

Block 2

Sociologists in India-1

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THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 3 RADHAKAMAL MUKERJEE*

Structure

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the contribution of Radhakamal Mukerjee to Indian sociology;
- outline the biographical details of Radhakamal Mukerjee;
- explain some of his central ideas and their contribution to sociology in India; and
- list some of his important works.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Radhakamal Mukerjee was pioneer in the areas such as social ecology, interdisciplinary research and the social structure of values. We will first describe the biographical sketch and then discuss his central ideas. Some of his central ideas revolved around the relationship between economic and social behavior, social ecology, conservation of forests, urban social problems, theory of values, Indian culture and civilization, and notion of universal civilization. We will discuss each of these issues in detail here.

3.2 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Radhakamal Mukerjee was born in 1889 in a large Bengali Brahmin family, in a

* Adapted from Unit 5 of IGNOU course material: *Sociological Thought* (ESO 13) by Nita Mathur

small country town of West Bengal called Berhampur. He spent the first sixteen years of his life in this town. His father was the leader of the bar, that is a lawyer and was an accomplished scholar with a great interest in history.

Mukerjee, while describing his early years, says that his home was full of books on history, literature, law and Sanskrit (Singh 1956:3). The general atmosphere in which he grew up was scholarly. His elder brothers were always reading books from which he, being a child, was kept at a distance. His father used to have long meetings with clients throughout the day and long intellectual and religious discussions during the evening. The interior of the house, where the ladies of the house presided, there were rituals, ceremonies and devotional songs. Mukerjee remembered that his house used to be full of pet animals, especially a golden-hued cow which yielded milk throughout the year. He wrote that these early years were marked by “peaceful tenor of life with its play and schooling, piety and devotion punctuated by the periodic celebration of fasts and feasts, rituals and sacraments, story telling from the Epics and Puranas and visits of ascetics and saints and guest of the household” (Singh 1956: 3).

Mukerjee’s early memories, which left an imprint on his mind, consisted of the picture of sorrow and misery of a large population devastated by famine in Madras and Orissa during the early years of the twentieth century. He was deeply moved by the pictures of human skeletons on the verge of starvation and death published in the newspapers. This was further deepened by the Bengal famine of 1942-43 which he had witnessed in Calcutta. He also vividly recalled the childhood experiences of Muharram processions, Durgapuja festivals, and so on.

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It was during the same period of his life that Bengal saw its socio-cultural and intellectual renaissance. In 1905 every city in Bengal was in a state of intellectual and political fervor. The partition of Bengal into East and West Bengal, introduced by Lord Curzon, led to a mass uprising against this event. Political meetings, street processions and singing parties, boycott of British goods and propagating swadeshi products introduced him to the mass movement of time.

Mukerjee had his early education in Berhampur. He went to the Krishnath College in Berhampur. He got an academic scholarship in the leading educational institution in India, the Presidency College in Calcutta. He took

his honours course in English and History in this college. Here he came in contact with such scholars as H. M. Percival, M. Ghosh, brother of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, and linguist Harinath De. He admired these scholars very much. It was here that he read books by Comte, Herbert Spencer, Lester Ward, Hobhouse and Giddings, besides many others, from cover to cover. As you must be aware by now many of these scholars are the leading men of sociology in Europe and America.

During this period of his life, Mukerjee launched himself into the area of adult education which remained his interest till the end. The country was going through a political and cultural upheaval during this period which, according to Mukerjee, completely changed the scale of values. This change was seen far more outside the Governmental institutions, taking the form of a literary and artistic renaissance. This renaissance slowly took the form of a mass movement. It was in order to help the process that Mukerjee started an Adult Evening School in 1906 in the slums of Mechaubazar of Calcutta. He wrote simple texts for adult education which sold in thousands. This school became a Community Centre and even the local physicians started taking interest in this movement of social education. They treated without charging any fee the adults and children of the slums (Singh 1956: 5).

Mukerjee valued his early training in the slums of Calcutta” turned the focus of his interests towards the disciplines of Sociology and Economics. He wrote that there was a definite call in the country for the tasks and responsibilities of education of the masses, and that call could be answered by an Indian student best through the knowledge of the social sciences (Singh 1956: 5). Social sciences during Mukerjee’s time in Calcutta University included the disciplines of Economics, Politics and Sociology at M.A. level.

It was during this period that Mukerjee came in close association with Benoy Kumar Sarkar (We have mentioned Benoy Kumar Sarkar’s contributions to sociology in the previous unit.) Mukerjee and Sarkar shared the same flat and B.K. Sarkar was at that time Professor at Bengal National College, an institution which had given support to such leading thinkers of Bengal as Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh.

Mukerjee, like many other Indians of his time, was impressed by the fiery political speeches of Bipin Chandra Pal, one of the Congress extremists. But the main interest of Mukerjee was at that time educational rather than political. He and his friends called themselves “Ministers of the Poor” and dressed poorly, giving up western dresses like shirts, coats and shoes (Singh 1956: 6).

In 1910 Mukerjee went back to his old college in Berhampur as a teacher in Economics. He says that this was the busiest period of his life and it was during this period that he wrote his early works in Economics, such as the *Foundations of Indian Economics*. His interest in social ecology and the study of regions also originated during this period. The Principal of his College, Rev. E. M. Wheeler, was deeply interested in the sciences, especially

Botany. Therefore, the teachers, including Mukerjee, spent a lot of time collecting specimens of plants and insects of all kinds and studying them. This experience developed Mukerjee's interest in ecology and he became aware of its link with human community.

At this time Mukerjee also became the editor of the renowned Bengali monthly, *Upasana*. He wrote for this monthly regularly and kept in touch with the literary development in Bengali literature. He was a voracious reader and his interest in literature was very deep.

During 1915, when there were persecutions by the British Government, Mukerjee was once arrested for a day and all his adult schools were liquidated. The charges against him were that he was a "terrorist" or had sympathy with terrorism under the disguise of adult education. Thanks to his lawyer brother he was released very soon. He was offered a position in Lahore College in Punjab and he went there thus, nipping in bud any interest in politics.

He went back to the University of Calcutta where Asutosh Mookerji had established in 1917 the Post-Graduate Council of Arts and Science. He stayed here for five years and taught Economics, Sociology and Political Philosophy. In 1921 he went to the University of Lucknow as Professor and Head of the Department of Economics and Sociology on the very day when the university started functioning (Singh 1956: 10). He introduced an integrated approach in Economics, Sociology and Anthropology in both research and teaching in Lucknow University.

According to Mukerjee, using comparative methods in the study of social sciences in India, we must aim at the scientific study of the race and culture origins. In his intellectual career he was deeply influenced by three social thinkers. First was Professor Brajendra Nath Seal; second was Professor Patrick Geddes; and the third one was an old, intimate colleague who died early, Narendra Nath Sen Gupta. The first two, Prof. Seal and Prof. Geddes contributed to the establishment and development of sociology as a discipline in the Indian Universities. Mukerjee always consulted Seal in all his works. His stress on comparative method in cultural sciences was due to Seal's influence on his work. Patrick Geddes too, influenced Mukerjee's work on study of regions, ecology and population while Narendra Nath Sen Gupta helped generate Mukerjee's interest in Social Psychology.

Besides these Indian thinkers there were many Western social thinkers with whom Mukerjee worked and who influenced his writings. Some of these were sociologists like, Edward Allsworth Ross, Robert Ezra Park of Chicago, Mckenzie and P. Sorokin. Most of these Americans sociologists were interested in the study of region, urban disorganisation, human ecology, social change and so on. The friendship and intellectual interaction with these sociologists stimulated Mukerjee's own efforts in social sciences to which he gives due credit (Singh 1956: 3-20).

Mukerjee taught economics and sociology in Lucknow University for nearly thirty years. He also became the Vice-Chancellor and Director of the J.K. Institute of Sociology and Human Relation of the University. He wrote erudite volumes on several issues. The basic nature of his writings is the integration of the social sciences and he has been a path-finder in many fields. Many of his students and associates reflect this approach in their writings (Singh 1956: 3-20). He died in the year 1968 but his contributions have left a deep imprint on the students of sociology.

3.3 CENTRAL IDEAS

In the Indian universities, the compartmentalisation of disciplines has dominated the scene. Disciplines such as sociology, psychology and statistics have existed side by side in the same college or university but there has been very little interaction between them. In his teachings and writings, Mukerjee emphasised the need for mutual interaction between social sciences on the one hand and between social sciences and physical sciences on the other. For example, Indian economics, modeled on British economics, mostly neglected the traditional caste networks in indigenous business, handicrafts and banking. Economic development was mainly viewed as an extension of monetary economics or market phenomenon. The Western model in economics focused on the urban-industrial centres.

3.3.1 Relationship between Economic and Social Behaviour

In a country like India where many economic transactions take place within the framework of caste or tribe, the “market model” has a limited relevance. Mukerjee tried to show the relationship between traditional networks and economic exchange. The guilds and castes of India were operating in a non-competitive system. The rules of economic exchange were derived from the normative Hinduism, in other words, according to the norms of Hindu religion wherein interdependence between groups was emphasised. Hence, to understand rural India, the economic values should be analysed with reference to social norms. Religious and/ or ethical constraints have always lent a direction to economic exchange. Values enter into the daily life of people and compel them to act in collectively sanctioned ways. For example, a hungry upper caste Hindu would not eat beef; likewise, an orthodox Muslim or Jew would not eat pork, however urgent may be the need for food. Therefore, it is wrong to always treat economic behaviour as separate from social life or collectivity.

3.3.2 Social Ecology

Social Ecology was another theme which preoccupied Mukerjee. He wrote a number of books on the theme. For him social ecology was a complex formulation in which a number of social sciences interacted. The geological,

geographical and biological factors worked together to produce an ecological zone. In its turn, ecology is conditioned by social, economic or political factors. For example, in the past many Indian ecological regions were opened up for human settlement and agrarian development through political conquests. As there is a definite link between ecology and society the development of ecological zones must be seen in terms of a dynamic process: that is, challenge of the environment and response of the people who establish a settlement.

Ecological balance is not a mechanical carving out of a territory and settling people thereon. Such an attempt weakens or destroys social fabric. For example, in building irrigation dams in India, very often people of the concerned locations are moved to new settlements. The lack of a proper perspective on involuntary resettlement and rehabilitation has often caused damage to social life of these people. In many parts of India, there is a traditional system of interdependence known as *jajmani* in the north or by its equivalents in other regions. If people are moved into other locations such arrangements abruptly come to an end. Only by planning suitable alternatives in advance, can this disruption be overcome. For example, the cooperatives can help people, in the absence of old social patterns of interdependence. Hence, social perspective is necessary for orderly and systematic transformation of India into an urban-industrial economy.

In his works on social ecology, Mukerjee took a point of departure from the Western social scientists. In the USA, the Chicago School of Sociology gave importance to empirical studies of such social problems as social disorganisation, urban deterioration, etc. To this school belonged sociologists like Park and Burgess, Louis Wirth, Giddings and so on. This school emphasised the study of human ecology. Here, the focus was on social engineering involving transfer of slum dwellers to new settlements, improvements in living conditions, better prospects of employment, etc. But, according to Mukerjee, social ecology was the better alternative to the havoc caused by rapid industrialisation. India, with its long history, was a storehouse of values. Therefore, in building a new India the planning must not be confined to immediate and concrete problems but must be directed towards value-based developments.

As part of his interest in social ecology, Mukerjee developed the regional sociology. He argued for a better understanding of regional dimensions of national development. If the regions in modern India were developed so as to make them self-sufficient, then the nation as a whole would stand to benefit. Otherwise, some regions would dominate the rest resulting in a lopsided development. As India was a country of diverse regions, each with a distinctive ethno-history, i.e. the history of its various ethnic groups, it was imperative to coordinate the developments schemes for maintaining ecological balance. In sum, he stood for a balance between economic growth and ecological fitness. In achieving this end, many skills, such as weaving,

engraving etc., were inherited by caste groups in India. These crafts could be well incorporated into the modern cooperatives. In other words, the modernisation of Indian society should not neglect its traditional economic networks. Incidentally, in the post-Independent India, the traditional crafts have been organised into handloom cooperatives, etc. in Tamil Nadu and other states. Likewise, the Khadi Gramodyog has also used the traditional skills for modern production.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences:

- a) Radhakamal Mukerjee was a pioneer in the areas such as social interdisciplinary research and the social structure of values.
- b) He was against the of social sciences.
- c) In his writings he combined sociology and history.

2) Describe in about two lines what is meant by an ecological zone.

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3.3.3 Plea for Conservation of Forests

Mukerjee wrote extensively on the danger of deforestation. The cutting of trees subjects the soil to the fury of floods and reduces the fertility of soil. The topsoil which is washed away by floods or excess rainfall cannot be replenished. Therefore, the forest and woods of India were an ecological asset. His plea for conservation has been taken up at present by a number of activists, voluntary organisations such as Chipko and Apko, which focus on halting the destruction of trees. Mukerjee also referred to the danger of mono-cultivation, that is, raising a single cash crop (such as cotton or sugarcane) to the detriment of rotation of crops. Such practices as deforestation and mono-cultivation disturbed the fragile ecosystem and gave rise to severe environmental problems. Every year some parts of India especially in the north suffer either from floods or from droughts. Of course, cyclones of the coastal regions are beyond human control, but the man-made disasters, such as the depletion of natural resources through deforestation can be slowed down or prevented.

Mukerjee advocated the integration of village, town and nation into a single, broad-based developmental process. Urban development at the expense of the village should be kept in check. Agriculture should be diversified and industries decentralised. A more equitable distribution of wealth and resources, not only between sections of people but also between regions, would bring about a more balanced development.

3.3.4 An Ameliorative Approach to Urban Social Problems

Mukerjee was also interested in the ameliorative approach to the problems of working class. The industrialisation in India, which has been taking place during the last several decades, succeeded in bringing together people from diverse regions and languages. But the living conditions of workers in the urban centres such as Mumbai, Kanpur, Kolkata and Chennai were adversely affected by slum life. In the early days of industrialisation, urban slums gave rise to vices such as prostitution, gambling and crime. It was, therefore, necessary to bring about drastic changes in the lives of workers to improve their economic and moral conditions.

Today, many private industries and the public sector units have provided facilities for the social welfare of a number of workers. Besides, the central and state governments have promulgated legislative acts which are binding on the employers. However, unorganised workers (i.e. who are underemployed, or temporarily employed) continue to live in slums. The rampant problems in the Indian slums at present are consumption of illicit liquor and drugs, crimes, and worsening housing conditions and civic facilities. Therefore, Mukerjee's analysis of the working class is relevant even for the present industrial organisation in India.

3.3.5 Theory of Values

As noted previously, Radhakamal Mukerjee had a sustained interest in the impact of values on human society. In the middle of the twentieth century, the notion of a value-free social science became dominant in academic circles both in the West and in India. Mukerjee held that a separation between "fact" and "value" was arbitrary.

Activity I

Note down at least five types of social behaviour that you perform in your daily life and state the values related with them. Some examples of social behaviour are wearing a sacred thread, going to the mosque, temple or church, touching the feet of elders, and so on.

Do you agree or disagree with Radhakamal Mukerjee's opinion that we cannot separate facts of social behaviour from the values which are associated with them? Write a note of one page about this and compare your note, if possible with those of other students at your Study Centres.

The facts and values could not be separated from each other in human interactions. Even a simple transaction like taking food, wearing dress or greeting others was a value-based or normatively conditioned behaviour. Each society has a distinctive culture and its values and norms guide the behaviour. Therefore, the positivistic tradition of the West, which (on the analogy of

sciences) wanted to separate facts from values, was not tenable to R.K. Mukerjee, especially in the study of a society like India. In the West, there was a compelling need to free scientific enquiry from the hold of church theology. Hence, it was perhaps necessary to hold that facts and values were separate.

Mukerjee underlined two basic points in relation to values. Firstly, values are not limited only to religion or ethics. Economics, politics and law also give rise to values. In other words, human needs are transformed into social values and are internalised in the minds of members of society. Older civilisations such as India and China were stable. Hence, values were formed and organised into a hierarchy of higher and lower levels. Secondly, values are not a product of subjective or individualistic aspirations. They are objectively grounded in humankind's social aspirations and desires. In other words, values are both general and objective i.e., measurable by empirical methods. In general, the great civilisations of the world have subordinated instrumental or materialistic goals to intrinsic or spiritual goals.

To sum up, there are three salient points in Mukerjee's theory of values. Firstly, values satisfy the basic impulses of men and women in an orderly fashion. This means that the selfish desires and interests are modified by collective living, wherein people give and take from each other. Secondly, values are generic in scope and include both individual and social responses and attitudes. This means that the values are shared by all through their symbolisation. The national flag, for example, is a common symbol for all individuals and groups who constitute a nation. Thirdly, in spite of diversities of human society, some universal values are discernible. The major religions of humankind are repositories of these universal values and norms. A dynamic approach to society will aim at an adaptation of inherited values to the needs of contemporary times.

3.3.6 Indian Culture and Civilisation

Mukerjee also wrote extensively on Indian art and architecture, history and culture. Mukerjee (1964) believed that Asiatic art aimed at collective developments and wrote, "Art in Asia became the torch-bearer of social and spiritual upheavals for millionsOriental art is most intensely charged with community feeling and is thus chiefly responsible for the historical continuity of Oriental Cultures". In contrast, such artistic endeavour in the West had been dominated either by individualism or the feeling that art was an end in itself. This was just not conducive to either social solidarity or spiritual development.

Indian art was embedded in social or ethical sphere. R.K. Mukerjee wrote "The myriad temples, stupas and viharas of India bear witness to the link between art and ethics, religious and social values. Art in India is an enduring component of people's interaction with each other which shows in concrete forms the active relationship between people's aspirations and their artistic creativity".

Indian art was constantly associated with religion. In his historical study of India Mukerjee was impressed by the non-aggressive nature of Indian religions such as Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. The remarkable quality of Indian religions was their insistence on ultimate truth rather than on a particular set of beliefs or rituals. The Indian influences spread to many countries not through war or conquest but through friendship and goodwill. Right from the time of Ashoka, the peaceful “colonisation” of Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Tibet, and other countries of Outer India took place. Indian art and religion enriched the local cultures and by doing so gave rise to a new culture. For example, even today, different styles of Ramayana, the Hindu religious epic, are performed in these countries and several others such as Indonesia, Sumatra and Trinidad. Thus, there was the harmony between foreign and indigenous elements. In India itself, the Hindu legal texts such as Dharmasastra are flexible codes to accommodate the ethnic diversities of India. Correctly interpreted, these texts provide a framework of values and norms for the orderly living of diverse groups. Thus, art and religion in India have been tolerant of diverse forms and styles.

3.3.7 Mukerjee’s Concept of Universal Civilisation

Mukerjee’s general theory of society sought to explain the values of a universal civilisation. He used the term “civilisation” in an inclusive sense; culture was part of it. He proposed that human civilisation should be studied on three inter-related levels. These are:

i) Biological Evolution

The biological evolution of human beings has facilitated the rise and development of civilisation. They have the capacity to change the environment as an active agent. The animals can only adapt to an environment; but human beings can mould it in different ways. The human beings, as a biological species, are capable of overcoming competition and conflict and attain cooperation (symbiosis).

ii) Psycho-social Dimension

There is a psycho-social dimension. In social psychology the people are often depicted within the framework of race, ethnicity or nationhood. Human beings are seen as prisoners of little selves or egos, whose attitude is parochial or ethnocentric. On the contrary, human beings have the potentiality to overcome the narrow feelings and attain universalisation that is, to identify oneself with the larger collectivity such as one’s nation or even as a member of the universe itself. In the process, common values help to subordinate the particularistic values to universal values. According to Mukerjee, ethical relativism which means that values vary from society to society) is not helpful in the present times; there is need for ethical universalism which affirms the

unity of the humankind. In the new perspective, men and women become free moral agents who are capable of recognising the common strands binding the humanity. They are no longer dictated by divisiveness or relativity.

iii) Spiritual Dimension

In Mukerjee's views, the civilisation has a spiritual dimension. Human beings are gradually scaling transcendental heights. That is, they are moving up to the ladder of spirituality by overcoming the constraints of biogenic and existential levels, i.e. the physical and material limitations. In this endeavour, art, myth and religion provide the "impulsion" or the force to move upward. As the social sciences have hitherto ignored these cultural elements, they are incapable of providing a spiritual perspective. Incidentally, a similar observation was made by Karl Mannheim, a German sociologist, who wrote on sociology of culture. Mannheim noted that the Western social sciences had neglected cultural dimensions (arts, myths, symbols, etc.) under the rigid code of positivism or structural functionalism. This resulted in a lopsided view of social reality. According to Mukerjee, humankind's search for unity, wholeness and transcendence highlight the spirituality of civilisation. In this respect, he commended the Indian and Chinese civilisations which had endured as stable entities since sixth century B.C. Their strength is derived from their universal myths and values which foster spiritual quest.

Mukerjee noted with satisfaction that the search for universality was embodied in the Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations Organisation (U.N.O) in the twentieth century. These rights upheld liberty and dignity of people, in whichever country they might be living. Mukerjee's emphasis on spirituality was not an escapist dream. He stated that human progress (in the ultimate sense) was possible only if glaring disparities of wealth and power between countries were reduced. So long as poverty persisted or political oppression continued, further integral evolution of mankind was not a practical proposition. The persisting human awareness of misery in the world had stimulated the search for universal values and norms.

3.4 IMPORTANT WORKS

Some of Radhakamal Mukerjee's important works in sociology are:

- i) *The Regional Balance of Man* (1938)
- ii) *Indian Working Class* (1940)
- iii) *The Social Structure of Values* (1955)

iv) *Philosophy of Social Sciences* (1960)

v) *Flowering of Indian Art* (1964)

Check Your Progress 2

1) What is 'regional sociology', according to Radhakamal Mukerjee?

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2) Discuss in about five lines Radhakamal Mukerjee's opinion about "facts" and "values".

.....

3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learnt about the contribution of a pioneer of Indian Sociology, namely Radhakamal Mukerjee.

You learnt about his biographical details. We have described some of his major ideas in the field of sociology. He has dealt with the study of society in a distinctive way. Finally, we have listed some of his important works.

3.6 REFERENCES

Indira Gandhi National Open University Course Material. 2003. *Sociological Thought* (ESO 13), New Delhi: IGNOU.

Mukerjee, Radhakamal 1984. *The Culture and Art of India*. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers: New Delhi.

3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) a) ecology b) compartmentalization c) economics

2) An ecocological zone is a result of the combination a certain kind of geological, geographical and biological factors.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Radhakamal Mukerjee's interest in social ecology led him to the study of regions in India. He called this study regional sociology. According to Mukerjee, if the regions in modern India were developed to the extent that they became self-sufficient then India will benefit as a whole. But if some

regions lag behind they will be dominated by the developed regions and this will result in a lop-sided development of India.

**Radhakamal
Mukerjee**

- 2) Radhakamal Mukerjee was against the Western trend of separating “facts” from “values” as done by the positivists in sociology. According to him “facts” and “values” are inseparable elements of human interaction and such behaviour as taking or giving food, wearing a dress, etc. are value-based and normatively determined by the society.



UNIT 4 G S GHURYE*

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
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- 4.3 Central Ideas
 - 4.3.1 Caste and Kinship in India
 - 4.3.2 New Roles of Caste in India
 - 4.3.3 Study of Tribes in India
 - 4.3.4 Rural-Urbanization in India
 - 4.3.5 Religious Beliefs and Practices in India
 - 4.3.6 Role of Sadhus in Indian Tradition
 - 4.3.7 Indian Art and Architecture
 - 4.3.8 Hindu-Muslim Relationships
- 4.4 Important Works
- 4.5 Let us Sum Up
- 4.6 References
- 4.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the contribution of Govind Sadashiv Ghurye to Indian sociology;
- outline the biographical details of Govind Sadashiv Ghurye;
- explain some of his central ideas and their contribution to sociology in India; and
- list some of his important works.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

G.S. Ghurye was an ethnographer of tribes and castes but he also wrote extensively on other topics. In his writings, Ghurye emphasised integration. Ghurye was a Sanskritist by training before he entered the discipline of sociology. His work on Vedic India, written in the later years, was an example of his interest in Sanskrit works.

* Adapted from Unit 5 of IGNOU course material *Sociological Thought* (ESO 13) with contribution of Jyoti Raghavan, Kamla Nehru College, University of Delhi

Let us first learn the biographical details about him. Then we will examine his central ideas and important works in sociology.

G S Ghurye

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In this sub-section we have described the biography of G.S. Ghurye based on his own book (1973) *I and Other Explorations*. Govind Sadashiv Ghurye was born on 12th Dec. 1893 in a small town called Malvan on the west coast of India. Malvan is some two-hundred miles away from Mumbai. He belonged to a fairly prosperous Brahmin family, which owned shops and other property. He was named after his grandfather who died the same year when he was born. His family was very religious and well known in that region for piety.

Due to loss in business and the death of his grandfather G.S. Ghurye's father had to take up a job. His job proved to be very lucky for the family. Ghurye was one of four children of his parents. He had an elder brother whom he admired very much, another brother and a sister.

He joined school in Malvan. In 1905 his "thread ceremony" was performed. At this time he had completed his fifth standard examination and joined an English school. His mother tongue was Marathi and his early schooling was also in Marathi. But knowledge of Sanskrit was there in the family. His grandfather knew Sanskrit. He too, started learning Sanskrit. The religious atmosphere of the family and its reputation for piety and learning had a deep influence on G.S. Ghurye. He grew up learning English and received modern education but his roots in Hindu culture and tradition were very deep.

He was sent by his mother to complete his matriculation from Junagad in Gujarat. Here his eldest brother was already studying. He became a student of the Bahauddin College in 1912. Here he became very proficient in Sanskrit. He joined Bombay University which used to have an entrance examination then. He cleared this examination with twenty other boys. There were no girls at that time, but later a Christian girl joined their class. Ghurye had obtained first position in his college. In the university he secured fourth position. His brother was teaching physics at the university when Ghurye joined the university. G.S. Ghurye was a very hard working student and in spite of the short phases of illness he managed to do very well in his studies.

In 1916 when G.S. Ghurye had completed his B.A. examination and stood first in it, he was married to a girl of a fairly rich family of Vengurla (Maharashtra), of his own sub-caste. His parents named his wife Rukmini after the marriage as per the practice amongst the Maharashtrians. But Ghurye reverted back to calling her Sajubai, which was her original name when they established their own household in 1923. He was against the practice of changing the personal name of a girl after marriage. He was also against the traditional practice of tattooing the skin because he considered it

barbaric. For his B.A. result he received the Bhau Daji Prize, named after the great Indologist Bhau Daji Lad who was one of the first physicians of Mumbai, trained in the western system of medicine. G.S. Ghurye had secured seventy four per cent marks in Sanskrit in his college.

Sadashiv was appointed a Fellow of the college and completed his M.A. degree. The languages he chose in his M.A. course were English, Sanskrit and later he took Pali. He also did a course which was newly introduced in the university on comparative philology. He got first class in M.A. also.

He was awarded the Chancellor's Gold Medal, a top most honour in the whole university. His success was unique in the history of the university because nobody before him had ever got first class in M.A. with Sanskrit.

He later applied for a scholarship to go abroad for studies in sociology, which the Bombay university had advertised earlier. He was asked to meet Prof. Patrick Geddes of sociology in Bombay university. During his interactions with Prof. Geddes he wrote an essay on "Bombay as an Urban Centre" which was highly appreciated by Geddes. This enabled Ghurye to get the foreign study scholarship.

Ghurye went to England by ship. He became a student of L.T. Hobhouse. Besides many other people, he met Dr. A.C. Haddon who was the world famous ethnologist studying preliterate cultures. It was Haddon who introduced Ghurye to Dr. W.H.R. Rivers whose influence on Ghurye was considerable. Rivers was at the pinnacle of his intellectual glory and was founder of the Cambridge School of Psychology. Rivers later came to India and studied a polyandrous tribe called the Todas of the Nilgiri Hills.

Ghurye wrote several articles in sociology at this time and got them published in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* and in the journal, *Anthropos*. He wrote his most important work, *Caste and Race in India*, during the 1930s. He was awarded the degree of Ph.D. from Cambridge university. He came back to India after W.H.R. Rivers' death.

He worked in Calcutta for 7 months on a scholarship which he received from Bombay University. Then he and K.P. Chattopadhyaya of Calcutta University got appointments as Readers in Sociology at Bombay university, in 1924. He got this appointment due to the great respect and recognition given to him by the late Dr. W.H.R. Rivers. G.S. Ghurye joined the Bombay Asiatic Society as a member in the same year. He guided several students under him. Some of his students are now famous sociologists. They made significant contributions to the growth of sociology and social anthropology in India.

G.S. Ghurye was made a Professor of Sociology in 1934, ten years after he joined the Bombay university as a Reader and the Head of the Department of Sociology. He was elected the President of the anthropological section of the Indian Science Congress in 1934. In the same year he was elected as the nominee of the Royal Asiatic Society by the Managing Committee of its

Bombay branch. In 1942 he became the President of the Bombay Anthropological Society and continued to hold this position till 1948. He wrote several books and articles and his knowledge of Sanskrit enabled him to study the religious scriptures in the context of Indian society. He studied castes and tribes, rural-urbanisation, about the Indian Sadhus, about Indian costumes and so on. During his life time he won several top honours accorded to any intellectual in India. He became not only a nationally but internationally known sociologist of India. He died in the year 1984.

Box 4.1

G.S. Ghurye was an ethnographer of tribes and castes but he also wrote extensively on other topics. In his writings, Ghurye emphasised integration. He used history and statistical data to supplement his sociological writings. Ghurye was a Sanskritist by training before he entered the discipline of sociology. His work on Vedic India, written in the later years, was an example of his interest in Sanskrit works. Now, let us examine his biographical details, central ideas and important works.

4.3 CENTRAL IDEAS

G.S. Ghurye's contributions to Indian sociology were mainly in the areas of ethnography of castes and tribes, rural-urbanisation, religious phenomena, social tensions and Indian art. Let discuss his ideas in the following sub- sub-section.

4.3.1 Caste and Kinship in India

In the early 1930s, G.S. Ghurye published a book, *Caste and Race in India* which still is an important source book on Indian castes. In this work, he examined the caste system from historical, comparative and integrative perspectives.

Box 4.2 Ghurye's Notion of Caste

Ghurye describes caste as a form of social organization that is unique to Indian civilization, which presents a clear contrast to social groupings in the rest of the world. Hindu society is divided into groupings known as caste, with varying degrees of respectability and social interaction. Ghurye brought out the following six features of the caste system:

- 1) Segmental division of society: The caste society comprises of heterogeneous groups with a distinct life of their own and the membership is determined not by selection but by birth. Castes are small and complete social world in themselves, marked off definitely from one another, though subsisting within the larger society.
- 2) Hierarchy: One of the principal characteristic of the caste society is the hierarchy of groups. This implies a definite scheme of social precedence

amongst the castes with the Brahmin at the head of the hierarchy.

- 3) Restrictions on feeding and social intercourse: There are minute rules pertaining to what sort of food or drink can be accepted by a person and from what castes. While lower castes have no scruples in accepting cooked food from any higher caste, the Brahmins and other castes did not accept food or water from other castes that stood lower than itself in the social scale. Ghurye also mentions about the theory of pollution communicated by some castes to members of the higher ones.
- 4) Civil and religious disabilities and privileges of the different sections: Ghurye noted that one of the most obvious markers of civil privileges and disabilities that prevailed all over India was the segregation of individual castes or a group of castes in a village. Southern India stands out as the most rigid in the matter of rules pertaining to ceremonial purity and untouchability. In Southern India, certain parts of the town or village were inaccessible to certain castes. Even the type of houses that were to be built and the materials that were to be used for construction were prescribed for lower castes.
- 5) Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation: The occupations have been fixed by heredity. Generally the castes were not 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 the untouchable category. Restriction on food, drink and social interaction were areas in which some rules have been imposed upon all castes people.
- 6) Restriction of marriage: Caste groups follow the principle of endogamy. This means that caste groups marry within their own groups. Marrying outside the caste group is strongly condemned.

Later, he made a comparative study of kinship in Indo- European cultures. In his studies of kinship and caste, Ghurye emphasised two points: (a) the kin and caste networks of India had parallels in some other countries also; and (b) the kinship and caste in India served as integrative framework. The evolution of Indian society was based on the integration of diverse racial or ethnic groups through these networks.

The gotra and charana were kin-categories of Indo-European languages which systematised the rank and status of the people. These categories were derived from names of the sages of the past. These sages were the real or eponymous founders of the gotra and charana. 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 we might notice the guru-shishya relationship,

which is also based on spiritual descent; the 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 which marked off castes from each other, were in fact integrative instruments to organise them into a totality or collectivity. The Hindu religion provided the conceptual and ritualistic guidelines for this integration. The Brahmins in India played a key role in legitimising the caste ranks and orders through their interpretation of Dharmashastras, which were the compendia of sacred codes.

Box 4.3 Assimilation of Scheduled Castes

According to Ghurye, the term Scheduled caste presented the fifth order in the four- fold society of the Hindu theory of caste. Oomen notes that while Indian caste system is the most widely commented upon social phenomenon, the practice of untouchability to which Scheduled castes were subjected to was and continues to be the most abominable in human history, shaming even slavery and racism. Ghurye states that the ideas of purity, whether occupational or ceremonial were a factor in the genesis of caste and are responsible for the practice of untouchability. Ghurye refers to Namashshudras of West Bengal whose social position was very low accounting for 320,000 according to the 1951 census. He was of the view that untouchable classes should be assimilated into Hindu society. By assimilation, Ghurye meant transformation of the status of untouchables' for which he advocated four steps namely:

First, removing individual's disability that hampers a better and cleaner living;

Second enabling these classes to cultivate cleaner and moral mode of life;

Thirdly, to encounter those of other sections to have freer social interaction with these people; and Fourthly to weaken and eradicate the exclusive spirit of caste.

Ghurye wanted this revolutionary task to be achieved through the establishment of a central administrative organization and provincial and local communities to adjudicate the disputes that arise between ritually pure and impure castes. He also suggested providing modern technology, training and employment to the untouchable classes in order to facilitate their assimilation into Hindu society. He did not think that reserved reservation was necessary since it tends to perpetuate the distinction based on birth. He also opposed reservation since it would lead to inter-caste strife and unleash caste patriotism. He reposed great faith in the 'noble' Constitution of India that promised equality to all including untouchables.

4.3.2 New Roles of Caste in India

Ghurye's work on caste contained some interesting speculations, which have been proved to be correct. Firstly, he noted that the Indian castes had fostered

voluntary association for furtherance of education and reformist aims. The Nadars, Reddys and Kammas of South India, Saraswat Brahmins of Maharashtra and Vaisyas, and Kayasthas of North India, to mention only a few, founded caste associations. Ghurye presumed that in the future they would give rise to a political consciousness based on caste ties. In the post-Independent India, the caste associations have been quite vocal about getting political concessions to their members. In the later decades of twentieth century, Rajni Kothari, a political analyst, extensively analysed the caste associations. Unlike Ghurye, Kothari recognised the positive roles of these caste associations such as taking up welfare activities, etc. According to Ghurye, they have served to mainly articulate the people's political aspirations in a democratic framework. Secondly, Ghurye referred to the various agitations of the backward classes for better privileges. These struggles seemed to be undermining the integrity of the Indian society. Thus, the caste system was becoming "pluralist" in the sense that each caste was in competition or conflict with the other for bigger share of the nation's wealth. Hence, according to Ghurye this scramble for privileges was damaging the unity of society.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Name the British anthropologist who influenced G.S. Ghurye very much. Use about one line.

.....

- 2) What was the approach of Ghurye in studying caste in Indian society?

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.....
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.....

4.3.3 Study of Tribes in India

Ghurye's works on the tribes were general as well as specific. He wrote a general work on scheduled tribes in which he dwelt with the historical, administrative and social dimensions of Indian tribes. He also wrote on specific tribes such as the Kolis of Maharashtra. Ghurye was of the view that the Indian tribes were like "backward Hindus". Their backwardness was due to their imperfect integration into Hindu society. The Santhals, Bhils, Gonds, etc. who live in South-Central India are examples of it. Ghurye (1963) wrote, "While sections of these tribes are properly integrated in the Hindu society, very large sections, in fact the bulk of them are rather loosely integrated..... Under the circumstances, the only proper description of these peoples is that they are the imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society".

For Ghurye, the incorporation of Hindu values and norms into tribal life was a positive development. With increasing contact with the Hindu social groups the tribes had slowly absorbed certain Hindu values and style of life and came to

be considered part of the Hindu caste society. The tribes gave up liquor-drinking, received education and improved their agriculture under Hindu influence. In this respect, Hindu voluntary organisations such as Ramakrishna Mission and Arya Samaj played a constructive role. In his later works on 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.

Box 4.4 Assimilation of Scheduled Tribes

Ghurye wanted Scheduled Tribes to be assimilated into the Hindu society and polity, just as he wanted Scheduled Castes to also be merged. While he wanted the tribes of Central India to be integrated through Hinduisation, as he felt contact with the Hindus would enhance their status. On the other hand, he wanted the tribes of North-east to be politically integrated through the administrative measures of the Indian state. Ghurye did not advocate Hinduisation of North-east tribes because of the significant presence of Christianity among the Nagas, Mizos and Khasis and also due to the fact that some of these sections of tribes had embraced Hinduism and Buddhism.

4.3.4 Rural-urbanisation in India

Ghurye was interested in the process of rural-urbanisation. He held the view that the urbanisation in India was not a simple function of industrial growth. In India, the process of urbanisation, at least till 1980s, started from within the rural area itself. Ghurye quoted Sanskrit texts and documents to illustrate the growth of urban centres from the need for markets felt in rural hinterland. In other words, owing to the expansion of agriculture, more and more markets were needed to exchange the surplus in food grains. Hence, in many rural regions, one part of a big village was converted into a market; in turn, this led to a township which developed administrative, judicial and other institutions. We may add here that urban centres were also based on feudal **patronage**. In the past, demand of royal courts for silk cloth, weapons, jewellery, metal artifacts led to the growth of urban centres such as Varanasi, Kanchipuram, Jaipur, Moradabad etc.

In sum, Ghurye's approach to "rural-urbanisation" showed the indigenous source of urbanism. The growth of metropolitan centres during colonial times altered the Indian urban life. The towns and cities were no longer the outlets for agricultural produce and handicrafts; but they became the major manufacturing centres, which used rural hinterland for producing raw-materials and turned it into a market for selling industrial products. Thus, metropolis came to dominate the village economy. In contrast to previous pattern, now the urbanisation has started making inroads into the rural hinterland.

Box 4.5 Process of 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 was not a simple function of industrial growth. In India, the process of urbanization, at least till recent years, started form 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 as 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 clothes, jewellery, metal artifacts, weapons etc. This led to the growth of urban centres such as Banaras, Kanchipuram, Jaipur, Moradabad etc. in brief, it may be said that Ghurye's approach to "rural-urbanization" reflects the indigenous source of urbanism. During colonial times, the growth of metropolitan centres altered the Indian life. The towns and cities were no longer the outlets for agricultural produce and handicrafts but they became the major manufacturing centres. These centres used rural areas for producing raw materials and turned into a market for selling industrial products. Thus, the metropolitan economy emerged to dominate the village economy. Therefore, urbanization started making inroads into the rural hinterland in contrast to previous pattern. A large city or metropolis also functioned as the centre of culture of the territory encompassing it. For Ghurye, the large city with its big complexes of higher education, research, judiciary, health services, print and entertainment media is a cradle innovation that ultimately serves cultural growth. The functions of the city are to perform a culturally integrative role, to act as a point of focus and the centre of radiation of the major tenets of the age. Not any city, but large city or metropolis having an organic link with the life of the people of its region can do this work well. According to Ghurye, an urban planner must tackle the problems of (1) sufficient supply of drinking water, (2) human congestion, (3) traffic congestion, (4) regulation of public vehicles, (5) insufficiency of railway transport in cities like Mumbai, (6) erosion of trees, (7) sound pollution, (8) indiscriminate tree felling, and (9) plight of the pedestrians.

Ghurye made the study of a village in Pune district of Maharashtra to highlight the continuity of the social structure. This village named Lonik and had been studied by a British officer in 1819. He described its general layout, economic infrastructure, caste composition, market transactions and political and religious dispositions. The re-survey of the village made by Ghurye in 1957 did not reveal any far-reaching differences in the demographic, economic and social dimensions of the village. Besides, he found that the layout of the village corresponded to the pattern laid down in a text of

antiquity. He also noted that the village did not have a very well-knit social structure; there were loose strands in its social fabric. In spite of it the village had survived as a viable unit.

G S Ghurye

Activity 1

Read carefully the paragraphs in sub-section 4.4.2 on central ideas of G.S. Ghurye on rural-urbanisation in India. Discuss with two elders about the kind of changes they have seen taking place in their city, town or village after the colonial period. Ask them about the changes in the layout of the village, that is, how it has been planned, where the market is situated, where the residential areas are situated and so on.

Write a note of about a page on the- “Rural- Urban growth in My City or Town or Village”, Compare your note, if possible with notes of other students at your Study Centre.

4.3.5 Religious Beliefs and Practices in India

Ghurye made original contributions to the study of Indian religious beliefs and practices. He wrote three books on this in the period between 1950 and 1965. He argued that the religious consciousness in ancient India, Egypt and Babylonia was centered around the temples. There were also similarities between Indian and Egyptian patterns of worship and temple architecture. In his work on the role of Gods in Indian religion, Ghurye traced the rise of major deities such as Shiva, Vishnu and Durga to the need to integrate local or sub-regional beliefs into a macro-level system of worship. The diverse ethnic groups in India were integrated into a religious complex around these deities. Political or public patronage was often the basis for the spread of popular cults in India. The Ganesha festival in Maharashtra and Durga festival in Bengal gained popularity due to the efforts of nationalists such as B.G. Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal. Even in the beginning of the twenty first century, these festivals have retained some political overtones.

4.3.6 Role of Sadhus in Indian Tradition

In his work, *Indian Sadhus*, Ghurye (1953) examined the paradoxical nature of renunciation in India. In Indian culture, the Sadhu or Sannyasin is supposed to be detached from all caste norms, social conventions, etc. In fact, he is outside “the pale of society”. It is the usual practice among Shaivites to conduct a “mock funeral” of one who is entering the path of renunciation. It means that he is “dead” to society but is “reborn” in spiritual terms. Yet, interestingly enough since the time of Shankara, the eighth century reformer, Hindu society has been more or less guided by the Sadhus. These Sadhus are not individual hermits. Most of them are organised into monastic orders which have distinctive traditions. The monastic organisation in India was a product of Buddhism and Jainism. Shankara introduced it into Hinduism.

Indian renouncers have acted as the arbiters of religious disputes, patronised learning of scriptures and even defended religion against external attacks. So, renunciation has been a constructive force in Hindu society. Ghurye considered in detail the different groups of Sadhus. Important among them were the Shaivite Dashnamis (literal meaning: ten orders) and Vaishnavite Bairagis. Both these groups had the Naga (militant naked ascetics) contingents which were ready to fight off those who threatened the Hindu religion. Incidentally, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Bengali novel, *Anand Math* recounts the story of a group of Shaivite monks who put up an armed struggle against the British forces in the nineteenth century. They were no doubt defeated by the British but they thereby revealed their staunch commitment to Hinduism. These Sadhus who assembled on a large scale at Kumbh Mela were the very microcosm of India; they came from diverse regions, spoke different languages but belonged to common religious orders. Asceticism, according to Ghurye, was not a relic of the past but a vital aspect of the current practices of Hinduism. The well-known ascetics of the recent times, Vivekanand, Dayanand Saraswati and Sri Aurobindo worked for the betterment of Hinduism.

4.3.7 Indian Art and Architecture

Ghurye was also keenly interested in Indian art. According to him, the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist artistic monuments shared common elements. By contrast, Hindu and Muslim monuments were grounded in diverse value systems. The Indian temples were indigenous in inspiration. The Veda, epics and Purana provided them with popular themes. But Muslim art was Persian or Arabic and had no roots in this soil. He did not agree with the view that the Muslim monuments in India represented a synthesis. The Hindu elements remain decorative in Muslim buildings. By contrast, the Rajput architecture retained its commitment to Hindu ideals, in spite of political control of Rajasthan by Muslim rulers. Ghurye traced the costumes in India from the ancient to the present time. He drew upon Hindu, Buddhist and Jain artistic works (architecture and sculpture) to illustrate the variations in costume over the ages.

Radhakamal Mukerjee, as noted earlier, wrote on Indian art. There was, however, a difference in his approach to art. Mukerjee viewed it as a vehicle of values, norms and ideals of a civilisation which had thrived through centuries. Ghurye, by contrast, was looking at art as a specifically Hindu configuration. Ghurye wrote that Rajput architecture was the assertion of Hindu faith in its own destiny. Mukerjee looked at the same phenomenon of artistic activity somewhat differently. He held that the Rajputs were fervently engaged in building monuments which they believed would outlast them as their artistic heritage. Thus, in spite of their continuous battles with Muslim overlords, they used their resources to patronise art.

4.3.8 Hindu-Muslim Relationships

G S Ghurye

Ghurye's works often discussed Hindu-Muslim relationships. He regarded Hindus and Muslims as separate groups, with little possibility of mutual give and take.

The pro-Hindu stance of Ghurye was based on the conflicts engendered by nearly seven centuries of Islamic rule in India. The forced conversions, destruction of places of worship, etc. no doubt damaged the Hindu psyche. Looking critically at Ghurye's views, it is necessary to add here that the predatory acts of Muslim rulers find no sanction in Koran. Islam does not advocate violence. What happened was that political expediency rather than commitment to faith made the Muslim rulers use force against their 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 and shared patterns of life style showed that Islamic rule had a positive side. Communal tensions were in fact mainly a product of colonial rule. It was a political strategy of the British to divide the Indian society, especially the Hindus and the Muslims, after the 1857 Mutiny so that they could not fight them as a united force. Communalism also received a fillip by the expansion of urbanism due to conflict of interest. Mostly, the communal riots have almost always taken place in India's urban centres due to political and economic reasons under the garb of religion. Ghurye's works have focused on the disturbances during his life-time. In reality, in pre-British times there was good cooperation between the two communities.

4.3 IMPORTANT WORKS

Some of the important works of Ghurye in sociology are:

- i) *Indian Sadhus* (1953)
- ii) *Family and Kin in Indo-European Culture* (1961)
- iii) *Gods and Men* (1962)
- iv) *Anatomy of a Rururban Community* (1962)
- v) *Scheduled Tribes* (1963)
- vi) *Caste and Race in India* (1969, Fifth Edition)

Some of his other works which show us the range of his interests are:

- i) *Bharatnatyam and its Costume* (1958)
- ii) *Cities and civilisation* (1962)
- iii) *Indian costume* (1962, Second Edition)

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Describe the opinion of G. S. Ghurye on the tribes in India.

.....

- 2) Describe Ghurye's approach to the study of urban growth in India.

.....

4.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you learnt about the biographical details of G S Ghurye. We describes some of his major ideas in the field of sociology. We discussed his ideas concerning caste and kinship, new roles of caste in India, tribes, process of rural-urbanization in India, religious beliefs and practices in India, role of sadhus in Indian tradition, Indian art and architecture, and Hindu-Muslim relationships.

4.6 REFERENCES

Indira Gandhi National Open University Course Material. 2003. *Sociological Thought* (ESO-13), New Delhi; IGNOU.

4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The British anthropologist, who influenced G.S. Ghurye deeply, was Dr. W.H.R. Rivers.
- 2) Ghurye studied the historical, comparative and integrative aspects of caste system in India. His approach was ethnographic, using historical, Indological and statistical data

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) According to Ghurye, the various tribes such as Bhils, Gonds, Santhals, etc. in India are like "backward Hindus". The backwardness of these tribes is a result of their imperfect integration in the Hindu society.
- 2) The process of urbanisation in India, according to Ghurye, is unique since it is not a result of industrial growth. In India, urbanisation process began from the rural areas because of the need for exchanging surplus food grains. Market developed in the rural areas slowly and became centres of small towns with their own administrative, judicial machinery and other institutions. These urban centres were also sometimes dependent on feudal patronage. Some examples of such towns are Banaras, Kanchipuram, Jaipur, Moradabad, etc.

UNIT 5 DHURJATI PRASAD MUKERJI*

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Biographical Sketch
- 5.3 Central Ideas
 - 5.3.1 Role of Tradition in Indian Society
 - 5.3.2 Integrated Development of Personality
 - 5.3.3 D. P. Mukerji's Views on Unity in Diversity
 - 5.3.4 D. P. Mukerji as an Economist
- 5.4 Important Works
- 5.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.6 References
- 5.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

5.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- describe the contributions of Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji;
- outline the biographical details of Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji;
- explain some of his central ideas in sociology; and
- list some of his important works.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 1, you learnt about the emergence of sociology in India. We gave you a broad outline of how sociology came to be established as a discipline in Indian universities. You learnt about the role played by several Indian and foreign scholars in the development of sociology and its link with social anthropology and Indology. You have thus obtained a broad idea of the background in which sociology developed in India.

In units 3 and 4, we dealt with the contributions of two sociologists: Radhakamal Mukerjee and G. S. Ghurye. They worked during a time when the spirit of freedom was alive in the soul of every Indian. The National Movement was part of the background of these scholars and critically shaped

*Adapted from Unit 5 of IGNOU course material *Sociological Thought* (ESO 15) by Nita Mathur

their writings. In this unit we will discuss the life and work of D P Mukerji. Section 5.3 gives a biographical sketch of D. P. Mukerji. Section 5.3 describes the central ideas of D M Mukerji and Section 5.4 provides the important works.

5.2 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

D. P. Mukerji was a Marxist who analysed Indian history in terms of a dialectical process. Tradition and modernity, colonialism and nationalism, individualism and collectivism could be seen as dialectically interacting with each other. Here we will give you a biographical sketch of D. P. Mukerji. This will help you to understand his central ideas in their proper perspective.

Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji was popularly known as “D. P. ”. He was born in 1894 in a middle class Brahmin family of Bengal. It was during this period that the literary influence of Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee was at its peak. There was renaissance of Bengali literature at this time.

D. P. Mukerji did his graduation from Bangbasi College, Bengal. First he was a student of history which included economics at that time, then he took a degree in economics. He was a man of letters in Bengali and wrote some fiction also but he did not pursue this line for long. He did not confine to the boundaries of a particular discipline. It was perhaps for this reason that he became a sociologist, as Sociology is the most comprehensive social science. He attained not only national but international fame as a sociologist.

In 1922 he joined the Lucknow University as a lecturer in Economics and Sociology. He was in his own words a Marxologist. His roots in middle class Brahmin family led him instinctively to blend Marxism with Indian tradition. D. P. Mukerji always thought that ideas of Karl Marx were relevant in India when adapted to conditions of Indian history and tradition. He, therefore, always emphasised the study of social processes and social movements.

He was born in the golden age of criticism and reflected this age in true senses in his own work. To every subject he brought critical criteria from as many fields as possible. He had the faculty of looking at every problem from a new angle. He was an art critic, music critic, a drama critic and a critic of life. In him we find a blend of Anglo-Bengalee culture.

D. P. Mukerji was a man of aesthetic sensibilities. He was interested in style, even in the style of his dress. He was a slim man who disliked gaining even an extra pound of weight. In thinking also he hated padding or writing anything superfluous or irrelevant. His style of writing was sharp, spare and incisive. He was a sophisticated man who rarely revealed his emotions. For him, emotions should not be exhibited but should be fused with the intellectual process.

He loved to be a teacher and was very popular amongst his students. He encouraged dialogue and interchange of ideas with his students. Thus, he was

co-student, a co-enquirer who never stopped learning. He was such an influence on his students that he lived in the minds of his students even after his death.

For some time D. P. Mukerji became the Director of Information when the Congress assumed office in U.P. His influence brought the spirit of an intellectual approach to public relations. He was also part of the foundation of the Bureau of Economics and Statistics. He returned in 1939 to the Lucknow University when Congress relinquished office on the war issue at the beginning of the Second World War. In 1947 he was appointed as a member of U. P. Labour Inquiry Committee. It was in 1951 that he was made a professor. This was a late recognition but D. P. never felt bitter about it.

A year before his retirement at Lucknow, in 1953, he was invited to head the Department of Economics at Aligarh. He stayed there for five years. He went to The Hague as a visiting professor of sociology at the International Institute of Social Studies. He was a founder member of the Indian Sociological Association and one of the members of its Managing Committee and its Editorial Board. He also represented the association at the International Sociological Association of which he became the Vice President.

He wrote several books and articles in diverse fields. After Independence he watched political movements with great interest but was not a politician in any sense. He was influenced by two national leaders, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai and Jawaharlal Nehru. He used to correspond with Nehru. As an intellectual he did not have a cloistered mind. He brought refinement to his subject. He was influenced by many but till the end he remained a scholar who influenced many others. He died of throat cancer in 1962. But as stated earlier, he survives through his students.

5.3 CENTRAL IDEAS

Marxism, according to D. P. Mukerji, helped one to understand the historical developments well but it could not offer a satisfactory solution to human problems. That solution was to be found in the regeneration and reinterpretation of India's national culture. He was opposed to the positivism of modern social sciences which reduced individuals into biological or psychological units. The industrial culture of the West had turned individuals into self-seeking agents; the society in the West had become ethnocentric. By emphasising individuation (i. e. , recognition of the roles and rights of the individual) positivism had uprooted the social anchors of humanity.

5.3.1 Role of Tradition in Indian Society

Mukerji held that tradition was the mainspring of culture. The individuals drew their nourishment from the tradition. They did not lose a sense of purposes or direction. But tradition often became a deadweight, as in India. Also, people made fetish of it, that is, they idealised it and worshipped it. Cultural stagnation was bound to result on account of the people's uncritical

attitude towards it. Therefore, individuation must also be encouraged. The individuals can recreate culture by infusing it with new vigour. The individual is to be neither totally free nor un-free. For the evolution of a healthy personality, there must be a balance between individuation and sociation. Sociation is the bond of the individual with society. Individual's freedom must not be anarchy but a creative expression of the tradition.

5.3.2 Integrated Development of Personality

Mukerji did not commend to Indians the positivistic construction of personality. The Western personality made a fetish of achievement. Science and technology had been harnessed to great improvements in the living conditions of masses. The capacity of human beings to control nature and use it to their advantage are notable achievements of the modern age. However, the Western approach could not lead to an integrated development. For an integrated development of personality there was need for a balance between technological development and human freedom. Even a socialist society such as Soviet Russia had failed to evolve a balanced personality. There, the individuals had been dominated by the state or the political party.

D. P. Mukerji's dialecticism was rooted in humanism which cut across narrow ethnic or national consideration. In the West, the individuals had become either aggressive or docile. The Western progress was devoid of humanism. The Renaissance and Industrial Revolution had freed individuals from the grip of stagnant medieval tradition but at the same time reduced the humanist content of progress. The modern nationalism is essentially nurtured in the positivistic aspects of the West. It could not be an appropriate model for India. Besides, India's middle classes were a product of Western impact on India. They were uprooted from their own indigenous tradition. They had lost contact with the masses. India could become a modern nation if the middle classes re-established their links with the masses. Only then a genuine development was possible. For D. P. Mukerji growth was a mere quantitative achievement, development was a qualitative term denoting value-based progress.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Briefly describe D. P. Mukerji's idea of Sociology.

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- 2) According to D P Mukerji, what are the pre-requisites for integrated personality?

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5.3.3 D. P. Mukerji's Views on Unity in Diversity

D. P. Mukerji was involved in depicting Hindu-Muslim relations. His search for truth led him to discover humanistic and spiritual unity in the diversities of Indian culture. He was examining many of the areas within the broad framework of Hindu-Muslim interaction. There were three areas of interaction which were worthy of note. i) Politically, the Islamic kings ruled over the Hindu subjects from eleventh to seventeenth centuries A. D. in North India. At the same time, there were established alliances between Muslim rulers and Hindu rajas. Hence, there was a sense of partnership between Muslim rulers and Hindu subjects; this was more evident during the Mughal rule. ii) In economic relations, during the Islamic rule while the jagirdars (military chiefs) were Muslims, most of the zamindars were Hindus. These two groups shared many interests in common. Thus, together these two classes formed an alliance. iii) Culturally, in literature, music, costumes, cultivation of fine arts, etc., there were reciprocal influences. Both Sufism and Bhaktism in the north encouraged mutual interactions. However, the Muslims and Hindus differed in their world view.

Mukerji noted that the Hindu mind thought in terms of cycles: the good and the bad succeeded each other. The Hindus had a fatalistic view. Further, the Hindu world view was the product of a distinctive territory, a subcontinent. Islam by contrast was a multi-ethnic, multi-national religion. Hindu approach to nationhood was idealistic, Islamic approach was pragmatic. For the Hindu freedom was a "birth right"; for the Muslim it was an opportunity. The Muslim view was non-cyclic and non-fatalistic. Hence the Muslim view favoured direct action to make the best use of a political crisis or opportunity.

5.3.4 D. P. Mukerji as an Economist

D. P. Mukerji was by training an economist. His approach to economics was, however, distinct from that of other economists. He viewed the economic development in India in terms of historical and cultural specificities. The economic forces in India were influenced by social values. During ancient times, the king and the members of royal court did not own the lands. The powers conferred on the king were limited to fiscal obligations; that is to say, the tillers of land had to give a portion of their produce to the treasury as tax or revenue in return for the royal protection. The ownership of the land was mainly vested in the village councils. During the heyday of Buddhism, the Sangha (monastic organisation) often managed extensive lands, which were granted to them by kings. Although the individual monks (Bhikshus) could not possess or own property, the Sangha owned properties. One-sixth of the agricultural produce called as tax by the Sangha was utilised for the cultivation of learning and pursuit of ethical and spiritual goals.

Just as village lands were controlled by kin and caste groups, which were internally autonomous, even trade and banking in India were managed by kinship and caste networks in pre-modern times. The guilds which carried on

regional trade were usually based on castes. Commercial banking was also controlled by castes. There were important money-lending Hindu families on the West coast whose influence was widespread especially during Mughal rule. Mukerji did not treat the merchants as mere parasites; on the contrary, he regarded them as those who established trade networks between urban centres and rural hinterland. But during the colonial rule they began exploiting as they shed their earlier cultural constraints. The Indian merchant princes often travelled to foreign countries to display their wares; thereby they linked India to the outside world not only through trade but through the spread of culture.

The British rule in India brought about widespread changes in Indian economy. The urban-industrial economy introduced by the British set aside not only the older institutional networks but also the traditional classes. This called for a new social adaptation. In the new set-up the educated middle classes of India's urban centres became the focal point of society.

However, these middle classes were dominated by Western life styles and thinking. The future of India would be secure if the middle classes reached out to the masses and established an active partnership with them in nation-building.

Box 5.1: Rise of the Middle Class in India

..[T]he British moved in with their totally alien form of economy based on money and mechanical production. They destroyed indigenous merchant capital, trade and commerce, self-sufficient rural economy, and traditional panchayat. They introduced new land-settlement based on the concepts of private property and profit, generated physical and occupational mobility in a hitherto more or less static society, and imposed on Indians and educational system with English as the medium of instruction. The new land-revenue system produced the category of absentee landlords- the main pillar of strength of British in rural India. These landlords remained divorced from both agricultural productivity and responsibility towards villagers. Similarly, English education gave birth to a class, who wouldn't support the colonial masters and were psychologically and socially distant from the majority of Indians who did not know English. These two classes-the landlords and the literati formed the new middle class, who were absolutely alienated from the language and culture of people. [...] (Chakrabarti 2010: 237-238).

5.4 IMPORTANT WORKS

Some of the important sociological works of D. P. Mukerji are:

- a) *Basic Concepts in Sociology* (1932)
- b) *Personality and the Social Sciences* (1924)
- c) *Modern Indian Culture* (1942)
- d) *Problems of Indian Youths* (1946)
- e) *Diversities* (1958)

Out of these books, *Modern Indian Culture* (1942) and *Diversities* (1958) are his best known works. His versatility can be seen from his other contributions too, such as, his books,

- a) *Tagore: A Study* (1943)
- b) *On Indian History* (1943)
- c) *Introduction to Indian Music* (1943)

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) In what way was Mukerji's approach to economics different from that of other economists?

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- 2) Give the names of the two of D. P. Mukerji's major works in sociology.

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5.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we discussed the biographical details of the D P Mukerji. We have described some of his major ideas in the field of sociology. His ideas on the role of tradition in Indian society, integrated development of personality, and unity in diversity are referred to by many sociologists. Finally, we have listed some of the important works of the three thinkers.

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5.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) D. P. Mukerji was keenly interested in social processes taking place in a rapidly changing society like India. He was a Professor of sociology at Lucknow University which he had joined in 1922. He was trained in both economics and history and he combined sociology with economics and

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history. He called himself a Marxologist due to his belief that Marx's ideas were very relevant when adapted to Indian history and civilisation.

- 2) According to D. P. Mukerji, for an integrated development of personality there was need for a balance between technological development and human freedom.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Mukerji's approach to economics was distinct from that of other economists. He viewed the economic development in India in terms of historical and cultural specificities
- 2) Two of his important works are:
 - a) *Modern Indian Culture* (1942)
 - b) *Diversities* (1958)



UNIT 6 N K BOSE*

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Biographical Sketch
- 6.3 Central Ideas
 - 6.3.1 Methods and Approaches to the Study of Society
 - 6.3.2 Civilizational View of Indian Society
 - 6.3.3 Caste System
- 6.4 Important Works
- 6.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.6 References
- 6.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

6.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to

- outline the biographical details of N K Bose;
- explain the socio-historical environment which influenced his work;
- explain his central ideas; and
- outline some of his important works

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Nirmal Kumar Bose was a scholar with varied academic interests. He figures prominently in any discourse on the development of anthropology and sociology in India. He wrote on a wide range of subjects: social and cultural history, political science, architecture, human geography. His scientific curiosity in anthropological investigations was always matched by profound concern for human welfare. His significant works continue to inspire generations of anthropologists, sociologists and many others. In this unit we will begin with a brief biographical sketch of his life which will throw light on the factors that shaped his ideas. Thereafter, we will focus on his central ideas, identify some of his important works and finally sum up the contents of this unit.

* Written by Shaily Bhashanjaly, North Cap University, Gurugram

6.2 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Nirmal Kumar Bose was born in Kolkata in the year 1901. His father Bimanbehari was a doctor by profession. Young Nirmal was very good in sports. Nirmal Kumar admired his father's wisdom, altruism and sense of dedication for his work. His mother was Kiranshashi Devi. She led an extremely disciplined and organized life. It is said that Nirmal Kumar Bose imbibed the trait of self-restraint from his mother. In the last phase of her life, Kiranshashi Devi stayed in Puri as a widow. But, no matter how engrossed he remained with studies, Nirmal Bose would frequently visit his mother so that she did not feel lonely without his father. He received his school education from different schools in Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. He completed his Bachelor of Science with Honours in Geology and Master of Science in Anthropology from the University of Calcutta.

Box 6.1 Bose's Involvement with Civil Disobedience Movement

After completing his Masters in 1925 and gaining an exposure to field based social anthropological research Bose at the age of 29 began his career not as an academic but as a social worker who was an ardent follower of Gandhi and read almost all the relevant Gandhian literatures by that time. Since 1930 he engaged himself with Gandhian social activism and worked particularly among the subaltern Harijans of Birbhum through establishing Khadi sangha (a centre of cottage industry), and Sikshaghar (adult literacy centre). His active participation in civil disobedience movement resulted in his imprisonment for the first time as category 'C' political prisoner and Bose was put behind the bars for almost two years (1930–1932) initially at Suri and then at Dumdum Central Jail. In 1934 he met Gandhi in person for the first time at Seagram, Wardha and started working at Bolepur until 1938 (the year when he joined as a faculty in Calcutta University) following Gandhian principles with revitalized vigor and enthusiasm. Again since 1942 to 1945 he took part in August Movement and was debarred in a phased manner but this time as category 'A' political prisoner. Again in 1946 he was appointed as a professor of Cultural Geography in the University of Calcutta but managed to get an early leave to work as personal secretary to and as Bengali interpreter of Mahatma Gandhi till September 1947, and joined Gandhi during his station at several places from Noakhali (now in Bangladesh) to Kolkata (Calcutta). (Sarkar 2012: 428)

He was drawn into the national movement at a young age and this gave a distinctive edge to his scientific and literary work. He also went to jail for nationalist activities during the movement for India's Independence.

The greatest single influence on Bose's life was his association with Gandhi. Bose was interested in Gandhi's ideas on the creation of new society in India, and began by making a detailed study of his writings. He was Gandhi's secretary and close companion.

Bose was impressed about Gandhi's search for truth through experience. In his view, Gandhi was the quintessential fieldworker, always ready to see and listen,

and never drawing conclusions about a human situation without first experiencing it. He has written several books on Gandhi, including *Selections from Gandhi's Writings*.

Bose had a varied career wherein he held high positions with great distinction. He taught in various universities in India and abroad. He was the director of the Anthropological Survey of India from 1959-64 and from 1967-70 held the office of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Government of India.

In recognition of his excellent work in anthropology, Bose was awarded Annandale Gold Medal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1948. He was elected as the President of Anthropology and Archaeology Section of Indian Science Congress in 1949. He was elected a fellow of the National Institute of Science of India in 1955. He was a devoted social worker and served in various capacities in many philanthropic organizations. He received Padma Shri in 1966.

6.3 CENTRAL IDEAS

Amongst several of writings N K Bose three Bengali books, *Maben o Pracheen*, *Paribrajaker Diary* and *Hindu Samajer Garban* are considered perhaps the best. The first two are collections of essays and sketches, and the third is a brief but very bold and imaginative account of the basic features of Hindu social structure in which the perspectives of ethnography, Indology and history are combined. A great anthropologist, he tried to present a single framework involving three approaches of ethnographers, indologists and social historians.

6.3.1 Methods and Approaches to the Study of Society

Bose laid great emphasis on conducting fieldwork. He believed that every idea should be put to the test of observation and experience. Nothing concerning human society should be decided *a priori* or taken at the face value. Bose travelled extensively, throughout the length and breadth of the country, constantly interacting and sharing experiences. He was of the opinion that in order to understand Hindu civilization, an anthropologist should go beyond the applied aspect. Bose had developed his unique approach of studying social phenomena and cultural attributes in specific situational contexts. He was of the view that there could be no set ways for actual fieldwork. The nature of task at hand should guide the researcher about what tools of investigation to adopt or, even, fashion depending on the problem of inquiry. He consistently emphasized the importance of careful and meticulous observation.

According to Bose, Indian society had an inexhaustible capacity to absorb and transform ideas and experiences from every conceivable quarter. He studied the lives of tribals in India and examined the relations between tribal and non-tribal population in a larger social and cultural perspective. Bose perceived clearly that the tribal communities of India are not all of the same kind and do not stand in the same relation to the wider society. Bose uses ethnographic data to show the nature of tribal communities of Orissa and Chota Nagpur and their relations with

wider community. For classifying the tribal communities in India, he uses two related criteria - their level of technological development and the degree of their geographical and social isolation.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What attracted Bose most about Gandhi?

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2) What was the most important aspect of fieldwork outlined by Bose?

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6.3.2 Civilizational View of Indian Society

In his book, *The Structure of Hindu Society*, Bose gives civilizational view of Indian society. He has divided it into three parts. The first part mainly belongs to the domain of ethnography, where he presents material based on his own fieldwork. Fieldwork is mainly done among tribal communities. The second part is predominantly Indological, where he presents an account of the theory and practice of Hindu social life. The third part deals with social history.

Bose conducted his first independent field research among the *Juang* tribesmen of Orissa who practised shifting cultivation. Bose was struck by the fact that although Juangs were outside the fold of Hinduism, there were clear indications that Hindu religious ideas had penetrated their culture. They bath in the morning, the offerings of sun-dried rice, the terms *satya*, *devata*, *dharama* – all prove how strongly Juang religious ceremonies have been influenced by those of the neighbouring Brahminical people. Yet they have their own language; they perform their marriage and funeral customs all by themselves, eat beef and are not considered by the Hindus to be one of the Hindu castes. This brief spell of field research gave him the basic insight into the ways tribes were being absorbed into the fold of Hindu caste-based society.

Bose shows that the influence of Aryan or Brahminical civilization has been greater in both extent and depth among the Mundas and Oraons than the Juangs or Savaras. It is through influences of this kind that tribal communities become increasingly articulated with the wider society. The process was described as “the Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption” and according to Bose it enabled marginal communities to become a part of Hindu society without requiring them to abandon all their particular customs.

It is interesting to note that Hindu castes like Ahir, Lohar and Midha also join the tribal people in their celebrations, and unless one is told who is who, no distinction can be drawn between them.

On the nature of cultural process of change, he observed that there are occasional fissions within one caste. Also, absorption of tribal groups from outside into the pail of Hindu social organization is observed. New recruits like Juang or Mundas may not exactly now be called Hindu castes. The reason is that they have yet retained their independent social rites which are not ruled over by Brahmins. But here we see the operation of a method by means of which the Hindus absorbed tribal groups within their own system.

The co-existence and inter-penetration of two modes of social organization – ‘Brahmanical’ and ‘tribal’ – was investigated by Bose in the field which clearly indicates his capacity as a field scientist. According to Bose, these two modes of social organization have coexisted in India for a very long time. The first had a superior technological base, was larger in scale and complex in organization than the second. It was the higher technical efficiency and the right given to all communities to practice their distinctive customs even when in a hierarchical arrangement that attracted the tribal communities to it.

As an anthropologist, Bose was interested not merely in revealing a certain pattern of culture but also in discovering the theory behind the pattern. The theory was an indispensable aid in understanding how the society actually worked.

Bose also seeks evidence from the domain of indology to test his ideas about the design of Hindu society. He has borrowed material from a variety of sources such as the epics, the *Smritis*, Buddhist texts etc. He notes that the processes which can be reconstructed from a reading of the sacred literature are substantially the same as those which are identified by the ethnologist from observations made in the field. He quotes a story from Ramayana as an example of attempts made by individuals of the lower castes to adopt the practice of the twice-born. Bose tries to identify the design of the ‘varna’ system from a reading of the epics and the *Smritis*. He finds in them the continual attempt to explain the ranks occupied by particular communities according to their origin and function. He also gives brief ideas of the king’s duties as laid down in various texts. The king’s rule accommodated the diversity of customs that prevailed among the different communities which together constituted the larger society. Underlying these customs was the principle of a particular type of economic organization which, according to Bose, gave Hindu society its distinctive character.

The village life was in many ways the basic unit of economic organization in the traditional system. Bose discusses the village life and focuses on the division of labour which was fairly elaborate. The villagers produced most of what they consumed and to this extent that village was a self-sufficient unit. But, the self-sufficiency of the village was relative and not absolute. What was not produced within the village could be procured from weekly markets or fairs or pilgrim

centres, which were visited by people from far and wide. Bose also gives some glimpses of city life, drawing mainly from the work of *Vatsyayna*, the ancient Indian philosopher.

Muslim rule brought some changes in Indian society. Some new crafts were introduced, but these were confined mainly to towns and cities. Even when they penetrated into the rural areas, they did not alter the basic pattern of economic organization in the village. Bose gives two examples of attempts to challenge the very basis of Hindu social organization, i.e., Buddhism in the ancient period and the Bhakti movement of Chaitanya in the medieval period.

These movements rejected the ascription of status by birth and the hierarchical ranking of castes. They brought new life into religion but they failed to make a significant dent on the existing social order. They did not generate any fundamental changes in the organization of production.

Fundamental changes in the economic order were ushered in by the British. The new economic forces introduced steadily eroded the traditional division of labour based on caste. Bose shows from an analysis of census data that the association between caste and traditional occupation began to weaken. Through an analysis of caste journals and other documents, Bose tries to identify the new demands put forward by various castes. The lower castes put forth the claims to higher social status and demanded concessions from the British government. The ideological basis of traditional Hindu society came to be challenged.

Bose felt that an exploration of the past would be used to the present and the future only if it were conducted in a truly scientific spirit. Using historical examples, Bose discusses some of the ways in which the structure of Hindu society began to loosen and change under the impact of British rule.

Thus the book *The Structure of Hindu Society* is an exposition of the ideas on which Hindu society was constituted. Bose attached great significance to the economic factor as a source of both stability and change in social life. He was also aware of the importance of agriculture technology. It is common knowledge imparted by anthropology that the tribals learned the skills of agriculture from the caste Hindus. Tribals had an opportunity to come closer with the caste Hindus because of the Gandhian struggle for freedom. Bose believed that one very prominent contribution of freedom struggle was that it narrowed down the society's diversity.

Bose took special interest in the economic organization of the tribal people. He believed that the best way of classifying the numerous tribal groups in India is not by language, religion or race but by mode of livelihood.

This type of classification enables one to see more clearly the relationship between the 'tribal' and the 'non-tribal' dimensions of Hindu civilization. Bose believed that the 'tribal' and 'non-tribal' people have been in continual interaction, and the key to understanding of this inter-action lies in the different types of productive system under which they lived. In his book *Tribal Life in India* (1970), Bose has observed that barring a very small fraction, there is little

difference in economic life of tribals and peasant and artisan communities. The difference between our rural folk and urban classes is undoubtedly greater than that between peasants and the tribal communities so far as their occupations are concerned. His understanding of tribals' absorption to caste is a significant angle to analyse the unity of Indian culture. He focuses on how similar material culture helps in binding zones of India into one framework. Bose felt that the tribal people were under constant pressure to abandon their isolation in favour of absorption into the wider society. This pressure was generated mainly by economic circumstances..

Besides, Bose was deeply interested in the study of architecture, Indian Civilization, caste system. During his lifetime at Puri in Orissa, Bose came in contact with a temple architect who initiated Bose to the traditional canons of Orissa architecture. He learnt from the field that a student of civilization will have to integrate information from various levels: the text as well as the product of arts. The elegance of ancient Orissan temples fascinated Bose so much that he started giving lectures on these temples to the visitors of Puri. Bose has written authoritatively on temple architecture – a subject that was very dear to his heart. He had an abiding interest in the material culture of the tribal people, and wrote with professional skill technology of shifting cultivation, and on various crafts such as oil-pressing, pottery and weaving.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Name the tribal community with which Bose conducted first independent research.

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- 2) List two criteria used by Bose to classify tribal communities in India.

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6.3.3 Caste System

With respect to caste system, Bose draws a distinction between varna system and several jatis that operate 'under specific conditions' of a village or region. He emphasises that caste system is not as immutable as it is generally assumed to be. The varna system became increasingly more complex due to the internal process of formation of new jatis as well as by assimilation of external groups within its fold. Bose's interest in the study of caste system in India appeared in his mind when he was working among the untouchables in the slums under the Gandhian Reconstruction Programme. He rejected the myth of divine origin, reincarnation and notion of purity and pollution.

In a series of articles 'Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption' (1941), 'Caste in India' (1951), and 'Some Aspects of Caste in Bengal' (1958), Bose proposes that the root of persistence of the caste system is to be found in the economic and cultural security provided by the non-competitive, hereditary, and vocation-based productive organization. Such a system operated in isolated village communities guided by general norm of inter-ethnic cultural tolerance. Bose viewed that the recent developments indicate deviations from the non- ascribed traditional system towards a one. In other words, the old structure being used in various combinations in new social meaning.

Besides having interest in change-oriented study of Indian caste system, Bose also developed interest in the study of castes as self-regulating corporate groups, guiding the social life of their members. A number of studies on operation of caste associations in different regions of India were initiated by him. In some of these, the roles of kings, temples, *mathas*, etc. were also brought into focus in regulation of caste norms. Bose rejected the argument that weakening of the caste system in India was a consequence of the spread of western education. He maintained that western education would not be able to hit the caste system if it was not accompanied with large-scale reorganization of economic life of the country.

Box 6.2 Gandhi's Notion of Trusteeship

Indeed at the root of this doctrine of equal distribution must lie that of the trusteeship of the wealthy for the superfluous wealth possessed by them. For according to the doctrine they may not possess a rupee more than their neighbours. How is this to be brought about? Non-violently? Or should the wealthy be dispossessed of their possessions? To do this we would naturally have to resort to violence. This violent action cannot benefit society. Society will be the poorer, for it will lose the gifts of a man who knows how to accumulate wealth. Therefore the non-violent way is evidently superior. The rich man will be left in possession of his wealth, of which he will use what he reasonably requires for his personal needs and will act as a trustee for the remainder to be used for society. In this argument honesty on the part of the trustee is assumed (Gandhi 1940: 260-61).

N K Bose was appointed Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in 1967. Among others, he was chiefly engaged with monitoring their social and economic condition, social security in different parts of the country. His contribution towards nation building is evident in the efforts that he made towards ameliorating their condition. Bose compared the condition of scheduled tribes in India with those in European countries. The sharp contrast between the two is attributed to deep rooted hierarchy and stratification in Indian society. Hierarchy and stratification opposed social change in India. Bose was critical of the caste system in India. He was committed to the idea of equality among castes. He felt that Gandhi's way of bringing social equality and justice was holistic. Bose was in complete agreement with Gandhi's notion of trusteeship and

favoured the idea of building a trusteeship of wealth. This would enable the poor to benefit from collective wealth without being obliged to the rich.

6.4 IMPORTANT WORKS

Some of the important works of N K Bose are:

Cultural Anthropology (1929)

Culture and Society in India (1967)

The Structure of Hindu Society (1975)

6.5 LET US SUM UP

Bose was a leading Indian anthropologist, who played a formative role in building an Indian tradition in anthropology. We began his unit with an understanding of the social and cultural background which influenced the life and ideas of N K Bose. We learnt that even as a child, he was disciplined and sensitive to the suffering of others. He joined the movement for Independence of the country. He acknowledged a number of scholars and writers from whom he got his intellectual stimulation. His basic insight of social science was grown at the time when he proceeded to solve the socio-political problem of the country under the idealism of Gandhi. Towards the end of the unit, we noted some of his important works. The contributions of Bose are immensely valuable and is widely acclaimed.

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6.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The greatest single influence on Bose's life was his association with Gandhi. Bose was interested in Gandhi's ideas on the creation of new society in India
- 2) Bose emphasized the importance of careful and meticulous observation in fieldwork.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Bose conducted his first independent field research among the *Juang* tribesmen of Orissa who practised shifting cultivation.
- 2) N K Bose lists two criteria to classify tribal communities in India: level of technological development; and degree of geographical and social isolation.



UNIT 7 VERRIER ELWIN*

Structure

7.0 Objectives

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Biographical Sketch

7.3 Central Ideas

7.3.1 Cultural Autonomy of Tribals

7.3.2 Issue of Tribal Identity

7.3.3 Fieldwork and Methods

7.4 Important Works

7.5 Let Us Sum Up

7.6 References

7.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

7.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- outline the life and works of Verrier Elwin;
- discuss Elwin's contribution to the issue of tribal of identity;
- explain Elwin-Ghurye debate on protection and integration of tribal identity ; and
- discuss Elwin's insights on tribal development in post-Independent India.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Verrier Elwin (1902-1964) was a 'self-made anthropologist' and a public intellectual-cum-reformer of his time; an ethically grounded and committed institution-builder and an iconoclast, who could translate the real voices of the tribal communities to both the academic and administrative discourses in post-independent India. Later, he took Indian citizenship. Elwin made the forests in India his home and treated tribal communities of those habitats like his own kin. He occupied administrative and official positions pertaining to the development of tribal communities distributed in different parts of India and actively contributed to the process of nation-building.

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This unit explores his major contributions to Indian anthropology, his approaches to the study of tribal communities, research methods, and his published corpus which includes a variety of literary expressions and writing styles.

7.2 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Harry Verrier Holman Elwin was the son of anglican bishop. His father died at a young age. Shamrao Hivale, a colleague and friend of Elwin, provides an interesting documentation of Elwin's student life, which carries an insightful account to understanding the protean possibilities hidden in his persona. Hivale notes that 'Verrier won a lot of prizes in his final year at school, but he could not manage to get a scholarship at St. John's College. In 1921, Elwin went up to Merton as a Commoner without much hope of a great academic career ahead of him. However, he reached Oxford University, where he found his actual potential to enter in varied fields of academics with a wide-ranging sense of inquisitiveness, which reflected in his engagement with different kinds of social circles among friends' (Hivale 1946: 5). Elwin got enrolled in English Literature in his third term in 1921, a discipline that, had yet not evolved into an established subject in the University, and therefore not qualified for scholarship grants. Later he moved on to study theology for two years. (Elwin 1964).

Box 7.1 Elwin's Life in India

He....came back to a remote village of the Gond tribe where he and Hivale opened a school and a dispensary. The place had been recommended to him by the Anglican bishop of the region who added the information that of the last five Europeans to stay in that part of the country, four had died within a year. The work with tribesmen had been recommended by quite a different character. Elwin had decided that he had to be in closer contact with the people than he could be in the Order in Poona, and he consulted with one of the chiefs of the nationalist movement, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, about working among untouchables. Patel dissuaded him; it was for Hindus, he said, to make reparation to the untouchables and there were many social workers and missionaries doing so. He advised Elwin to work among tribal peoples. So he did for the rest of his lifetime. To the religious drive to make reparation, Elwin soon added the urge to make tribal peoples known as real people, rather than tiresome savages, and their cultures as worthy of respect. This was the impetus from which flowed the rich stream of his ethnological writing (there was an earlier, not inconsiderable, output of theological and nationalist writings). As he became increasingly engrossed in his work with tribal villagers, he became less and less comfortable with his role as clergyman and his formal faith. He came to "a dramatic conversion, but in reverse." He renounced his membership in the Church of England both as priest and as communicant. Thenceforth he continued his work on his own, living at the simple village level of subsistence, putting most of the donations that came to him into the welfare work. (Mandelbaum 1965: 448-449)

Elwin was ordained an Anglican priest at Oxford. He came to India as a missionary to join an Anglican Order in Pune. He wanted to become a monk but before he could do that, Elwin was attracted by Gandhi and got involved with the struggle for Independence in India. Over a period of time, his closeness with Gandhi grew. On one occasion, Gandhi told him that he would take Elwin as his son. Elwin stayed in Gandhi's ashram for about four years and got associated with his various projects and mission. After those years of working together, he parted ways from Gandhi on different issues of dissociation, except that of India's right to freedom from the colonial rule. However, Elwin claims that "contact with Gandhi wedded me to India" (Elwin, 1964: vii),

Elwin's participation in political activities in India was viewed seriously by church superiors in his own country. The result was that the government officials refused to allow him to return to India. Finally, however, permission was granted to him but in the condition that he would keep himself away from political activities in India.

Choosing to be with the tribal communities, Elwin was, in a way, refusing his own Christian past and forging a new idea of freedom outside the contours of European modernity. For him, living amongst the tribal people of the forests was an individual form of freedom that had its antecedents in the pre-modern and in the pre-capitalist ways of life.

As resolved to make his home among the Gond tribe, in 1932, Elwin moved with his friend Shamrao Hivale to a remote village in the forests of the Mandla district of the Central Provinces. This was the deciding moment and a crucial turn in his career, where he started seeking fuller immersion in the pain, the suffering, the poverty of the most marginalized people in the forests. He had spent around twenty years in central India, as a one-man army and as fully committed pressure group for the rights of the tribal people (Elwin 1964; Hivale 1946)

In January 1954, Elwin took Indian citizenship. In the same year, he was appointed as the anthropological adviser to the Indian Government, with special administrative responsibility to work on the hill tribes of the north-east frontier. Moving to Shillong for this administrative project, he served for a decade as the leading campaigner of what he liked to call 'Mr Nehru's gospel for the tribal communities inhabiting those regions. Elwin passed away in February 1964, a greatly esteemed public anthropologist in his adopted land. He received the most prestigious Padma Bhushan and numerous other medals and awards

Historian and writer, Ramachandra Guha sketches Verrier Elwin's multifarious presence in distinct arenas of public discourses in India: "This Englishman, missionary, Gandhian, social worker, activist, bureaucrat and Indian was always and pre-eminently a writer, a man whose richness of personal experience illuminates an oeuvre of truly staggering proportions... Elwin worked in a whole range of genres. He wrote and published poetry, religious tracts, polemical

pamphlets, novels, anthropological monographs, folklore collections, official reports and manuals, reviews, editorials and travelogues. His last work, an autobiography, is generally regarded as the finest of all his books” (Guha 1998: 326).

Elwin was keen on seeing a unity of ideas guiding his life-choices. Arriving in India and visiting Sabarmati for a conference of the Inter-Religious Fellowship in January 1928, he writes: “From the moment of my arrival there I was doomed. For long a sympathetic fellow-traveler, I now became an ardent disciple.... The impact of those few days at Sabarmati was extraordinary. It was as if I had suddenly been reborn as an Indian on Indian soil. Everything fell into place so naturally that I did not, I think, realize at first how very serious was the new attitude I adopted or what the consequences would be. As he clarifies, his understanding of India was not entirely that of the exotic other. As he writes, at first I did not see the conflict as between India and Britain but rather as between two different kinds of people. My theme was freedom and this was not confined to India. The prize essay on the poetry of revolution which I wrote at Oxford had shown me how many Europeans, and particularly how many of the English poets, had treasured liberty. Many of the ideas inspiring India’s national movement came originally from the West. Tolstoy and Ruskin had a profound influence on Gandhi. The first result of my contact with him, therefore, was to put me among those Europeans, those Englishmen, to whom colonialism or imperialism was intolerable...” (Elwin 1964: 42).

One of his earliest memories upon arrival in Poona was of the experience of learning Marathi: “We spent most of my language-lessons discussing Hindu mysticism and philosophy with the result that after six months I knew the Marathi or Sanskrit words for most of the higher spiritual states, yogic postures and exercises, but I was quite incapable of ordering lunch at the railway station” (ibid, 41).

His commitment to India was so forceful that he was appointed as the Advisor on Tribal Affairs for the North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA), by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Independent India.

7.3 CENTRAL IDEAS

Verrier Elwin is known for his extensive study of tribals. Some of his main writings are focussed on tribal life and identity. His approach and method of research have inspired many anthropologists and sociologists. Let us learn about these now.

7.3.1 Cultural Autonomy of Tribals

In 1932, Elwin moved away from politics towards social work and anthropology after he went to live among the Gonds. Elwin’s long spell of living with tribal

people enabled him to see the world through their eyes. He married a Gond girl in 1940 but they divorced each other in 1949.

Elwin spent a major part of his life among the people he wrote about, the tribal communities in Central and North-East India. His first ethnographies, on the Baiga (1939) and the Agaria (1942), dealt with his own neighborhoods since both the communities were closely connected to the Mandla Gonds where he made his home. Elwin stayed for a long period in Bastar and Orissa for studying the tribal communities. He settled down among the people, lived with them, shared their life as far as an outsider could. He did not depend merely on asking questions, but tried to gather knowledge from the people in great detail.

Elwin believed in the cultural autonomy of tribal life and value system, which is a unique civilizational order according to its own terms and references. On this aspect of cultural uniqueness, Elwin writes "There are many elements in the Gond ethos which should be conserved", their simplicity and freedom, their love of children, the position of their women, 'their simplicity and freedom, their love of children, the position of their women, their independence of spirit, their freedom from many of the usual oriental inhibitions'. The tribal, indeed, 'has a real message for our sophisticated modern world which is threatened with disintegration as a result of its passion for possessions and its lack of love (Elwin 1936):

Elwin's first work of ethnography, *The Baiga*, published in 1939, reflected this perspective of the tribal life which emphasized unique collective identity. This work was a massive monograph about a tribe, whose economy was being ruined by the expropriation of their natural resources and livelihood by the state, and who had been forced to adopt cultivation, which was not preferred by them.

Elwin conducted fieldwork in many villages of the present-day Indian states of Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Orissa. Between 1940 and 1942 he lived in Bastar, a large, isolated and thick forest region with a huge volume of tribal population. His monographs were not merely descriptive accounts of 'exotic' communities, they provided rich analysis of tribal lives. Many of his writings reflected tribal autonomy and their civil and political rights.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Why did Elwin come to India? Explain.

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2) State the key features of Elwin's monographs on tribal life.

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Elwin gathered numerous facts on the tribal life in Central India, their myths, poems and stories that appeared in vivid depiction in his fascinating monographs. *The Agaria* (1942) portrays a melancholic narrative of the decline of a community of charcoal iron-smelters heavily damaged by taxation, factory iron and administrative neglect. In 'Maria murder and suicide' (1943), Elwin tried to explore the events of homicide in a tribal society. The Muria and their ghotul (1946) presented a unique pattern of socialization among a tribe in Bastar, where their sexual orientation was explored. In more specific terms, the account focused on the life in a dormitory, or ghotul, where boys and girls are trained with the lessons of sexual life (Elwin 1946, Guha 1998, 1999).

In *Bondo Highlander* (1952) Elwin made an attempt to understand the personality of a highland Orissa tribe. The study focuses on the contestation and conflict between individualism and collective cooperation among the everyday life of the community. 'The religion of an Indian tribe' (1955), another study based in Orissa, is a holistic account of rituals and belief system among the Saora. This ethnographic attempt on religion and ritual was considered as 'the most detailed account of an Indian tribal religion that ever flowed from an anthropologist's pen' (Förer- Haimendorf 1957: 602-3).

Among all these books, it was those on the Baiga and the Muria that invited the most attention and discussion. Both studies reflected the intimate connection between the author and the communities, which resulted from prolonged stay with the people.

Elwin's most famous pamphlet, 'The Aborigines' (Elwin 1943) was a blueprint of his concerns over the rights and safeguards of tribal communities towards their economic security and protection. He strongly advocated for the restoration of their rights over forest resources, protection of tribal land and regulation and control of external interventions in their lives.

Verrier Elwin wrote his sixth book on a tribe titled *The Religion of an Indian Tribe* (1955) in continuation to his earlier ethnographies on ethnographies of the Baiga, the Agaria, the Maria, the Muria and the Bondo. His concern over the material and natural resources of the tribal communities made him to pay close attention on the issues of tribal land alienation, loss of forest resources, and exploitation by the non-tribal money lenders and officials. His interventions in these pertinent issues related to the tribal question prepared him to become an action-oriented anthropologist, rather than to remain an arm-chair scholar. His writings were loaded with political conviction and intellectual commitment towards representing the voices of the marginalized tribal communities and

protecting their fundamental rights and cultural autonomy. All his writings carry the hope that they might help envision, 'or at least delay, the degradation and exploitation of the tribes' (Guha, 1998: 330). Elwin's own remarks on this aspect further attest the emphasis added in his political and ethical quest. He hoped the writings and interventions of anthropologists would aim to protect the tribals from exploitation, interference and repression. Elwin was a strong advocate of preserving and protecting the uniqueness of tribal identity and culture. He was criticized for his political position on the question of tribal identity by his counterparts labelling him as 'isolationist', who stood in the way of integrating the tribal people into the Hindu religious fold.

7.3.2 Issue of Tribal Identity

The controversial position that Elwin occupies among the Indian intellectuals and political activists is well known. Some of them severely condemned his works and standpoint on the tribal question with reference to identity. However, Elwin could also gather many admirers of his works, and among them the most prominent figure was Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India. In 1954, Nehru recommended him to be deputed to the north-eastern region as an advisor on tribal affairs to the Government of India. Elwin continued to write and draft policy documents with a view to protect the interest of the tribal communities. During his tenure in the north-east region, Elwin's two books entitled, 'A philosophy for NEFA' (1957) and 'A new deal for tribal India' (1963), received wide attention among the reading publics. Nehru's enunciation of the famous 'tribal panchsheel' carries Verrier Elwin's signature in its content and argument. In order to understand Elwin's engagement in the controversies over tribal identity and the issue of national integration in post Independent India, it will be worthwhile to contextualize the concept of identity and identity-based movements for political and cultural autonomy within the tribal discourse.

Manor (1996) demonstrates the formations of different types of identities in India with reference to ethnic and tribal identity and the tendency of people to give priority to one or another level of identity according to varying social and political situations. These markers include language, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual preferences, caste, tribe, race and so on and so forth. Identity based political articulations are thus attached with a set of core features shared by members of a collectivity. These core markers are different from associational markers like those of the workers and labourers who are defined more by their common interests rather than by certain core and mostly ascribed identity attributes of the groups.

The identification of the members of a group on the basis of sharing common attributes—on the basis of all or some of the attributes—such as language, gender, religion, caste, ethnicity etc. suggests the existence or formation of identity. The mobilization on the basis of these markers is called identity movements (Manor 1996). Identity in general and identity based political articulations in particular have become important features of modern politics.

The identity of a tribal community can be a production from within the community that is internal to the group as a self-image or it can be an imposition from outside, which is external to the group. The idea about 'tribe' that reflects in the names of different tribal communities as well as generic terms like 'aborigins', 'adivasis', and 'Scheduled Tribe (ST)' are some of such propositions either imposed by outsiders or created by the tribal people themselves. Sahay (1977) suggests that a discussion on identity can start with the etymological meanings of the names of individual tribes or the appellations which the tribes use for themselves as tribal self-image. The leaders, legends and traditions associated with the names of particular tribes constitute another significant aspect of the study on identity (Sahay 1977). Here, we need to focus on the question that how the self-image and identity of tribal communities can be traced as the vantage points of political movements and mobilizations.

Identity-based movements among tribal communities in India have been a subject of discussion during the Colonial period onwards. The survey conducted by the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) identified a number of movements in central and eastern India; the most important of them being the movement for the formation of a Jharkhand state. There were also social movements among Kurmi and other tribal communities in Chotanagpur seeking towards an autonomous tribal status. There were also movements in western India such as the Bhagat movements among the Bhils and many agrarian movements among different tribal groups as well as political movements for autonomy. Central India reported the continuity of the Bhagat movements and a political movement among the Gonds. (Singh 1982).

According to the ASI survey conducted in the tribal belt in central India, the movements can be categorized into four major streams:

- (i) Movements for political autonomy;
- (ii) Agrarian and forest based movements;
- (iii) Sanskritization processes;
- (iv) Cultural movements based on script and language.

Singh (1982) underlines the different forms in which movements took place among various tribal areas. Movements for political autonomy, agrarian and forest based movements, cultural movements based on script and languages characterize distinct forms in which movements can take place. Sanskritisation process also had an influential role in shaping the movements in particular ways.

The Gonds and Bhils raised their demand for establishing a separate state in the early 1940s. But these movements were not sustained as an organized effort. At the same period, there was a political upraise in Adilabad in 1941, demanding a Gond Raj. In a memorandum submitted to the States Reorganization Commission in the 1950s, the Gond leaders demanded the formation of a separate state for the Adibasis in the tribal areas of Chattisgarh, Rewa region and Vidarbha. (Singh 1982).

Birsa Munda Revolt of 1895-1901 of Singhbhum and Ranchi was the most popular movement against the merchants, traders, land lords, and government officers who were responsible for alienating tribal people from their land, had increased the rental charges, forced physical violence, treated them as lesser humans, and increased interests on their debts. These issues contributed to a massive revolt under the leadership of Birsa Munda, a revolutionary leader among the community. Munda mobilized people against the British government. He was determined to fight against the mighty Britishers and could mobilize the people towards an organized movement for tribal autonomy. However, the movement could not keep its momentum as Birsa Munda was imprisoned and died in the year 1900 (Singh 1982).

Though most of such struggles were intent to address the basic question on rights to land and forest, the issue was not separable from the religious and cultural fabric of the people. Because of this linkage between economy and culture, the denial of the rights to access forest and land eventually connects to the question of community and identity. A reflection of the identity marker present in such struggles can be seen in the effort being made by some communities to regain the tribal status they lost under the spell of Sanskritization movements. The efforts to evolve a script and build up an indigenous literature in tribal language may be seen as part of an organized movement to define and assert tribal identity. This process in Chotanagpur can be traced to the 1920s when the emerging tribal middle classes initiated a movement to gain political autonomy, and strengthen revivalism in tribal literature which sought to preserve and recreate many of the cultural symbols of the past.

The post-Independence period witnessed a different turn in tribal movements in which the question of cultural identity became powerful in certain contexts apart from the issues of land and forest. Tribal communities started mobilizing themselves with the support of civil society organizations raising the issues of identity, civil and political rights. Identification of different tribal communities is also dependent on the multiple modes in which we trace the origin and shifts in their etymological meanings. Sahay notes that several tribes have two sets of names—a popular name by which the tribe is known by its neighbors and a name which the tribe uses to identify itself. Both types of names generally refer to certain characteristics or qualities of a given tribe and there are also some appellations which are resented by the tribes as uncomplimentary. Finally, it may be noted that the tribals as a whole are acquiring a new identity as *adivasi* (original inhabitant) or *vanyajati* (community living in jungle). There are also certain local terms which reflect their identity in relation to the geographical and ecological settings in which they inhabit (Sahay 1977).

All of these categories of understanding identity fit into Indian society and politics in a distinctive way. Most of the tribal communities tend to be geographically isolated from most other people of any description. Some of the tribal groups inhabit underdeveloped areas within states on the plains, but undergo incursions by non-tribals from their regions that are often exploitative in

nature. Adivasis, found in greater or lesser numbers in most Indian states, erode the solidarity of the regional linguistic group, in the process of adapting particular ethnic identities.

While understanding different identity movements towards tribal autonomy, we need to examine the ways in which such movements address the question of nation and the project of national integration. In this context the state becomes as an active contributor to identity based movements through organizing the structures of power and governance which define and then recognize people in terms of certain identities. Roy Burman calls our attention to consider whether the tribal unrest is symptomatic of a deeper challenge posed by tribal India to the contemporary non-tribal social and political systems of the country. One has also to consider whether such a challenge, if it exists, has a global dimension. Burman identifies several parameters in order to locate the nature and character of the tribal unrest and movements for autonomy.

In this backdrop of affairs related to tribal identity, Verrier Elwin's writings on tribal communities in the two decades of pre and post-independent India became crucial for the domains of both anthropology and policy making. In this period--1940s and 1950s--Elwin engaged in critical debates on the question of tribal identity in the form of lively polemics among his critics. Elwin's distancing of himself from the mainstream of Indian nationalism, and his protectionist approach towards the tribal communities earned him the resentment of other sociologists and anthropologists.

The first set of issues that Elwin took up was with anthropologists on the idea of integrating tribal communities to Hindu religion. G.S. Ghurye was the main opponent of Elwin in this debate. Ghurye wanted to treat the tribal communities as part of the Hindu fold and integrate them to the larger Hindu religious identity. He accused Elwin for his position on artificially separating the tribals from the Hindu society; and on 'isolating' the tribal communities in the mountains, forests and other remote regions, where they remained underdeveloped and backward, and separated from the mainstream of society. Ghurye also criticized Elwin for advocating for separating the tribal communities deliberately from the contours of Indian nationalism and the emerging Indian nation, predominantly located in the fold of Hindu religiosity. Elwin argued that the tribal communities always maintained a collective community spirit, different from the Hindu religion in the absence of caste system. They had a close and communicative tradition with nature and relatively equal gender relations.

Elwin's encounter with the social reformers who wished to bring in prohibition and forbid tribal dances, was also part of a controversy as he was accused of being 'anti-reformist'. Elwin opposed this move on prohibition by the social reformers. For him, the ethnocentric tendencies cannot be given room in any activity towards social reform. He strongly argued for the preservation and protection of unique cultural forms which were integral parts and building blocks of the collective lives of tribal cultures.

Elwin vehemently attacked Christian missionaries, on their ideas of religious conversion of tribal communities to Christianity, who believed that the change in religion would bring modernity and development in the tribal world. Elwin equally blamed both the Christian and Hindu reformers for being intolerant of tribal culture, art, rituals and dance, and for disrupting community spirit and hurt new converts by making them ashamed of their traditions' (Elwin 1941, 1943, for a detailed account of these controversies, see Guha 1996). In the latter part of these debates, Elwin had gradually shifted to a middle path between Ghurye's assimilationism and his own notion of isolation of the tribal communities from the rest of India.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What was the main thrust in Elwin's book, *Bodo Highlander*?

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- 2) Outline Elwin's critique of Christian and Hindu reformers with respect to tribals.

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Box 4.2 Nehru's Tribal *Panchsheel*

The following are his five fundamental principles for tribal development, which is known as Nehru's *panchsheel*:

- (i) People should develop along the line of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.
- (ii) Tribal rights to land and forest should be respected.
- (iii) We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will no doubt, be needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.
- (iv) We should not over administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions.
- (v) We should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved.

A recurrent theme in Elwin's accounts is the wreckage of tribal integrity by the violence and abuse caused by the non-tribal outsiders, the state or other external interventions, of their defining institutions and traditions (Padel 1995). Elwin's writings always backed the interests of the tribal communities, especially for the maintenance of the relative autonomy of tribal culture and identity. For him, the state interventions into tribal lives on the problem of development needs to be in tune with the interests of the community and their priorities. His influence on Nehru in the making of the tribal panchsheel was reflected in its content and articulation, in which the voices of the tribal communities were deeply imprinted.

7.3.3 Fieldwork and Methods

This section discusses the approaches and methods through which Verrier Elwin presented his ideas and arguments through a variety of writing forms. Elwin followed unconventional methods and practices in his research on tribal communities in India.

Elwin's caliber in doing fieldwork is incomparable as he was not artificially entering and doing fieldwork in a particular village or forest land. In fact, he lived for long and sustained durations with the communities that he wrote about, becoming one among them. Rather than relying on copy book methods and techniques of anthropological research, Elwin recreated in his writings, the experience of living with the communities, in their own voices and interests

Elwin affirms in his autobiography that "for me anthropology did not mean 'field work': it meant my whole life," or that "the essence of anthropology is love. Without it, nothing is fertile, nothing is true" (Elwin 1964: 142). By making this point, he was seeking to cast the vocational pursuit in terms that transcend the borders and conventions of the professional discourse.

Elwin states in the preface of his autobiography that the earliest lessons of his childhood, reinforced by his subsequent engagement in the English literary classics and Western philosophy, have sustained him in a serene fashion to embrace the literariness of life and culture. This attitude towards an aesthetic sense-making in his writings made him a literary figure, which overshadowed his identity as an anthropologist. His autobiography 'The tribal world of Verrier Elwin' obtained the most prestigious Sahitya Akademi award for the best book in English. The citation mentioned it an 'outstanding contribution to contemporary Indian writing in English', written 'with sincerity, courage and charm, revealing a mind in which Western and Indian idealism were uniquely blended' (Guha 1998: 331). Guha further remarks that Elwin's dearth of conventionally deploying field methods in research spills over into the articulation of ideas in his books, that made him 'a marvelously evocative but undisciplined writer', immersed in the world of metaphors, poetics and polemics, rather than invoking scientific rigor and structured analysis (Guha, 2007: 331)

Commentators allege that Elwin's empathy and sensibility for tribal lives were often overshadowed by a stylistics of language where the aesthetic categories of "poetry" and "beauty" begin to dominate, alongside a discourse on the celebration of "nature". For an anthropologist who "came to anthropology through poetry" (Elwin, 1964:143), it was difficult to bring a scientific rational formulation over and above his aesthetic sensibilities.

Treated strictly as literary outputs, Elwin's two most famous books are *Leaves from the jungle* (1936) and *The tribal world of Verrier Elwin* (1964). In both these works, the author's experience is foregrounded and he becomes a character in the narratives. On the other hand, his ethnographic accounts, representing other cultures and contexts, carry a large store of information and description, presented with less coherence and scientific temper.

Elwin once pronounced that he is a 'devoted disciple' of the Malinowski school of functionalism, however, the application of the theoretical approach was half-hearted as the author in him carried his veiled literary temptations. He was a novelist and a poet, before he became an anthropologist, and returned to literature after he completed his last major study on the Saora and other anthropological tasks assigned with him.

In a newspaper description, Elwin figures as 'not an anthropologist in the academic sense of the term' but a 'man of letters who is fundamentally interested in human beings'. In a British weekly's viewpoint Elwin was considered to be an anthropologist 'by grace' rather than 'by profession', and 'primarily a lover rather than a student of mankind' (Dutta 1956). This uncertain location that Elwin occupied between literature and science is, in some sense, can be read as an attempt of methodological pluralism.

Elwin never tried to represent tribal cultures only in terms of religion and ritual--a reductionist viewpoint, which was characteristic of many of his counterparts. On the contrary his writings exhibited an uncommon interest in representing the material culture of tribal life. This include the detailed description of clothing, housing, utensils, agricultural tools, food materials and cuisine, hunting and fishing implements and so on. It was Verrier Elwin who made women's lives visible for the first time in Indian anthropology, by studying the themes of clothing, food and sexuality. Along with the focus on women and nature, Elwin also explored the topics of crime, disease and art, all hitherto ignored subjects of research in Indian anthropology (Elwin, 1964; Guha 1994).

His unique literary proficiency in translating the life worlds of the tribal people in minuscule ethnographic details, contributed towards the making of thick descriptions in its actual sense of the term. Elwin's simultaneous engagement with different worlds of experience, west and east, literature and science, religiosity and social work, modern and the pre-modern, equipped him to

transcend the conventional boundaries of doing anthropology, and more precisely, practicing it in a more meaningful way.

7.4 IMPORTANT WORKS

Some important works of Verrier Elwin are:

The Baiga (1939)

The Muria and their Ghotul (1946)

Myths of Middle India (1949)

Bondo Highlander (1950)

Tribal Art of Middle India (1951).

Tribal Myths of Orissa (1953)

The religion of an Indian Tribe (1955)

The philosophy of NEFA (1957)

The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin: An Autobiography (1964)

7.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have navigated through the life and works of Verrier Elwin, who spent the major part of his life among various tribal communities in India. The conditions of his life and career made Elwin a privileged interpreter of tribal cultures, with a political conviction and a genuine concern for their rights.

We learnt that Elwin was so deeply involved with life of different tribal communities in India that he would go to the forest with them and even stay with them. He contributed immensely to their lives through his administrative positions.

Elwin's descriptive accounts (in works like 'the Baiga', 'the Muria' and 'the Agaria'), distinguish him from his contemporary scholars in Indian anthropology.

Elwin contributed a lot to our knowledge of India's aboriginal populations. His monographs on such tribes as Baigas, Muria Gonds, Bondos and Saoras will be valued for a long time.

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7.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Verrier Elwin came to India as a missionary to join an Anglican Order in Pune. He wanted to become a monk but before he could do that, he was attracted by Gandhi and got involved with the struggle for Independence in India.
- 2) His monographs were not merely descriptive accounts of 'exotic' communities, they provided rich analysis of tribal lives. Many of his writings reflected tribal autonomy and their civil and political rights.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) In *Bondo Highlander* (1952) Elwin made an attempt to understand the personality of a highland Orissa tribe. The study focuses on the contestation and conflict between individualism and collective cooperation among the everyday life of the community.

- 2) Elwin vehemently attacked Christian missionaries, on their ideas of religious conversion of tribal communities to Christianity, who believed that the change in religion would bring modernity and development in the tribal world. Elwin equally blamed both the Christian and Hindu reformers for being intolerant of tribal culture, art, rituals and dance, and for disrupting community spirit and hurt 'new converts by making them ashamed of their traditions'

