahadev Kolis 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 uses Ghurye's inexhaustible themes for their researches.

#### **FEW MARKED CHARACTERISTICS OF GHURYE'S THEORETICAL APPROACH**

- **Ghurye was 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'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 emphasised on Indological approach in the study of social and cultural life in India and 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 Kalidas 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.**

**Ghurye's Works : Pramanick has divided Ghurye's writings into six broad areas. These are-**

- Caste
- Tribes
- Kinship, family and marriage
- Culture, civilization and the historical role of cities
- Religion
- 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**

Ghurye in his **Caste and Race in India cognitively combined historical, anthropological and sociological perspectives to understand caste and kinship system in India.** He tried to analyze 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 of Indo-European cultures**. In his study of caste and kinship, Ghurye emphasizes two important points:

- **The kin and caste networks in India had parallels in some other societies also.**
- **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:

- Segmental division
- Hierarchy
- Pollution and purity
- Civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections
- Lack of choice of occupation
- 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 practiced endogamy.** For example, Vaishya 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 –**
  - Exogamy in our society is largely based on kinship, either real or imaginary, and
  - 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 parts:**

- Sapinda or prohibited degrees of kin, and
- Sept or gotra exogamy.

**The gotra 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-shisya (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 castes 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 Dharmashastras, 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.

**There has been fierce debate between G.S. Ghurye and Verrier Elvin.** Elvin in his books *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 hold 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 present 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 adopted 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 rural-urbanization 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 and 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**

to enlarge the outlets for agricultural produce and handicrafts but they became the major manufacturing centres. These 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.***

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:**

- Sufficient supply of drinking water,
- human congestion,
- traffic congestion,
- regulation of public vehicles,
- insufficiency of railway transport in cities like Mumbai,
- erosion of trees,
- sound pollution,
- indiscriminate tree felling, and
- plight of the pedestrians.

## **CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION**

In general, 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. 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.

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 analyze 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 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 analyze 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 total 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 :

- Religious consciousness
- Conscience
- Justice
- Free pursuit of knowledge and free expression
- 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 and society. 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 and Durkheim. **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, Gods and Men,

Religious Consciousness, Indian Accumulation, Vedic India and The Legacy of Ramayana. All these works reflect Ghurye's interest related to the sociology of religion:

- 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.
- **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 is an excellent sociography of the various sects and religious centres established by the great Vedantic philosopher Shankaracharya and other notable religious figures. In this work, Ghurye **highlights the paradoxical nature of renunciation in India. A sadhu or sannyasi 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 Shankaracharya, 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' and 'The Aborigines'. However, this concern with the present 'disturbing trends' in Indian society has come back in a big way in later writings of Ghurye (Pramanick). 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', 'Whither India' and 'India Recreates Democracy'. *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 :*

- The Scheduled Castes
- The Scheduled Tribes
- The Backward Classes
- The Muslims as religious minority groups
- 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.
- *He analyzed the normative structure of Hinduism, and the teaching of sacred religious texts such as the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Brahmins etc., to show how they provide the common cultural foundation.*
- *The role of such great Hindu thinkers as Panini, Patanjali and Tulsidas etc., in strengthening unity has also been discussed by Ghurye.*

*He blames the political leader for disunity in India.* 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 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 cause 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 hold the view region. The regional

languages ensure the unity of territory at the local level and all efforts should be made to improve.

### **BRIEF ASSESSMENT OF GHURYE'S WORK**

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. Critics argued that,

- ***Ghurye 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 scripture, 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**

Wide range of Ghurye's work and his intellectual interests has had a profound influence on the development of the twin disciplines sociology 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 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.

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. 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 religious 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 analyzed 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.

## **STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

**Understanding Structural Functionalism :** This perspective focus on understanding the 'ordering' and 'patterning' of the social world. The focus of attention is mainly the 'problem of order' at a societal level. The 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.

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.

Structural-functionalism is brought into sociology by borrowing concepts from biological sciences. Structure in biology refers to organisms meaning a relatively stable arrangement of relationship 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 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.

**Srinivas** is of the view that a new departure was marked in the thirties of the 20th century by the works of a number of British social anthropologists.

**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".

- *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 slow, cumulative process of adjustment to new situations.
- 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 started structural-functional analysis in sociological and social anthropological research in India.** 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.

## M.N.SRINIVAS

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. 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. *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 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 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', 'sanskritisation-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 presents the results of a number of studies on the structure and change in the village society. Srinivas has written and articulated in the 1940s on Tamil and Telugu folk-songs.

Srinivas explains two basic concepts to understand our society :

- **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 emphasised to the field view.

- **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 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 derive 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). His writings are based on intensive field work in South India in general and Coorgs and Rampura in particular (Shah).

- Social change: Brahminization, sanskritisation, westernization and secularization
- Religion and society
- Study of village
- Views on caste
- Dominant caste

## Social Change

'Social change' as a theme continues to be a significant concern of Indian sociologists. This holds true not only for the pre-independence phase but also for the post-independence period. Srinivas attempted to construct a macro-level analysis using a large number of micro-level findings on the processes of 'sanskritisation', 'westernization' and 'secularization'. Interestingly enough, Srinivas returned to his micro-empirical setting – a village – after nearly a quarter of a century and in a diachronic frame highlighted the nature of social change in that village over a period of time.

## Religion and Society

Srinivas' work 'Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India' 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, **Sanskritisation**, which Srinivas introduced because his own field data and those of many others indicated limitations of using only the Brahminic model as a frame of reference. Later, sanskritisation, as a concept, thus, replaced Brahminization at a more abstract level.

Srinivas achieved this through enlarging the meaning of sanskritisation 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 placement lower in social and economic status.

We find a systematic formulation of the two concepts in Srinivas's 'Social Change in Modern India', wherein he defines 'sanskritisation' as the process by which a 'low' caste or tribe or other groups take over the custom, ritual, beliefs, ideology and style of life of a high and, in particular, a 'twice-born (dwija), caste. The sanskritisation of a group has usually the effect of improving its position in the local caste hierarchy. The major emphasis in the study of social change through concepts of sanskritisation 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 sanskritisation 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, sanskritisation 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 the village as the microcosm of Indian society and civilization. It is the village, which retains the traditional composition of India's tradition. He conducted field work among the Coorgs. Dumont and Pocock consider this work as a classic in India's sociology. It is in this work that Srinivas provides a basic structure of India's traditions :

- 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 'sanskritisation' 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.

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 traditions into sanskritisation, 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 traditions component of Srinivas' Study is village. Srinivas got the seed idea of studying India's villages from his mentor Radcliffe-Brown in. He conducted the study of Rampur – a Mysore village – which gave him the concept of 'dominant cast'. The study has been contained in the Remembered Village; it is here only that Srinivas takes some time to discuss social and economic changes, which have taken place in Rampura. He informs that the 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. Srinivas search for the identity of traditions makes him infer that the Indian traditions are found in caste, village and religion.
- Ideologically, he believed in status quo: let the Dalits survive and let the high castes enjoy their hegemony over subaltern. 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.

For him, Indian traditions are those, which are manifested in caste and village. His traditions are Hinduised 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' to Hindutva ideology of cultural nationalism. At this stage of discussion, Doshi 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 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 segment 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** 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 field work at the ground level.

### Views on Caste

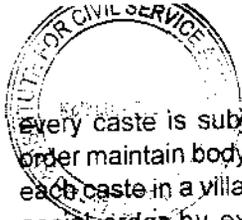
Srinivas views caste as segmentary system. Every caste, for him, is divided into sub-castes which are:

- The unit of endogamy;
- Whose members follow a common occupation;
- The units of social and ritual life;

- Whose members share a common culture; and
- 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:

- **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.
- **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, Sonar, Kumhar, Teli, Chamar etc. He also stresses that occupation are placed in a hierarchy of high and low.
- **Restrictions on commensality, dress speech and custom** are also found among castes. There is a dietic hierarchy and restrictions on acceptance of food.
- **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.
- **Caste Panchayats and Assemblies:** Besides the above mentioned attributes of a caste,



Every caste is subject to the control of an order maintain 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 sanskritisation.

### Sanskritisation

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 the indicative of higher status is called 'sanskritisation'. 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 caste. 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:

- sizeable amount of arable land;
- strength of numbers;
- high place in the local hierarchy;
- western education;
- jobs in the administration; and
- Urban sources of income.

Of the above attributes of the dominant caste, the following three are important:

- numerical strength,
- economic power through ownership of land, and
- 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 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.

In his study of Rampur 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, 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 sanskritisation. Sanskritisation 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.

### Assessment of Srinivas's Work

The life mission of Srinivas has been to understand Indian society. But he is criticized on following lines :

- He though talks about economic and technological developments but in the study of these areas sidetracks lower segments of society.
- In his endeavour for promoting sanskritisation he has marginalized and alienated religious minorities.
- For him, Indian traditions are those, which are manifested in caste and village. His traditions are Hinduised traditions and in no sense secular ones.
- The construction of sanskritisation 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 in the 1960s were formulated by M.N. Srinivas under the labels 'sanskritisation' and 'westernization'. He regarded these two processes as "limited processes in modern India and it is not possible to understand one without reference to the other". Srinivas had evolved the concept of sanskritisation

while preparing his doctoral dissertation under the guidance of Radcliffe-Brown and Evens Pritchard at Oxford. He finally formulated the concepts as denoting the process by which a 'low caste people, tribal or other group, changes its customs, rituals, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently 'twice-born caste'.

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 cession of these forces but, meant on the contrary, their intensification".

- According to Mukherjee now, as a summary of certain characteristics spontaneously observable in society, these concepts cannot claim any originality.
- What Srinivas characterized as sanskritisation in the idiom of sociology currently fashionable, had been described by the proto-sociologists Lyall and Risley as 'Aryanization' and 'Brahminization'. Possibly, sanskritisation is a more precise expression of the process under reference, as is claimed by Srinivas who does not deny, the antecedents to his concept.
- 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 sanskritisation.

### CONCLUSION

Despite above mentioned criticism, Srinivas stands tall 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 Coorgs 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 'sanskritisation' which he used to describe the process of the penetration of Sanskritic values into the remotest parts of India.

## MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

The dialectical-historical orientation is related primarily to Marxist methods and propositions for the analysis of social reality. Yogendra Singh 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, 1943, 1977).*

### Methodology

*Among Indian sociologists one who has consistently advocate 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 introducing the modern Marxist approach to empirical investigations involving bibliographical and field research. Following facts are worth mentioning about Desai :

- 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 economic. 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, his examination of community development programmes for economic development in villages, his diagnosis of the interface between state and society in India or the relationship between polity and social structure, his treatment of urban slums and their demographic problems, and finally his study of peasant movements 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.

### 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 endeavors 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 relation. 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 crude reducing of every phenomenon to economic factor; **it also not denies 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 institutions 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, endeavors to understand the role and the nature of the transformation of these institutions in the larger context of the type of society, which is being evolved.*** This approach understands these institutions 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, 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.* This understanding will 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 outlook.

- ***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 saluting of their problems.***

Important contributions of Desai on major themes are :

- Village structure
- Transformation of Indian society
- Social background of Indian nationalism
- Peasant struggles
- 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 product 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 was 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 destroyed 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 labourer, 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 exploitations by the owners of land. It give rise to new class structure in agrarian society with categories like zamindars, absentee landlords, tenants, peasant proprietors, agricultural labourers, money lenders and merchant class.
- Similarly, in urban society, there were capitalist industrial working class, petty traders, professional classes like doctors, layers, 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 nationalism, 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.

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 employer 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 creations 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 Indian economy and production relation. Despite merits of 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.
- In his works, Desai 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. To him, the administrative and apparatus of the state performed the two functions of protecting the

propertied classes and suppressing the struggle of the exploited classes.

- In 'India's path of Development' he took on the traditional communist parties and the Marxian 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's struggle, 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* and *Agrarian Struggles in India after Independence?* Desai had 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 the 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 in themselves. Thus, Desai maintained, progress could be achieved only by radically transforming the exploitative capitalist system of India. The theme of the state was explored in several of his studies.

### State and Society

In *State and Society in India*, 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 Marxists 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*, he highlights the violation of the democratic rights of minorities, women, slum dwellers in urban India, press and other media by the state (Munshi Sand Saldanha).

In his studies of nationalism, analysis of rural social structure, the nature of economic and social politics 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. 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 Marxist perspective.*
- 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.
- *According to Desai, the Marxist approach is the relevant approach. 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 breakthrough 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."

- **According to Desai, 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.**
- **According to Desai 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.
- **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.

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.

However, **this approach has been criticized on many counts.** According to Yogendra Singh, 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 assertion, which are often historiography 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 these limitations, some studies conducted on this model offer useful hypotheses, which can be further tested in course of the studies on social change.

## CONCLUSION

The works of A. R. Desai, shows 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 India's reality.

