

# Perspectives on the study of Indian society

## INTRODUCTION

*No intellectual discipline develops overnight. This statement is largely applicable to the evolution of Indian sociology. Indian sociologists studying India are no different from European sociologists studying India today, for the reason that both are using, theories, methodology to reflect on Indian society. Indian sociology today is more committed to the study of social protests, women issues, problems of Indian farmers, Cosmopolitisation , Globalization and getting away from the study of caste, kinship, and family which were centrality to the study of Indian sociology from 1950 - 1980. This departure advocates and impact on Indian sociology losing its Indianess and merging into cosmic sociological tradition as put forward by Venugopal.*

*Way back in 1960s, Louis Dumont indicated that it is imperative to have a sociology for India because western theoretical models cannot be blindly applied to the study of Indian society for two distinctive reasons:*

*Indian values are different from Western values i.e. mostly followed by Indians to regulate their everyday social life. Ethno-sociology should be evolved as a methodology to study India and for that a sociologist must use peoples language to understand their symbols, cultural meanings associated with their activities to gain an understanding of Indian society without any value bias.*

*He himself used the dichotomy between paap and punya(purity and pollution) to understand Indian society.*

*If we look for the backwards we will notice that Indian sociology from 1940s to 1960s was extremely committed to British idea of empiricism. Village studies, caste studies were conducted by and large number of European and Indian sociologists to examine the dynamic nature of social change in India.*

*Problems of Indian agriculture got sociological attention during late 1960s as a large body of sociologists looking into the restrictive impact of land reform systems explained landlessness and poverty in rural Indian social structure. This phase of Indian sociology is considered as golden period or maturity stage for two reasons :*

- *every aspect of Indian social life was investigated and*

- both Western and Indian sociologists came together to explore India from a **value neutral** perspective.

Field study tradition evolved as a reaction to Indological study in India during its late formative stage i.e. from 1920s to 1940s. Indologists were the products of different schools of Indological tradition like Indological Research Centre developed in Pune (G.S. Ghurye was associated with it), Indological Research Centre of Lucknow, Asiatic Society of Bengal instituted by Sir William Jones.

So Indological tradition in India follows different mode of orientation. Indology of Lucknow was more close to history whereas Pune was more close to philosophy, Sanskrit and theology. Bengal ideology was more into critique to Indological structure following the footsteps of colonial government. These Indologists wanted reforms in Indian culture for India's progress and development.

Various leagues of Indological Outlook in India offer Indian sociology an identity, ideology and methodology in different forms and explain the nature of Indian society. Colonialists and nationalists were engaged in explaining Indian society driven by their values.

## Indological approach (G.S. Ghurye)

Ordinarily speaking Indological approach means the study of Indian society from Indian perspective collecting data of Indian art, architecture, language, culture, religious texts, folklores, legends, myths.

Indological studies also simultaneously contributed to as well as received stimulus from the efforts made by the British scholars and officials in order to develop an in-depth knowledge of Indian society and culture.

G.S.Ghurye's approach distinctive from other Indological approaches for the following reasons:  
Being a student of Sanskrit Ghurye uses Sanskrit text exclusively to explain Indian society and culture.  
Being a student of Prof Rivers he uses the method of diffusion to understand evolution of caste in India and cultural synthesis of Indian society.

Despite being a sociologist he would never make a distinction between his personal commitment to nation-building and nationalism from his professional commitment and sociological research. Hence in many of his writings he uses Indological data to glorify India's cultural past and manifest concern through his writing about caste consolidation, tribal unrests and religious conflicts in India.

Thus it will be unfair to consider Ghurye as just an Indologist as most of his writings also contain some elements of historicism, diffusionism and nationalism. He wrote 32 books cutting across

themes like 'Sexual Behaviour of American Women', 'Indians Sadhus', 'Kalidas and Shakespeare', 'Caste and Race in India', 'Will India wither away'; speaks of diversity of his interest and distinctive approaches that he experimented all through his academic life. Ghurye used Indological approach but unlike his contemporaries he cannot be identified as a stereotype Indologist.

### G.S.Ghurye on caste in India

Ghurye's understanding of caste is comparative, historical and Indological as well. Unlike his contemporaries he doesn't glorify or condemns caste rather he considers caste as a product of Indian culture, changing with the passage of time. Hence, it is a subject of sociological interest.

Ghurye studies caste mostly as a diffusionist and a historian than as an Indologist. In his book "caste and race in India", he agrees with Sir Herbert Risley that caste is a product of race that comes to India along with Aryans.

Ghurye considers it as unfortunate that caste system is mostly understood in terms of Brahminic domination. Caste has gone through process of fusion and fission in different ways in Indian history. During Vedic period caste was a product of race. Aryans distinguished themselves from non-Aryans just in terms of colour but subsequently different ethnic groups developed alliance/relationship with each other and Hindu culture and values moved from Aryan community to non-Aryan communities. Aryans never introduce themselves as Brahmins or as a superior race as against non-Brahmins. Aryan society itself practised different kinds of occupations which were allocated to different individuals and families. On the basis of their occupation caste names were allocated to different groups therefore Aryans society had architects, peasants, warriors, artisans and society was highly disciplined, organised and progressive.

Ghurye tells that it may be a matter of fact that caste evolved in India with the advent of Aryans, as their racial character was different from Indians. But at the same time there were different racial categories present in India prior to Aryans. India was not the hometown of one racial group. Aryans advent added one more race to the already existing ones.

Caste was not hierarchical exploitative system. Aryans carried with them caste system which promoted discipline in their life giving them specialisation over particular occupation. No caste was superior or inferior. Occupation change was possible. Hence Aryans became highly specialised and indigenous people looked forward to Aryans for progress therefore they started imbibing these elements into their life. Rulers were taught the virtues of Aryans by the Brahmins who glorified the Aryan culture. These mobile saints spread the embodiment of caste to non-Aryans.

Ghurye points out that caste was considered as centrality to organised form of division of labour in Aryan society. When Aryans and indigenous communities developed interpersonal relationship through communication and warfare, the disciplined nature of Aryan society was appreciated by indigenous rulers who injected the elements of caste into their social life. In addition to that priests, monasteries, travelers glorified the virtues of Aryan caste system. Hence the element of caste radiated from northern India to other parts of the country.

He writes that caste is originated from race and occupation stabilised it. When caste is diffused from one area to another it negotiates with cultural environment and ecology as a result people belonging to a given caste follow different food rules, occupation pattern and behavior.

**Ghurye explains caste in India on the basis of six distinctive characteristics:**

- 1) segmental division of society;
- 2) hierarchy;
- 3) civil and religious disabilities and privileges;
- 4) lack of unrestricted choice of occupation;
- 5) restriction on food, drinks and social intercourse;
- 6) endogamy.

He considers the above-mentioned characteristics has been questioned, challenged and altered by various historical forces and therefore caste is a dynamic institution surviving through ages adapting to the demand of time and therefore neither cast is great nor it reproduces common structural character and functional ethos. Through his analysis of various structural features of caste he makes an attempt to reject the stereotype, ideological understanding of caste as hierarchical system which is historically undiluted and producing identical form of inequality and exploitation in time and space.

Ghurye claims that if history of Indian society is changing with time the institution of caste is not lagging behind. Ghurye's concern is that, caste which was once binding people together, an institution that contributed for the evolution of India's cultura and identity is now being reduced into an institution which is contributing towards the polarisation of society. Social conflict is challenging national unity. He considers that caste not only sustained itself in India but it also evolved a dynamic characteristic in response to the odds of change.

**Segmental television society:** there are so many division's and subdivisions of caste system. The members of every division have fixed status, roles and tasks. According to status they have to perform their roles. There is moral ethics, obligations and justification value behind these roles. All these roles are different in nature from other people or other division.

**Hierarchy:** Ghurye indicates that caste is hierarchical but at the same time we cannot see the same kind of structure everywhere in the country. Who will occupy which position is debatable and questionable. Hierarchy do exist; theoretically Brahmins occupy top position. Hierarchy is a contentious issue in other words we can say that there is a feeling of superiority and inferiority among the people.

**Civil and religious disabilities and privileges:** Justification of reservation policy has its root in the civil and religious disabilities and privileges imposed upon the people at the lowest rung of the hierarchy there are special rights and powers to the people of higher castes while many disabilities have been imposed on untouchables in areas of public utility. The untouchables cannot take water from public Wells. They are not allowed to get entry in religious temples or any other social and educational places.

**Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation:** the occupations have been fixed by heredity. Generally they have not been allowed to change their traditional occupations. All caste people maintain their supremacy and secrecy in their jobs and do not allow the other caste group to join in. The upper caste people like Brahmins are free to opt for study of religious books, while this cannot be done by other classes. The lower natured jobs like sweeping bathrooms, washing clothes, scavenging etc have been kept in untouchable category.

**Restriction on food drink and social intercourse:** some rules have been imposed upon all caste people. Restriction on feeding and social intercourse are still prevalent in Indian society. There are two types of food i.e. Kachha (cooked) food and Pakka (raw) food upon which certain restrictions are imposed with regard to sharing, for example:

caste groups from whom twice born caste people can accept Kachha food;

caste group from whom twice born caste people can accept Pakka food;

caste groups from whom twice born caste people can accept water but no food;

caste groups from whom twice born caste people do not accept water or food and maintain distance.

**Endogamy:** Indian caste system is also polarized due to endogamy being determined primarily by Caste. People can marry within caste only. To disobey the caste rule is not only treated as a crime but is also condemned as a sin. The caste panchayat not only denounce inter-caste marriages but also impose severe punishment upon those who break these rules.

Ghurye wrote that caste evolved as a system of division of labour not to glorify Brahminic supremacy. Every jati's Dharma was clearly specified by Hindu culture thereby compelling every jati to make contribution for other jatis. Hence, culture cemented the differences among the people making jati system an acceptable institution for collective happiness.

He goes on to say that every jati perceives some epistemological knowledge like humanism, sacrifice, brotherhood, knowledge and perseverance. Therefore value integration never glorified inequality in Indian society. These values were taught and preached both in formal and informal ways by different saints. He considers that this culture mitigated the difference between various ethnic groups who accepted caste as a way of life and not as a system to divide people and inject inequality among them.

G.S Ghurye writes about caste considering it to be a product of race in India. He further says that caste was not a product of division of labour it was only after the advent of Aryans that it gained its prominence as a Division of Labour. Ghurye writes that caste was never a static system of organization. It is evolving in India according to different time and situation. He says Varna is different from caste and that division of labour was not a hierarchical phenomena. He believed that right to rituals was a universal phenomena and not a Brahminic monopoly.

He points out that Brahmins were performing rituals for common welfare hence they were different from others and thus they gained respect from every section of society. Brahmins were catering to the needs of the society. Every caste and Varna was driven by same values and hence it promoted harmony, peace and tranquility. India sustained for such a long time as a country without any centralised rule because of common ideology and values.

Furthermore, Hindu culture was always anti-hierarchy, cosmopolitan, inclusive giving rise to the growth of egalitarian society driven by fraternity and equality. These concepts were used in European civilisation long after they were tested and used in India. He states that caste is a system of inequality with Brahminic domination appear in mediaeval India due to detachment of non-Brahminic caste from Hindu values, advent of Islamic rule and breakdown of Hindu monastery, who were instrumental in establishing the linkage between various caste groups. This magnified the dysfunctional characteristics that is still prevalent today. British rule also tried its best to rule over India by following the treacherous concept of divide and rule.

Ghurye looks into the origin of caste and how it led to competition among people. Caste evolved as a product of culture but resulted into division and compartmentalisation of people. Hinduism should be looked in context of cosmic values it is offering.

Looking at the dysfunctional nature of caste today Ghurye points out that, when subsequently different ethnic groups started asserting their dominance through caste consolidation they moved away from the values of Aryan culture. Therefore caste which once evolved as the frontier of culture to

promote equity and self-sufficiency was now transformed into an institution that glorifies inequality and social sufferings. Hence in contemporary India caste is no longer textual, ideological and cultural institution. It has become a degree divisive institution emphasising on the six characteristics mentioned above like segmentation of Indian society, putting people in hierarchical order, putting restrictions on food drinks and social interrelationships, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation, civil and religious privileges associated with higher class and denied to lower class and denouncing into caste marriages.

Ghurye concluded by saying that social institutions are a product of culture. During the process of social change, cultural ideology got separated from social institution resulting into a situation where institutional functions in the past are evolving into institutional dysfunction today. Therefore evolution of caste is a testimony to its differential role at different stages of history of Indian society.

### Evaluation of Ghurye's approach

one can advocate that using historical data, diffusion method Ghurye looks into the origin of caste, its regional variation, its integrative role and pathological character of caste. This approach is first of its kind i.e. liberating sociology of India from studying caste from a speculative, value centric perspective to studying it from historical, comparative and empirical perspective. This approach of Ghurye potentially changed the methodology and theoretical outline to the study of caste in contemporary India.

In his explanation of caste Ghurye sufficiently indicated dichotomy between the ideal culture of caste and empirical nature of caste and on the basis of that he brilliantly illustrated social changes in Indian society. Hence Ghurye's understanding of caste is reflexive, critical, and judgemental.

### Criticism of Ghurye by M.N. Srinivas

Srinivas points out that Ghurye's approach to caste can be considered as Brahminical view as he perceives that Brahmins in search of exclusivity, distinction impose certain restriction on food, dress, rituals, manners and speech as a result their way of life stand to be distinguished from the rest. Therefore Brahmins in search of exclusivity when stand distinctively, others look forward to them as role models and thus they slowly imbibe Brahminic values but could not obtain Brahminic status. Hence relative difference between Brahmins and non-Brahmins make appearance. Those who are close to Brahmin in terms of life standards they are known as Kshatriyas and other caste divide on the basis of proximity and distance from Brahmins way of life.

Therefore Srinivas criticises Ghurye for presenting a Brahminical viewpoint of the caste system in India which subsequently offered foundation to the theory of Louis Dumont, who also presented a similar viewpoint of Brahminical supremacy.

In defence of Ghurye it can be said that, every theory also gets influenced by the time during which it is written. Ghurye's sociology was written when there were very strong anti-Brahmin movements going on in Maharashtra led by Jyotiba Phule and in Tamil Nadu initiated by Periyar.

## G.S Ghurye on tribes

Ghurye considers that multiple ethnic groups were present in India prior to the entry of Aryans. Hindu culture was not imposed on tribal communities rather synthesis between Aryan culture that was mystical, magical, spiritual got entangled with Tantric culture, magical culture and materialistic culture of different ethnic groups giving way to evolution of Hinduism. Therefore considering Hindu culture as Aryan culture is nonsensical.

The tribal deities like Ganesh, Kali, and Shiva were getting equal space in Hinduism with Aryan deities like Indira, Vishnu, Brahma. Animism, totemism, naturalism for establishing synthesis between multiple culture present in Indian society. As a result the tribes of India considers the Hindu society and its cultural tradition a new home for them therefore voluntarily they assimilate themselves within the folds of Hindu society.

Many tribal leaders like Tana Bhagat, Vishnu Bhagwat, Kabir Panthi other successfully carried Hindu cultural attributes to tribal life. As a result the tribes of the heartland of the country sharing Hindu values have Hinduised themselves. Hence their assimilation within Indian society is almost complete.

Ghurye writes "Tribalism always contribute towards the construction of Hindu temple that is yet to be completed", meaning Hindu culture is evolving through a series of dialectics addressing to the demand of people in time and space. Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism largely embodied Hindu values with new ideas and doctrines contributing for decline of Hindu culture and tradition. He considers that Hindu cultural values were shared by tribal communities in mitigating the tribe - caste differences. Therefore tribes of India are backward Hindus. 'Backward' because of epistemology of Hinduism like Sanskar, distinction between Buddhi, Mana, Ahankar are yet to reach them even though they've already gone for Hindu life, ritual and way of life.

Ghurye was critical to Elvin's approach of 'isolationism', indicating that forced isolation of the tribes from the larger society will accelerate suspicion leading to secessionist movement. He further indicated that separatist movement in North East India is a product of the cultural distinction between tribes located there and the larger Hindu society.



*In conclusion one can advocate that Ghurye's understanding of tribes and their problems largely manifest his nationalist appeal as he considers cultural unity between tribes and caste can only promote integration in Indian society.*

## *G.S. Ghurye on Muslims in India*

*He considers that Muslims in India are greatly divided on the basis of their ethnicity, geographic location and doctrinal affinity. However, they are integrated on the basis of common religious affiliation. The rise of Muslim rule adversely affected the People's affiliation with Hinduism. The traditional Hindu rulers were patronising Hindu saints and encouraging debates and discussions on Hindu values, ruling over the masses following Hindu doctrines and ideals. This resulted into Hindu values reaching people in the form of Administration, Justice, participation in religious discourses thereby leading to voluntary integration among people of India.*

*Islam offered alternative values and ideas that challenged the essence of Hindu culture. However, Sufism made an attempt to establish the linkage between Hindu and Islamic culture but this was highly confined to selected groups in Indian society. With the rise of Islam, priestly classes concealed their identity, philosophy to discourse died out, political patronage to Hindu ideas disappeared resulting into confusion and crisis in Indian society. Unified culture that promoted integration in India was questioned on the basis of two distinctive cultural identities. People of India got vertically divided giving way to great partition of India.*

*He suggests to Muslims to adhere to basic epistemological values of Hindu religion i.e. bhakti, sacrifice and fraternity indicating that ideology is essential for social integration. If the people of society follow dialectical ideology then social disintegration is inevitable. In his observation of Muslims he also articulates nationalistic concern and suggesting cultural revivalism in search of national unity.*

*The pro-Hindu stance of Ghurye was based on the conflicts engendered by nearly 7 centuries of Islamic rule in India. The forced conversions, destruction of places of worship etc., no doubt damaged Hindu psyche. But looking critically at Ghurye's views, it is necessary to add here that predatory acts of Muslim rulers find no sanction in Koran. Islam does not advocate violence. What happened was political expediency rather than commitment to faith that made the Muslim rulers use force against the subjects. Besides, Hindu - Muslim interactions have been culturally productive and socially beneficial. Sufism stimulated bhakti movement in India, the growth of Urdu literature, Hindustani classical music had shared patterns of lifestyle that showed that Islamic rule had a positive side. It was a*

political strategy of the British to divide the Indian society, especially the Hindus and Muslims as they knew that, after the revolt of 1857, that they are incapable to fight them united.

## G.S. Ghurye on values and social unity

Ghurye considers the unity of Indian society can be attributed to:

- *Sanskritic language and Brahmi script: Sanskrit language slowly influenced various languages of several ethnic groups as a result in many languages of India like Telugu, Kannad and all other north Indian languages and eastern Indian languages one finds out element of Sanskrit. The only language least influenced by Sanskrit is Tamil. However, both Sanskrit and Tamil influence almost all languages of India and through these two languages cosmic Indian ideology reached the masses in Indian society.*
- *The saints like Skandha, Shankaracharya, Agastya carried the embodiment of Hindu ideas to South India as a result in Tamil Bhakti literature there is a promotion of cultural unity between North and the South.*
- *Hindu rulers living in far-off places were marrying women belonging to other kingdoms thus geographically distant places like Vidharbha, Udda, Gandhar came closer to each other on the basis of marriage. Most of the Hindu rulers practised hypergamy and that made the caste system weak. Therefore marriages also resulted into cultural unity of India.*
- *Ashwamedha Yagya was the source of cultural unity in India. It was a symbolic ritual in which the ruler was making a ritual horse to move to different kingdoms giving an invitation of War to different kings to prove their heroics. Any ruler challenging to him was either defeated or won the war leading to acceptance of sovereignty of winning ruler by the defeated one. The war was symbolic because the rulers were driven by Hindu epistemology. Hence, no territories were annexed by the winning ruler and also there was no looting of property of the defeated rulers.*

*Finally Hindu rulers in India patronised intellectuals to get engaged in 'Tark'(debate). Such intellectuals were regularly rewarded by Hindu rulers, granted revenue free lands and provided several other benefits. These saints were writing and interpreting*

*different Sanskrit texts glorifying Hindu ideals e.g. Arthashastra written by Kautilya. Ghurye considers common ideology, text, ruling class, values radiated from Hindu culture which were the source of Indian unity.*

## G.S. Ghurye on values

*Values contain bodies of abstract standards that regulate our everyday behaviour. Animals are differentiated from human beings because of values. Sometimes these animals too have values of love etc. but differentiated because these values are not sustainable.*

*Values are transmitted from one generation to another generation. Values are injected into individual with the help of socialisation. When values undiluted or not adhered to one behaves like a beast e.g. rapists, murderers etc.*

*Ghurye looking into values to understand its invisible magical power which played an important role in unifying the people and bringing them together. It explains the values in terms of 'Triads'. Ghurye considers seven distinctive triads were central to Hindu culture and tradition bringing oneness in the thinking, feeling and the acting of the people of India who were divided on the basis of language, region, appearance, caste and occupation. Synthesis of Hindu culture eliminated differences among the people and integrated them.*

*These values were not radiated from the cities and going down to masses rather both elites and masses were internalising common values therefore manifesting common perceptions, thoughts and way of life. For this value uniformity major role was played by saints like Vijayan, chaitnya, Kabir and Nanak Dev. Therefore Indian unity was a product of common value consensus that was challenged by the advent of Muslims and British rulers subsequently.*

*Ghurye considers differential allocation of values evolved in Indian society during 11th and 12th century leading to collapse of Hindu kingdoms. Patronage to Hindu culture and values lost its merit, giving way to disintegration and confusion persisted in Indian society.*

## G.S. Ghurye on Vidya

Vidya (knowledge) ordinarily means pursuit of knowledge. Ghurye considers that knowledge in Indian culture carries different meaning as compared to knowledge in Western countries. In case of West, knowledge is classified into two types i.e. science and arts. Methodologies to acquire these two kinds of knowledge are also different. People obtaining scientific knowledge are identified as scientists and those acquiring the knowledge of arts are called philosophers. On the basis of their choice students are going for one form of knowledge or other.

To its contrast in China, Confucianism was practised wherein scholars passed on knowledge to a large audience through public speech without any personal and emotive relationship between teacher and students. In case of India the source of all knowledge were Gurus who taught the students in Gurukul ashrams. They personally evaluated every student so as to determine the requirement of every single one of them and impart them desired form of knowledge.

The primary objective of knowledge/education was to dismantle ego within their pupil and inject into them the values of tolerance, compassion, charity, humanism, patience, endurance and sacrifice. Kautilya has also written that Vidya is very essential for two purposes:

firstly in case of India no ruler is born as divine but he has to rule over the people on the basis of divine proclamations (cultural prescriptions). Hence it was essential for the rulers to obtain different kinds of Vidya e.g. spiritual, metaphysical, political and materialistic. Hence Indian system of education was both sacred and secular. It was mundane (ordinary) as well as cultural therefore Indian education was all inclusive and cosmic.

Secondly Vidya was able to bridge the gap between rulers and subjects. The expectations of one subject was realised by the rulers voluntarily because of training they received and so good governance was possible.

Ghurye considers that there are 66 kinds of knowledge/Vidya which are compounded further with the product of needs of people in time and space. For instance, when foreign invasion got accelerated more importance was given to good governance, economic discipline and political integration. Kautilya's Arthshastra didn't speak about ritualism but it admired rule of Law, trade and Citizen Charter.

*The source of knowledge/Vidya in India comes from different areas Ayurveda, Logic, Mimansa (solutions), Archaeology, Spiritualism, Natyashastra, Kamasutra, and so on. These knowledge established unity between different classes and communities in India. Therefore Vidya transmitted through Gurus promoted uniformity in the thinking, behaviour, pattern and the way of life of people in a big way and this attributed for the rise of India as a unified nation bridging the gap between culture, communities, linguistic and regional groups. He considers that teacher - student relationship was ethical and lifelong that gave rise to the growth of 'Charnas'. Hence Indian society should be studied not in terms of caste but Gotra and Charnas that was bringing people belonging to different origin altogether despite variations in their caste and language.*

*Thus, Ghurye figured out that culture unites people together injecting into masses mind, and cultural consciousness. He concluded by saying that cultural disorganisation is a product of divisive influence of other cultures that came to India. The glorification of non-Sanskritic language by the ruling classes, loss of political patronage to the custodians of Hindu cultural traditions led to the great religious divide in India during Islamic rule. This division was further widened during British regime which encouraged forced conversion giving rise to suspicion and intellectual conflict.*

*Ghurye standing committed to Sanskritic background, his nationalistic mind tells us how contemporary India is passing through turmoil due to the breakdown of Indian cultural traditions. He is empathetic to Dayanand Saraswati who he regarded as Martin Luther King of India and equally is emphatic to Bankim Chandra who considers nationalism is not a political slogan but it is also a form of religion.'s*

*Ghurye was a product of time when India was divided on the basis of religion. He noticed there is movement in South India in search of separate nationalist identity and also in north-eastern India where people were going for secessionist movement . Ghurye considers all these problems could lead to further disintegration of India.*

*In Ghurye sociology, social reconstruction is highly glorified therefore he can be called as Durkheim of India who is more committed to society than being committed to sociology.*

## *Major limitations of Ghurye*

*He fails to recognise the rise of modern India and the contribution of Islamic and British rulers. Town planning, architecture, new administration and technology by both made India altogether different than what it was during Vedic and non-Vedic period. If sociology is science then sociologists must have to honour the fact rather than ideology. In Ghurye's sociology ideology predominates over the fact and that is a tragedy for Indian sociology.*

*A.R. Desai writes that, studying India from the lens of culture provides us no space to understand the real India that lives within inequality, diversity, dialectic and exploitation. Therefore one has to come out of the bondage of Ghurye's sociology to understand real India and the challenges and problems associated.*

*In a nutshell, one can advocate that Ghurye's sociology is romanticising India what it is not therefore there is a need for Indian sociology to change its goalpost from book view to Field Approach.*

## *Marxist sociology (A.R.Desai)*

## A.R. Desai on India

*Indological approach to the study of Indian society largely speaks about unity, harmony, integration, ideological equity without paying any importance to diversity of interest reflected by the people in the cultural history of India. No society is a product of complete cooperation, integration or conflict.*

*Theory of India has passed through different stages of development therefore understanding Indian society cannot wishfully ignore dynamics of the history. When Ghurye looks into cultural history of India A.R.Desai makes an attempt to understand a political and economic history of Indian society. He considers that history is no sociology but sociological understanding of reality cannot be complete without interpretation of historical data.*

*History explains the conditions in which we lived in whereas Sociology explains our experience today. Hence Desai makes an attempt to develop a historic sociological model to understand Indian society. As a Marxian scholar he considers foundation to Indian history is based upon the **modes of production** that evolved during different points of time. He divides economic history of India into **three** distinctive stages:*

- *Pre-colonial stage;*
- *Colonial stage;*
- *Postcolonial stage.*

*In these three stages how modes of production is organised and used is the key to understand social and political relationship among people. He finds out three distinctive modes of production radiates hierarchical class relationship among the people in the light of which we can understand intensity of inequality and form of conflict that direct social change in India. Therefore unlike his teacher Ghurye, AR Desai studies India from historical, dialectical and class perspective and for this approach he is put into the category of Marxian school of thought.*

*His book on social background of Indian nationalism talks about the limitations in Asian mode of production. Revisiting Marxian approach to primitive communism indicates how in pre-colonial India multiple classes were present, exploitation was inevitable and social inequality was institutionalised and legitimised.*

In his book "Rural Sociology" and later also in "Sociological Background of Indian Nationalism" he speaks about the impact of colonialism on trade, agriculture leading to the formation of new classes and intensification of exploitation. He looks at colonialism from a non-political perspective indicating that capitalism is expensive and expansive that institutionalised inequality in India for differential purposes.

Finally in his book "Developmental Planning in India" and "State and Society in India" he explained how in modern India, public policies are catering to class interest than addressing to Mass needs. He indicates that urban development policies had contributed to the rise of slums and rural development policies have expanded the number of rural poor leading to acceleration of peasant movement in modern India. This approach of Desai gives him a status of social logical rebel whose heart bleeds for rural and urban poor.

Desai considers that state and society of modern India has gone into the hands of dominant class and therefore the exploited masses in modern India, for lack of receiving any patronage from the state have been subjected to alienation and marginalisation.

## Pre-Colonial India

Marx considered that prior to colonialism Indians lived in villages. Every village had control over specific quantum of agricultural land. Every family irrespective of their caste were using this land on the basis of their need, technology was simple, family labour was used and production was made for consumption. Land was not mercantile commodity. Hence, control over means of production and common use of labour was making in villages egalitarian classes in character.

Conforming to Marxism view British scholars like Sir Henry Maine, Charles Metcalf, Boden Powell indicate that village communities were 'Little Republics' and were self-sufficient in character. This self-sufficient/self-sustaining community were little affected by change in the leadership in the larger nation-state. They indicated that rulers may come and go but village communities stood undiluted forever.

A R Desai collected historical data on village communities in India to contradict these positions. He finds out that Marx and colonialists failed to understand India effectively because they had romantic view of India. Marx took into consideration ownership as the main criteria to understand inequality and exploitation.

However, Desai points out that in case of village India artisans class like barbers, oilmen, carpenters, ironsmiths, Goldsmiths etc., didn't had any association with land. They



were engaged in manufacturing commodities meant for selective buyers present within the village and local communities. These selective buyers were belonging to upper class usually operating as village headman who have the prerogative of allocating village land to different families. These headman were reserving fertile land for themselves and using the labour of marginalised groups who are not culturally entitled to claim their rights over village land. These people were mostly untouchables and lower division of Shudras hence, rural labour were the exploited lot.

In village India multiple classes were present and these class division was neatly hidden under the blanket of caste but Marx and colonial scholars failed to identify. Hence they glorified classless and egalitarian character of village community.

A R Desai figured out that it is premature to consider that caste was a static organisation. Different caste groups internalize the values and develop hierarchical relationships. Natural calamities leads to distress migration as a result people belonging to higher caste compromise with the rules regulating diet, rituals and occupation and thus caste gets converted into class. Old caste get segmented into new class. New affluent class challenged old dominant caste. Village Indian historical gone from this process of dialectics but nationalists, colonialists and Marxist scholars failed to understand this.

The early scholars indicated village India was **land bound, classless and egalitarian**. These studies ignored the presence of the 3 kinds of cities in traditional Indian society, such as:

- **Cultural cities** that developed surrounding the great religious places like Benaras, Rshikesh and Puri.
- **Administrative cities** that developed in different parts of the country where the rulers kept their administrative staffs and Warriors.
- **Economic cities** where traders, businessmen and manufactures were present.

Therefore, in pre-colonial India a large body of non-agrarian urban classes were present and these classes did not manifest the integrative relationship, likewise in rural India different classes were present and class divisions were determined on the basis of occupation, excess over agricultural produce and market value of non-agricultural product. Thus conceptualising precolonial India as an egalitarian social system is a neglect to empirical fact.

Finally Desai draws a distinction between feudalism in Europe and in India. He considers pre-colonial India as a feudal system because all the rulers who invaded India from 9th

century onwards controlled the political power of the state but until colonialism none of them made an attempt to evict the indigenous people living in the villages from their right over agricultural land.

Feudal lords in case of Europe first control agricultural land then developed a political and religious system to safeguard their needs. However, the indigenous farmers in India had the limited liability towards the political state which was confined to:

- payment of taxes;
- supply of warriors, architects as and when their services were needed by the ruling classes.

Therefore village committee in India manifest invisible feudalistic character that early scholars failed to notice. It was feudalism for the reason:

- tax policy was determined by the rulers;
- no measures were taken to improve the condition of agriculture;
- product from agriculture was not sufficient to address to basic needs of local community living with hunger, malnutrition and forced migration in village India.

Desai considers that condition of rural people in village India and mediaeval Europe was no different as both manifest attributes of feudalism. European feudalism was monaural feudalism but in case of India it was cooperative feudalism. In case of monaural feudalism state legitimises to feudal relationship between lords and the serfs but in case of pre-colonial India landlords were not present and people dependent on land were non- emotive, culture bound, prefer recreation and state is not concerned with improving agriculture condition leading to mass poverty and marginalisation.

In conclusion one can indicate that the Desai looks Indian society from the standpoint of production to arrive at the conclusion that it is not the exploitative a system of production rather it can be ignorance of the people that can generate the seeds of exploitation and inequality in social life. Hence pre-colonial India living in villages was not the manifestation of classless society.

## Colonial India

Capitalism is expensive and expansive; colonialism in India is a product of demographic and technological compulsion in Britain. Stakeholders of capitalism fight with each other in their own country but when had overseas they use common symbols to promote spirit of nationalism, hence unified.

A few thousand British could control over millions of Indians because the presence of British nationalism and absence of Indian nationalism. British came to India driven by economic necessity therefore at first they carried the products meant for the use of targeted body of buyers to gratify their economic interest and control over power. Technologically developed weapons were used, indigenous rulers were financed, military support was given to them to fight war against each other.

Desai writes when indigenous rulers were fighting with each other British got them to sign various friendship treaties and accept their domination and sovereignty. Those indigenous rulers who didn't accept the sovereignty of British were alienated or defeated. This way imperialism was established in India which further promoted capitalism.

Zamindari system was introduced driven by capitalist interest leading to the rise of absentee landlords, big landlords, sub landlords, sub sub landlords intensifying the exploitation of rural poors. The growth of commercial cities introduce a standard currency, expansion of Railways and transport for economic purpose, introduction of education to gratify British interest gave rise to the emergence of Indian middle class who offered loyalty to British and distinguished themselves from the rural and urban poors.

Trade monopoly act, salt act, industrial labour act, Corporation act were introduced by British to systematically demolish cottage industries, manufacturing units and Indian industries that gave rise to handful of industrialist controlling Indian market emerging as big bourgeois. Thus polarised class structure developed both in urban India and in rural India, manifesting the exploitative character of capitalists

## Post-Colonial Stage

Desai's reflection on India is not just a critique to public policy rather it explains the dichotomy between ideology of developmental planning and the results attribute to public policies. He finds out that green revolution appeared but it did not kill rural poverty, rather it created petty bourgeois in rural India. He studies on rural cooperative, PRI's indicate how in different states these modern institutions have offered legitimacy to the traditional dominant caste to control over modern institution to gratify their political interest.

*Landlessness in rural India is a fountainhead of naxalite movement. Eighty percent of Indian industries are controlled by 12 families and state has taken interest in those industries which are left out by private enterprise. State has emerged not as a savior of masses but as a promoter of big bourgeois. Therefore the dominant caste and dominant class developing juxtaposition have control over agrarian mode of production and industrial mode of production as a result trade union movements are getting momentum in modern India.*

*Thus industries are not a solution to poverty, Green Revolution is not a solution to backwardness of rural community. The irony of India is that it follows socialist policies with commitment to protect capitalist interest because these capitalists are present everywhere in the form of dominant caste, in the form of upper-class, powerholders and in the form of traders in India. Therefore modern India is not structurally different from Colonial India because intensity of inequality and marginalisation of masses are identical in both the conditions.*

### **Criticism Of A.R. Desai**

*Desai expects that peoples movement in India can drive Indian society truly in the direction of socialism through the glorification of people's consciousness. His approach is considered as stereotypical by S.C Dubey who in his book "community development" indicates that how community program development have transformed the structure of agrarian economy in Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh rejecting AR Desai's understanding of India. MN Srinivas indicated that Naxalite movement started in West Bengal when communist government was in power. He considers that there is no guarantee if socialist group came to power they can bring in an egalitarian society as suggested by A R Desai.*

*KL Krishna indicates the development planning in India is studied by Sociologists from ideological perspective wherein they select their field research that can simply fit into their ideology. To its contrast economists goes for a larger sample and their studies indicate in which area policies are largely successful, partially successful and unsuccessful. Thus an economist tries to find out the reasons behind the failure or success of developmental programmes. Therefore sociological analysis of rural development should be supplementaries to analysis done by economists.*

*MS Gore in his book "Public Policies and Social Development" writes that cooperative movements have been highly successful in Maharashtra and Karnataka that these movements are yet to take a start in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and certain pockets of Uttar Pradesh.*

*Likewise community development programmes have achieved differential results in various parts of the country. Thus Desai's study of postcolonial India is not driven by empirical merit.*

*Despite these limitations one can still be empathetic to Desai who rebelled against Oriental understanding of India, Nationalistic understanding of India and Indological understanding of Indian to advocate what looks so romantic from outside is so greatly different in reality. It is true that he studied India from the standpoint of modes of production ignoring other important factors like ideology, power, culture, education. But he was the first sociologist who didn't mechanically applied Marxian model to understand the economic history of Indian society. Therefore rightly Yogendra Singh considers that sociology of A R Desai is foundation to modern sociology of India.*

## **Structural functionalism (MN Srinivas)**

*MN Srinivas was born in an orthodox Brahmin family he was socialised in the basics of Brahminic values. He had the opportunity of learning sociology from GS Ghurye, AR Radcliffe Brown. GS Ghurye stimulated Srinivas to study a ritual patterns of Coorgs of Mysore and compare that*

with the death rituals of Egyptian tribe so as to strike out the similarity between the two in order to understand cultural diffusion. Srinivas found this study as the wastage of time, nonsensical and intellectually non-illuminative. Therefore he went for a second Ph.D. at Oxford University. He changed his approach there, a diffusionist in Srinivas died and a structural functionalist was born under the influence of AR Brown.

A structural functionalist never takes truth for granted, truth happens in social context that needs to be studied through empirical observation therefore sociology must have to liberate itself from the book view approach(textual) and must have to go for fieldwork and contextual analysis.

Structural functionalists make a point to go for field situation and collect data on the basis of what you see there. There is no need for glorification/exaggeration. It is called structural functional approach as it never considers anything so simple to understand. There are caste structures, ritual structures, political structures and each of these structures both influence others and gets influenced itself. Structures can be Functional or Dysfunctional and Structuralists never takes into consideration their personal ideologies while studying these social structures so as to put forward the studies done from a value neutral perspective. MN Srinivas is the founder of the structural functional approach in India.

Srinivas's sociology emphasises on the study of social structure of caste, village, family and society. In his study of caste, he makes a distinction between both book view of caste and empirical view. He emphasises on Varna system and also looks into division of caste, subdivisions and sub sub divisions present within caste. He considers that caste is an empirical reality, hence in every village one can notice around 20 to 25 caste groups present and within every caste groups there are present sub caste and sub sub caste who are engaged in cooperation, competition and conflict with each other.

Citing the case of Vishvakarma and Valmiki Brahmin of Karnataka indicates that new caste groups are born out of the decline of old caste groups therefore caste is a subject of both fission and fusion. He rejects outrightly Varna view of caste founded by colonial rulers and stereotyped Brahminic models founded by Louis Dumont. He conceptualised that the structure of caste must be studied from **Ritual Perspective and Secular Perspective**.

Changing a ritual position of the caste has taken through Buddhism, Jainism, Bhakti movement, Swami Narayanan Guru Dharam Palipana (SNDP) and Satya Shodak Samaj. He

further considers that ritual mobility in contemporary times is taking place through Sanskritisation. He considers Sanskritisation becomes easier for the lower caste when they improve their position in secular sphere that is by getting education, power and wealth. Citing the example of Mahisya of Bengal, Kayasthas of Bihar, Chauhan Rajputs of UP, Yadav of western UP etc.

Citing the case of Nair of Kerala he indicates that how this caste group receiving patronage from rulers, joining Army, participating in trade, formulating caste association and campaigning could successfully improve their positions and secular sphere and used this domination as a foundation for ritual mobility. Through this empirical data he rejected the idea that caste is a hierarchical system where mobility is not possible, produces closed society. Srinivas considers that caste is dynamic throughout Indian history. Different caste groups of experience both upward and downward mobility that needs to be asserted by empirical observation.

Reflecting on the rise of dominant caste during 1960s and 70s Srinivas indicated that land reform systems, PRI's offered foundation to non-Brahminis, non-Dalit, middle caste in India to get unified. Democratic politics being a game of numbers gave them a chance for caste consolidation as a result in different pockets of the country like Reddy's in AP, Yadav's and Bhumiards in Bihar and UP, Gujjars in Rajasthan, non-Brahminic caste in Tamil Nadu, Jats in Haryana and many more got unified together. Either they formulated their own political party or the evolved into provincial leaders of regional and national political parties, seized power and formulated public policies to benefit their own caste groups thereby giving a wider coverage to the policy of reservation.

His understanding of India covers the following issues:

- Structure of caste,
- structure of social change,
- structure of Indian villages,
- structure of Indian joint family,
- dynamic nature of caste,
- status of women and dowry.

Srinivas looks into the caste system giving importance to 2 important criteria i.e. 'Ritual Criteria' and 'Secular Criteria'. Under ritual criteria he puts in aspects like food, manner, speech, practices, birth, dieties, personal conduct and language. Under the secular criteria he takes into consideration education, wealth and power.

He says that caste in the past was giving importance to ritual criteria but with the advent of foreign invaders the ritual criteria were not given so much importance. When Brahmins declined the offer of Muslim rulers to work in their courts there was one class which joined the Muslim court i.e. Kayasthas and they were able to enjoy higher status. In Gujarat Nooniyas who were engaged in salt production got hired by the British to make salt fitter for guns during the Second World War, The British provided them huge amount of money and this led to the rise in their status in their villages and thereby they started enjoying higher power than the Brahmins.

In the past Brahmins enjoyed immense status and were considered 'Lords of power'. But in contemporary India secular criteria had started dominating the ritual criteria. Srinivas says, caste which was a static institution in the past is now a dynamic institution. In India with the increase in secular criteria people belonging to lower caste are going in a big way to improve and consolidate their position in ritualistic sphere also by making use of their dominant position in secular criteria.

Srinivas, being a structural functionalist mainly uses 'field study approach' to study Indian society. He writes that it is very difficult for a sociologist to remain value neutral when he's studying his own society i.e. objectivity is very wise to hear but difficult implement.

Karl Marx tells that India is a closed society because people living in villages were not prepared to change their mind and that land is controlled by village community and one can go for agriculture irrespective of their caste. He further says that village is a reality and caste is a myth. Louis Dumont tells that caste is a matter of fact and village is a myth, he says that village is a contracted identity and caste is a real identity. Srinivas points out caste is a matter of fact as well as village i.e. to study India one needs to take both caste and village into consideration.

Srinivas uses three concept to understand social structure of Indian society:

- **Sanskritisation;**
- **westernisation;**
- **dominant caste.**



*Modernisation is a value loaded concept. Modern means good, dynamic and innovative whereas traditional means Orthodox, bad, rigid. In India, tradition and modernity are not opposite to each other, they are complementary to each other. He says that "more caste is becoming weaker in India the more it is becoming stronger" because secular role of caste is more important today just like ritual role which was important in the past.*

*In his book "20th century: New Avtar of caste" he gives a list of secular role of caste indicating that caste cannot die out because it performs a series of social functions today that can't be undertaken by any alternate institution.*

## **Srinivas on social structure of village**

*Marx considers that Indian villages self-sufficient because all members of the village have land as their primary modes of production. Colonial scholars considers that village India suffered from myopic culture, hereditary of occupation, name, residence and culture in addition to pessimistic values, lack of innovation, non-exposure to market, absence of individualism resulting into a community which was self-perpetual and continuous. Louis Dumont considers that village is a territorial space, it does not carry any social and cultural significance therefore Indian society must be studied from the standpoint of caste and not village. Srinivas rejects to both the positions outrightly indicating that both Marx and colonial scholars had romantic understanding of villages because there assumption of India was greatly driven by the book view.*

*No village manifest unity in totality and is not perpetual in character. Srinivas indicates that village solidarity is a fact because:*

- people belonging to a particular village exhibit village exogamy,*
- cutting across their caste line the participate in village festivals,*
- voluntarily they come together against external aggression,*
- servicing caste groups regularly comes from adjoining villages for work which results into functional coordination.*

*People carry their family identity, caste identity and village identity along with your name therefore village is not a geographical space, it is a social and cultural universe for man in India from where he gets his identity. He lives with this identity all through his life. Rejecting Louis Dumont he writes that caste divided but village united the people. Thus one cannot understand Indian without understanding the dynamic nature of Indian village.*

## **AR Desai on Structure of joint family**

*Srinivas rejects outrightly the Indologists viewpoint that joint family injected a value of corporate existence, ritualism, fraternity and cooperation limiting the materialistic orientation of man in India. He rejects the modern viewpoint that joint family in India is replaced by nuclear family under the impact of industry and urbanisation. He makes a distinction between **joint family** and **joint household**. In search of occupation people are leaving their traditional joint family and living in urban centres. These urban family mostly consist of husband, wife and their unmarried children.*

*AR Desai considers that rise of nuclear family in urban centres of the country he the indication of breakdown of feudalism and the rise of capitalism. Rejecting to that Srinivas indicate that in the so-called nuclear family the jointness is strongly present. It is evident from the fact that at the time of childbirth, elderly members are invited either from wife's side or husband's side ,all important decisions are taken by the head of the nuclear family in consultation with the members of the joint family. This indicates that India has gone for residential split hence joint household is breaking down but not the spirit of jointness. This observation is subsequently taken by AM Shah, Alan Rose, MS Gore, J Sharma when they study the dynamic nature of joint family system in India.*

## **Srinivas on Social structure**

*Srinivas consider the social change in India is not just technological and institutional rather it is value centric. 150 years of British rule in India has exposed us to modern technologies, railways, printing press, radios & television, telephone. All these embodiments of modernity have responded to the demands of traditional culture efficiently. TVs and radios do have secular and sacred uses in India, newspaper is glorifying caste-based marriages, caste association. In addition to that temples are becoming a place for collective gathering where politics and economics are discussed. Hence social change in India establishing a balance between ritualistic orientation and secular success. Therefore India is establishing a balance between tradition and modernity than simply following the European model of modernity.*

*In conclusion it can be advocated that MN Srinivas took Indian sociology away from the world of speculation, judgemental orientation, Indological and ideological attachment to the world of facts where people speak for themselves. His commitment to the field study method took researchers close to the subject of research. It made the researchers more passionate/patient observer to the empirical fact happening around them.*

*Under intellectual leadership in large body of young sociologists from 1960s to 1980s, field studies were conducted in different parts of the country which correspondingly studied the changing nature of caste, kinship and religion. Many of them studied the impact of public policies (rural development programmes and policies, population policies, urban development policies) and came forward with vibrant information on social change in India. Therefore Srinivas's sociology gave a new dimension to sociology of India both in terms of methodology and in terms of content. Therefore David Mandel Baum rightly points out that it is difficult to imagine Indian sociology without Srinivas because he offered Indian sociology the status in 20 years that European sociologists have obtained in centuries by standing committed to his structure functional approach.*

*Srinivas never gave sociology of India big theories nor did he try European theories on Indian society. Rather a developmental race theories like Sanskritisation, Westernisation, dominant caste, AGJR (Ahir, Gujjar, Jat, Rajput), BIMARU to understand social, cultural and economic dynamics of Indian society.*