

Block 3

Sociologists in India-2

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UNIT 8 IRAWATI KARVE *

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
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 - 8.3.1 Hindu Society
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8.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to

- outline the biographical details of Irawati Karve;
- discuss her central ideas; and
- list some of her important works.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Irawati Karve was the first woman anthropologist of India and the founder of sociology in Pune university. Her range of work stretched from mapping kinship and caste to surveys on the contemporary status of women. To interpret the inner integration of Hindu society she related Hindu mythologies with modern customs.

The same enterprise was again found in the work ‘Yuganta’ (1967) which was written in Marathi. It won Sahitya Academy Prize as the best book of that year. In the book *Yuganta: The End of an Epoch*, Irawati Karve studied the characters and society in Mahabharata. The subject of the book is secular, scientific and anthropological in the widest sense.

We begin this unit with a biographical sketch of Irawati Karve. This will be followed with discussion of some of her central ideas.

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8.2 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Irawati Karve was an Indian anthropologist. She was born in Mynjan in Burma and educated in Pune, India. Irawati's father sent her from Burma to India. Here she lived with a Brahmin family – the Paranjpyes. The family valued education tremendously. Irawati embraced their values. Later, she married into the Karvés who were educators and social reformers. She did B.A. in Philosophy and M.A. in Sociology (1928) from Bombay University before proceeding to Germany for advanced studies. For an outstanding research in anthropology, the Berlin University conferred on her the D. Phil degree in 1930. This marked the onset of her long and distinguished career of anthropological research. Her professional training was accomplished under the supervision of Eugene Fischer in the University of Berlin. She acquired knowledge of both social and physical anthropology.

Box 8.1 Irawati Karve's Academic Journey

Irawati Karve left India to study abroad as a young woman at a time when this was uncommon. She came to Berlin in a turbulent period, when the city lived in a state of decay following World War I, yet cultivated cultural openness, only to succumb, a few years later, to a dictatorial regime. Karve's dissertation was supervised by the German anthropologist Eugen Fischer, well-known for his studies on "race mixing" in German South West Africa (today Namibia) and later a supporter of the forced sterilization of hundreds of "racially mixed" children in Germany, among other eugenicist policies. Fischer gave Karve the task of proving a correlation between race and skull asymmetry, a physical feature that supposedly accounted for better development of the right side of the brain and thus of intelligence and civilization, a feature that Fischer expected would correlate with European races. Karve undertook measurements on hundreds of skulls, many obtained in German colonial territories. Her conclusion was blunt, and unexpected by her mentor: she proved the racist hypothesis was false....

Karve was a sociologist anthropologist in India who in her rather short life became renowned for her feminist cultural and social commentaries and for her studies on the Indian caste system. Less known are her racial studies of India's castes and "tribes": Employing the same methods and instruments she learned to use in Berlin, she measured and analyzed several anthropometric, racial features of different social groups in India. In this way, she contributed to the racialization of human difference there, continuing a legacy that had begun with colonial British anthropology. Although she was outspoken about women's issues she was silent about caste and religious discrimination, especially in her early work decades (1930s–1950s). She did embrace a multiculturalist rhetoric and antiracist stance in the last decade of her life, but she used racial methods in her research long after World War II, including as late as 1968, two years before her sudden death (Barbosa 2021).

Coming back to motherland in 1939, Karve joined the Deccan College Post-graduate and Research Institute of Pune as Head of the Department of Sociology

and Anthropology. She served as the Head of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Deccan College till her retirement. She presided over the Anthropology Section of the Indian Science Congress in 1939. Her academic proficiency as well as topics of general interest brought her in the limelight of fame and public appreciation. She acquired a wide circle of readership.

Irawati Karve also conducted anthropometric studies in Maharashtra (by the financial aid from Emslie Horniman fund) the results of which were published in book-form in 1953. It provided a very useful data to mark a stage in the progress of knowledge about the people in Maharashtra.

She wrote in both Marathi and English on a wide variety of academic subjects as well as topics of general interest. She was the daughter-in-law of Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve. Dinkar Karve, her husband, was an educator. Her daughter, Gauri Deshpande, made a name for herself as a writer. Irawati Karve presided over the Anthropology division of the National Science Congress held in Delhi in 1947. She died in Pune of a heart attack in 1970.

8.3 CENTRAL IDEAS

Karve's central ideas focused on Hindu society and its caste system as well as kinship organization in India. She wrote extensively on the Mahabharata wherein her character studies treat the protagonists of the epic as historical characters and use their attitudes and behaviour to understand the times they lived in. Her research interests were concentrated on the following aspects: racial composition of the Indian population; kinship organization in India; origin of caste; and sociological study of the rural and urban communities.

8.3.1 Hindu Society

Hindu Society – an interpretation (Deccan College, 1961) is a study of Hindu society based on data which Karve had collected in her field trips, and her study of pertinent texts in Hindi, Marathi, Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit. In the book, she discussed the pre-Aryan existence of the caste system in Hinduism, and traced its development to its present form.

According to Irawati Karve, 'The Indian caste society is a society made of semi-independent units, each having its own traditional pattern of behaviour. This has resulted in a multiplicity of norms and behaviour. Accordingly, the Hindu religion is intrinsic in the particular stratification found in caste.' Karve begins her book on Hindu society by noting the complex patterns found in it. She calls caste an endogamous kinship group which are distinct from each other. Karve has shown that castes are really caste-clusters composed of smaller endogamous units or Jatis. The number of Jatis in a cluster varies in the different regions of India. Discussing the structural features of caste society, Karve says that it is "loose" and "very elastic". Internally a Jati has its own near-independent organization, each Jati is viable by itself. The absence of standardization and the great tolerance of diversity, in her view are the expression and a consequence of the world view of Hinduism - with its basic notion of unity in diversity. Her views on

caste were based on the anthropometric and blood group surveys which she conducted in her research on caste. She refers to Hindu society as a loose coming together of many separate cultural entities. Her thesis on The Chitpavan Brahmins was based on physical anthropological studies (eye colour measurements) as well as an Indological discussion of caste origins drawn from Puranas and Mahabharata and other mythologies. She viewed Indian society as a patchwork of castes, physically and culturally different from each other.

Karve traced the geneology of sociology and anthropology on Maharashtra to the social writings of Ranade, Tilak, Gokhale, followed by the works of Russell and Hiralal on 'Tribes and castes in Central Provinces'. Her major anthropological works are concerned with the following:

- (i) physical anthropology and archaeology – mainly anthropometric investigations;
- (ii) cultural anthropology – kinship, caste, village community, tribes which combined Indological studies- folk songs, epics, oral traditions;
- (iii) socio-economic surveys – weekly markets, dam displaced, urbanization, pastoralists, spatial organization; and
- (iv) contemporary social comment – women, language, race.

Karve was of the view that the cultural problems before India revolve around region, caste and family. She felt that it was difficult to evolve a common language, uniform civil code and abolish caste. She looked upon the task of welding the sub-continent through uniformity would destroy valuable cultural traits of the old way of life. These valuable traits are described by Karve as tolerance and an awareness of diversity. .

On social issues like language and schooling, Karve retained a strong Marathi nationalism, and she refused to concede Hindi superior status as a national language, or allow English to dominate access to the civil services. She insisted that all primary education must be in one of the regional languages, and there should be no English-medium schools at all.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) In which areas were research interests of Irawati Karve concentrated?

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- 2) What was the topic of the Ph D thesis of Irawati Karve?

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8.3.2 Kinship Organization

Irawati Karve

Karve's work, *Kinship Organization in India* (Deccan College, 1953) is a study of various social institutions in India. Karve mapped kinship patterns in India on to linguistic zones to come up with the following variations:

- (i) Indo-European or Sanskritic organisation in the Northern zone;
- (ii) Dravidian kinship in the southern zone;
- (iii) A central zone of mixed patterns (e.g. found in Maharashtra); and
- (iv) Mundari kinship systems in the east.

Within each linguistic region, there are variations between castes and subcastes. The unity in all this diversity was provided by the Sruti literature (Vedas, Brahmanas, and Upanishads) and the epics, such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, which she reads as sociological and psychological studies of the joint family in ancient North India. North Indian Indo-European kinship is analysed through etymological analysis of kinship terms in the Mahabharata, an examination of kinship practices contained in Sanskrit and Pali texts, and a similar collection of contemporary terms for kin in different languages. The kin-ship practices of Muslim, Christian, and other communities do not find a mention at all in this kinship organisation of India.

Karve notes that in the north women are separated from their families at an early age and sent-off to live with unknown in-laws far away, whereas in the south, a girl is among her relatives even after marriage. The kinship organization in the central zone shows greater internal variation than the north with some castes allowing cross-cousin marriage in one direction (to the mother's brother's daughter) as in the south. In almost all castes in the northern zone, according to Karve (1953) the marriage between cousins is prohibited. According to Irawati Karve, 'A joint family is a group of people who live under one roof, eat food cooked at one hearth, hold property in common, who participate in common worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred.' Karve thus provides an understanding of the structure of Indian society and its range of social arrangements in her study of kinship organization. Uberoi has described Karve as pioneer of an indigenous 'feminist' perspective on the Indian family. She also evaluated modern changes in family life from their possible effects on women's life. Her empathy for women could be noted from her essay on the projected status of Indian women in 1975, in which she examines the long term trends on women's employment or education. Irawati Karve's (1953) paper *The Kinship Map of India* highlights the customs of marrying close kin in South India in contrast to the principle of extended exchange in North India that enables women to frequent their natal families, thereby reducing the stress faced by married women. Sundar notes that Karve does not seem to have wanted to identify herself as a feminist because she was not radical in her views. For instance, Karve supported the joint family system as an essential part of life with all its problems and joys and questions about patriarchy and oppression do not figure.

On caste, Karve predominantly addressed two themes, namely, the origin of caste and the unit of analysis, and secondly that the smallest endogamous unit or jati, was a product of the breaking up of a larger group caused by occupational diversification. Karve differs from Ghurye who had argued that caste in India is a Brahminical product of Indo-Aryan culture, spread by diffusion to other parts of India. Karve, on the other collected anthropometric measurements such as blood samples, eye colour, etc to argue that it was the sub-caste, such as the Chitpavan Brahman which should be treated as the 'caste', while the overall category, Maharastrian Brahman should be treated as a 'caste-cluster'. Her reasons are that Chitpavan, Karhadas, Saraswats, Deshasthas, Rigvedis and Madhyandin Brahmins did not intermarry but they had different marriage regulations and were ethnically different from each other. For Karve, a caste is a group which practices endogamy, has a particular area of spread or dispersion (generally within one linguistic region), may have one or more traditional occupations, has a more or less determinate or flexible position in a hierarchical scale and has traditionally defined modes of behaviour towards other castes.

Karve has made significant contributions in the form of socio-economic surveys or policy studies. Her later works are largely descriptive and packed with tables. Her first survey was on the Bhils of West Khandesh. She argued that tribals are not different from other parts of the Indian population and that it would be wrong to create an entirely new entity based on 'primitiveness'. Her view was that tribals should be helped to advance and assimilate and no external codes should be imposed on them.

Karve observed that kinship organization is influenced and strengthened by the caste system and both these conform to certain patterns found in different linguistic regions. She states that one has to find out the degree of tolerance which a social structure possesses for deviations and aberrations. The rigidity or elasticity of a social structure may depend either on the nature of the particular social structure or on the whole cultural fabric of a society.

Divorce is not tolerated by the Brahminical law books and does not have the sanction of the priests. She wrote that divorce is a firmly established social institution all over India in all castes except a few which consider themselves the top castes eg Brahmins, Kshatriyas etc. The refusal to accept the existence of divorce has very far reaching effects on kinship and caste organizations. She noted that there may be a type of social structure which is more tolerant of deviations than another. Outside factors such as cultural contacts may lead to numerous deviations.

The family in the majority of regions in India is an autonomous unit with its own observances. The caste in its turn is also a closed autonomous unit which has certain limited contacts with other similar units and which controls the behaviour of families in certain respects. Different castes living in the same locality have different rules as regards marriage, have different hereditary occupations and different Gods. A family and a caste are social groups of a kind where the individuals are conscious of belonging to the group. The joint family provided

economic and social security. The village where people spent all their lives was also the ultimate support of all residents. The rise of industrial cities and employment opportunities have resulted in a loosening of the bonds of joint family and of the village community.

8.3.3 Yuganta

Irawati Karve's *Yuganta*, a retelling of *The Mahabharata* is a literary and sociological text blending history, culture and philosophy of the ancient times. This work is remarkable as a literary piece, as a sociological study, as an anthropological and cultural document and serves as a mirror reflecting human needs and responses that are alike, both in the past and in contemporary times.

Irawati Karve says the central figures of *the Mahabharata* are neither wholly good, nor wholly bad, but a blend of both. She examines each one of the characters and unravels the working of a wide range of human emotions- both positive and negative. In her presentation she adopts a matter of fact tone without commenting on the virtues and vices of the characters. She makes a parallel study of the literary text and the cultural, historical and civilizational aspects of the society.

The poem was orally sung by wandering minstrels, known as *Sutas*. Dealing with the mode of narration, Karve looks at the structure as consisting of stories within stories, originating externally and internally. The thread of the main story is never forgotten. The story of *the Mahabharata* has many narrators and the happenings of the 18 days war are narrated to Dhritarashtra by Sanjaya, the Suta narrator.

From the different versions of different *Sutas*, the poem was knitted into a coherent text. *The Mahabharata* had its appeal to different sects in India – to the Buddhists, its excellent moral code, to the Jains and to the Marathis, the story of Krishna, while the Bhagavad Gita is the most read book both in and outside of India. The story also became popular among the tribals who saw in Bhima a prototype of the Powerful man of the folklore. *The Mahabharata* thus has meaning and relevance to its readers in varying degrees.

Irawati Karve as a sociologist recognizes that today's generation lacks knowledge of this great epic and therefore retells this story to make the young people recognize that their problems are the same as faced by the epic characters. *The Mahabharata* deals with issues that are essentially human. The principal theme of the Mahabharata is a familiar story- of feud over property. Here the quarrel is between the Kauravas and the Pandavas princes, the sons of Dhritarashtra and Pandu for the throne of Hastinapura.

Irawati presents different characters and their actions not subjectively through a moral prism but objectively through the events that impacted and shaped the destiny of different people. Thus the characters are in the grey area of good and evil and their actions lead to a tragic end. Irawati Karve's *The Mahabharata*, describes "the difficulty of being good" (Gurcharan Das). Bhishma's whole life has been one of fruitless sacrifice. Karve says "however justifiable his actions

may have been in the realm of politics, they are certainly blameworthy from the human point of view". She questions the rightness of many of his actions. Irawati's approach to *the Mahabharata* is far from a blind veneration of values like honour, sacrifice, self-centred addiction to one's own goodness. Her narration of the story encompasses humanistic vision beyond that of the individuals which results often in disastrous effect on fellow beings. Similarly Yudhishtira's faithful practice of dharma and his weakness for the dice and Karna's generosity result in tragedy with its colossal waste of the human potential'.

Irawati as a sociologist makes a study of human social behaviour. As an anthropologist, she makes an insightful study of the physical, social, and cultural development of humans.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Name the kinship patterns mentioned in Karve's book *Kinship Organization in India*.

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- 2) Outline the way caste influences kinship organization with reference to the view of Irawati Karve.

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8.4 IMPORTANT WORKS

Some of Irawati Karve's important works are:

Kinship Organization in India (1953)

Hindu Society: An Interpretation (1961)

Maharashtra: Land and its People (1968)

Yuganta: The End of an Epoch (1969)

8.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we learnt about the life and work of Irawati Karve. We began with developing an understanding of the social and academic environment in which her ideas were born. Then we discussed her central ideas. We found that she integrated anthropological insights with her expertise in indology. This distinguished her work from those of others. Her work presents holistic and profound understanding of society of that time.

8.6 REFERENCES

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8.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Chief research interests of Irawati Karve were concentrated on the following aspects: racial composition of the Indian population; kinship organization in India; origin of caste; and sociological study of the rural and urban communities.
- 2) Irawati Karve's Ph D thesis on The Chitpavan Brahmins was based on physical anthropological studies (eye colour measurements) as well as an Indological discussion of caste origins drawn from Puranas and Mahabharata and other mythologies.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Kinship patterns identified by Karve in the book, *Kinship Organization in India* are:
 - a) Indo-European or Sanskritic organisation in the Northern zone;
 - b) Dravidian kinship in the southern zone;
 - c) A central zone of mixed patterns (e.g. found in Maharashtra); and
 - d) Mundari kinship systems in the east.
- 2) Karve observed that kinship organization is influenced and strengthened by the caste system and both these conform to certain patterns found in different linguistic regions.

UNIT 9 A R DESAI*

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Biographical Sketch
- 9.3 Central Ideas
 - 9.3.1 Indian Nationalism
 - 9.3.2 Role of the State in Capitalist Transformation in India
 - 9.3.3 Path of Development
 - 9.3.4 Understanding Indian Society from Marxian Approach
- 9.4 Important Works
- 9.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.6 References
- 9.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to

- outline the biographical details of A R Desai;
- explain the contribution of A R Desai to sociology in India;
- discuss his central ideas; and
- list some of his important works.

9.1 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Akshay Ramanlal Desai was born on April 16, 1915 in Nadiad in Gujarat. His father, Ramanlal Vasantlal Desai was a civil servant in the princely state of Baroda in 1920s and 1930s. He was a well-known litterateur, who inspired the youth in the 1930s. The travels with this father across the state of Baroda left a deep impression on his sensitive mind. Ramanlal Desai, apart from being an officer of the Baroda state, was also a well-known litterateur who wrote many novels depicting the lives of the peasantry which influenced and inspired the youth towards social transformation. The exploitation of the peasants due to

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excessive rent, a searing critique of colonialism and the role of citizens in the making of a new India were all themes that occurred repeatedly in his novels. He also had a great admiration for Gandhi and some leaning towards Fabian socialism. The young Akshay Desai absorbed all these influences. From his father he imbibed the idea of taking an active interest in the world around with the intention of intervening to transform it. This was to stay with him till his end. He was also exposed to a range of literary and musical giants in his childhood through his father. His deep political consciousness came from a family milieu that was highly sensitive to social oppression. In 1947, he got married to Neera Desai who played a pioneering role in the growth of Women's Studies in India. Their son Mihir Desai is a leading human rights lawyer and practises in Mumbai.

He began his teaching career as a lecturer in Siddharth College in Bombay 1946 and joined the Department of Sociology, University of Bombay in 1951, became Professor and Head of the Department in 1969 and resigned from the Department in 1976. Desai was appointed a Senior Fellow and a National Fellow in the Indian Council of Social Science Research from 1973-75 and 1981-85 respectively. He was President of the Indian Sociological Society in 1980-81 and Gujarat Sociological Society in 1988-90. He was the only Indian sociologist who was active in politics and was also a member of different non-mainstream left political parties at different points of time, even though during his early days in the 1930s he was a member of the Communist Party of India for a brief period. He was a committed Marxist since his early undergraduate student days and remained one till his death in 1994.

He gravitated to radical politics in his undergraduate student days. The 1930s was also the decade when a left alternative to the mainstream nationalism represented by the Congress was also emerging. There were ideological conflicts between the relatively more left oriented sections within the Congress and that of the right oriented sections. However, the alternative which was the left, and distinct from the Congress was also clearly emerging, posing a challenge to the Congress. The *kisan* movement had started in Gujarat in the 1930s. Baroda was an important centre for radical and left politics including the activists of the nascent Communist Party. It is said that Akshay Desai was suspended for his activities from his college in Baroda. He moved to Surat and then to Bombay to pursue his studies and his activities. Bombay was the nerve centre of trade union activism and also the burgeoning communist activity.

What is interesting about this entire period was that there were many currents of political activity both at the national level and in Gujarat as well. There was a struggle for gaining influence over the anti-colonial movement among the various ideological and political currents. The workers in the textile mills in Bombay, jute mills in Calcutta and mine workers were on the path of struggle against inhuman exploitation, grueling working hours and low wages. The trade union movement was in the forefront of both the struggle of the workers and the nationalist movement. This was also the period of the Great Depression. The industrial recession that followed it hit major industries and this gave a further

fillip to the militancy in the labour movement. The communist presence and leadership of the labour movement deepened during this period.

There was a mushrooming of people's organisations, ranging from trade unions, Kisan Sabhas, students' federations, women's organisations and cultural and literary forums, all of which were imbued with a strong anti-colonial consciousness. In all these various forums, various political parties and forces, ranging from the Congress, socialists and the communists worked together at different points of time. Needless to say, the attempt to jointly work in various organisations was not easy given the diverse and sometimes even divergent perspectives. However, one remarkable feature of the national movement has been its inclusiveness, despite discordant strands of separatism. However, the end of the 1930s and the early 1940s saw the ominous shadow of the partition looming over the country which was soon to become a dreadful and frightening reality, accompanied as it was by mutual slaughter in Punjab and Bengal.

These were challenging times for any sensitive young person. Desai got involved in the communist movement and joined the Communist Party in 1934. But he left the Communist Party after a brief period of five years since he found the bureaucratic structure of the party suffocating. More importantly, he opposed the change in the Party's stand regarding support to British war efforts in India when the Soviet Union was attacked by Nazi Germany in 1939. He resigned from the party in 1939. Desai continued to pursue his research and activism through his entire teaching career and subsequently as well leading to a plethora of publications both in English and Gujarati.

9.3 CENTRAL IDEAS

As you would have learn from the previous section, Desai was involved in radical politics and later on in leftist and Marxist groups that were active in the nationalist movement in Surat and later in Mumbai where he pursued his higher studies. Expectedly then, his central ideas were concerned with Indian nationalism, role of the state in social and political transformation, development, and Marxian perspective on Indian society. Let us discuss each of his ideas in following sub-sections.

9.3.1 Indian Nationalism

Nationalism was the canvas and the backdrop against which social sciences took root in India. His social enquiries arose out of the questions and issues that were facing Indian society and the Indian people and their struggles of which he was an integral part. This is the most significant fact that needs to be kept in mind while assessing his life work.

A large part of his work was based on the method of historical materialism. His doctoral work was published as a book titled, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*. Later he brought out another volume, *Recent Trends in Indian Nationalism*. Originally his doctoral work, the former was published in 1946 and has run into several editions. Characterised by a broad historical sweep, this work

was written during the high point of the anti-colonial movement, and captures the diverse contradictions that the country was passing through, including the imminent partition of the country.

Desai analyses the various forces at work at the time and the changes brought about by colonial policies in the basic structure of Indian society. He views nationalism as a historical category, a modern phenomenon which comes into existence at a certain point in history. In India, it evolved as result of a combination of objective factors and subjective factors when the Indian people were political subjects of the British Empire. While the initial stirrings of Indian nationalism arose in the early nineteenth century, it took concrete shape only in the latter part of the century. The nation that emerged was not a homogeneous one; it comprised of different classes that arose in the course of colonial intervention.

British colonial rule initiated a deep structural transformation in Indian society which led it to a new path of development, capitalist development and initiated changes in almost spheres of Indian social life, from modern means of transport and communication, capitalist property relations in land, the establishing of a centralised state, introduction of western education, new forms of administration and even limited forms of self rule at the provincial levels. It destroyed the older order and unleashed many dynamic new forces which revolutionised Indian society, though to sub-serve its own interest, which was the colonial exploitation of India. Colonialism had a contradictory dimension to it and Desai analyses that. Marx had argued that capitalism would play revolutionary role in altering the nature of the productive forces in Indian society characterized by the caste system; however, Marx's own ideas changed in this regard. But Desai was clear that colonial rule did not play a revolutionary role since it destroyed the very institutions that could facilitate the growth of capitalism, i.e. the factories of the pre-capitalist period.

Desai's concern was also to highlight the specificity of the Indian pre-capitalist social formation with its caste system. He highlights the nature of the 'self-sufficient' village community lacking private property in land, which was the key component in the agrarian system in pre-British India. He outlines the social consequences of the transformation of agriculture, the decline of town handicrafts and the decline and destruction of village artisan industries. According to him, 'It was the village artisan industries that constituted the industrial pillar of the economic autarchy of the village, the other being the self-sufficient village agriculture' (Desai 1976:92).

The new social forces and classes that emerged led over time to the contradiction with British colonial-imperialist rule giving rise to Indian nationalism. What is remarkable is that Indian nationalism emerged in the midst of geographical vastness of sub-continental dimensions, social and religio-cultural diversities of immense complexity, powerful institutions and traditions. In the encounter between British colonial rule and Indian society, various movements emerged which encompassed intellectual, political, economic, social, religious and cultural

spheres. These endeavours initiated by various strata and classes to alter the situation created by British rule either to assimilate or challenge its varied effects led to 'various complex movements which created a new, exciting, interesting, heroic and unique history for Indian people' (Desai 1976: viii).

While there were various phases of Indian nationalism, it was the last phase begun in 1918 under the leadership of Gandhi that was critical for the nationalist movement. This period was characterized by a strong mass base and many classes and groups were active participants in the national movement, even though sections of Indian capitalists had extended support to the Indian National Congress from the 1920s onwards. Their influence over the national movement increased steadily and with independence they dominated the movement.

The manifold dimensions of colonial exploitation under British rule have been analysed with a rare perspicacity. Thus the destruction of the old social order, based on the unity of agriculture and handicrafts, and simultaneously the rise of new social forces, the growth of new social classes, the role of education, the question of caste (referred to as 'the steel frame of Hinduism'), the various social reform movements against caste, the question of political representation and the issue of nationalities and minorities are all addressed. What is remarkable is that all the critical questions that were being debated at the time either intellectually or politically find place in the book. For example, the potentialities of capitalist development in pre-colonial Indian society is seriously discussed and whether India could have embarked on a capitalist path is analysed (Desai 1976).

In *Recent Trends in Indian Nationalism* (1960), Desai assesses the path of development and sums up the significant characteristics of the post-independence trajectory. He highlights the uneven nature of capitalist development and a bourgeoisie (capitalist class) tied to feudal and semi-feudal origins. The feudal social origins and composition of Indian bourgeoisie made it incapable of fulfilling the tasks of a bourgeois democratic revolution, i.e. the destruction of feudalism and the organization of the national economy and an overall democratisation of the society. Besides, the state apparatus inherited at independence was almost a replica of the colonial state apparatus since independence was not a genuine independence but a transfer of power in which the Indian National Congress, heavily influenced by business and capitalist interests, played a leading role. For Desai, the choice of the path of development was clear: it was bourgeois industrialization versus socialist industrialization. He argues that a clear distinction between the two is necessary since this would result in qualitatively different types of social, institutional, ideological and cultural patterns and thereby the kind of structural pattern of the society (Desai 1960).

In the pre-Independence period, colonialism and nationalism as concepts and fields of action were central to Desai's intellectual and political engagement,

while in the post-Independence years it was the character of the State and the path of the development.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) In two sentences outline Desai's approach to the understanding of nationalism in India.

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- 2) What was the difference in Desai's intellectual and political engagement in pre-Independent period and post-Independent period in India?

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9.3.2 Role of the State in Capitalist Transformation in India

In exploring the post-Independence period, the two concepts that recur consistently are the State and its crucial role in social and political transformation, specifically in rural transformation and the question of the path of development. Contrary to the expectations of the nationalist movement, the State in the post-independence period initiates a capitalist process of transformation. The historical method remained central to his work throughout. There is continuity between his earlier work – *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* – wherein he developed Marxian historical method and his later work wherein he focused on the class character of the State and the nature of classes that characterise the society and their relationship to the State. Significantly, he traces the origins of the post-independence path of development to the trajectory of the nationalist movement and dominance and influence of the capitalist class on the movement and to the choices that were made during the course of the national movement.

In the two edited volumes, *Rural Sociology in India* (1969) and *Peasant Struggles in India* (1979), Desai has put together a rich collection of articles and reports that map the changes in rural society over many decades. In the volume on *Peasant Struggles in India*, he has critically analysed the role of the peasantry in an article, "Unconventional Anthropology of the 'Traditional' Peasantry" highlighting the historically important work of Eric Wolf – *Peasant Wars in the Twentieth Century*. In a remarkable introduction, Desai has woven all the material across centuries and regions to highlight the major socio-economic policies and processes initiated by the State specifically focusing attention on their impact on the peasantry. Through the first three decades after independence, the State focused attention on the transformation of rural society. Desai analyses the policies implemented by the State, the main thrust of which

has been to transform agrarian structure from pre-capitalist to capitalist relationships. Agrarian society and relationships have been transformed due to conscious State intervention. The thrust of agrarian policy was the elimination of parasitic landlordism and absentee intermediaries, Zamindari and in its place to create a class of agricultural capitalists, rich farmers and middle peasant proprietors directly linked to the State. This was accomplished through 'development' programmes and land legislations, leading to differentiation among the peasantry, with the emergence of a class of agricultural capitalists, rich peasants and simultaneously the emergence of a pauperized, hungry, landless rural proletariat.

9.3.3 Path of Development

One central concern of Desai which recurs consistently throughout his work is that of the path of development. He relates this question to a variety of issues that the country faced in the post independent period. His principal critique has been of the "modernization syndrome", i.e. development along a capitalist path and also those of its proponents, specifically, of academics and social scientists who view this as 'a desirable value premise'

Two of the volumes: *State and Society in India* (1975) and *India's Path of Development: A Marxist Approach* (1984) comprise his writings on the path of development and the nature of the social transformation in India. In the volume, *State and Society in India*, he critically examines the assumptions underlying the modernization thesis which was propounded by the academic establishment and shaped the content of the curriculum in the expanding educational apparatus. The famous 'tradition-modernity' thesis was an important component of the modernization thesis which held sway among mainstream academics and which effectively camouflaged the capitalist path of development pursued by the State. Such intellectual activities were financially supported by the State and helped in pursuing development along capitalist lines. This helped to generate valuable data which was useful in formulating concrete policy measures. It also helped to create and consolidate an educated stratum to run the administration, services and other professions. More importantly, it was useful as an ideological tool in socializing the younger generation in a particular mould (Desai 1984: viii)

The principal focus of his work is the capitalist transformation of India and the role of the State as a prime mover in this process. The relationship between the capitalist class and the State, the moulding of different institutions, i.e. legal framework and administrative apparatus for facilitating capitalist development, along with the major policy initiatives, the public sector, planning as a major instrument, the mixed economy and even the welfare state are all designed to facilitate capitalist development.

In the latter volume, *India's Path of Development: A Marxist Approach*, he engages seriously with the practice of Marxism in India and with the Communist parties' theory and practice. The main thrust of his critique of the Communist Parties is the critique of the two stage revolution, i.e. a democratic stage when

the bourgeois democratic tasks would be completed and a socialist stage which would follow. This would necessitate correspondingly different alliances of social forces, the former envisaging an alliance with sections of a 'progressive national bourgeoisie'. Along with this, he sharply critiques the theory of 'peaceful and parliamentary road to socialism'.

The critical question according to Desai, is: what should be the nature of the revolution during the imperialist phase of capitalism, especially after the October revolution, in a backward, predominantly peasant country? It was his firm assertion that in a country like India, the bourgeoisie was too weak to move the economy and society from colonial underdevelopment to even a bourgeois stage of development. Hence the need for a socialist revolution to complete the bourgeois democratic tasks under the leadership of the working class in alliance with sections of the marginalized rural proletariat.

His concern in analyzing the processes in post-independence India was the nature and path of development that was being adopted by the Indian State. Indian society was being shaped along capitalist lines and the State that has emerged in India after independence was a capitalist State and was following the capitalist path of development. Therefore, sociologists and social scientists need to address the question of the path of development and analyse the class character of the Indian state in order to understand the processes at work and the impact of these on the Indian people.

Thus the central concepts are class and the state in attempting to understand the processes at work in Indian society. In his endeavour to understand Indian society and the social, economic and political processes at work in post-Independence India and the impact of these processes on the Indian people, he found the Marxist approach most relevant.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Why did Desai leave the Communist Party?

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- 2) List the main factors that facilitate capitalist development in India.

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9.3.4 Understanding Indian Society from Marxian Approach

Desai's principal purpose was to understand Indian society from a Marxist point of view and to apply the Marxian method in studying the various contradictions of Indian society with the aim of transforming the society. Contradictions does not mean merely conflict or tensions but refers to the structural and systemic conflicts that shape the basic structure of the society, like, for example, that between working class and the bourgeoisie or that between the peasantry and landlordism. In his world view the Marxian method was not only significant and necessary for an understanding of Indian society but also that the Marxist method and viewpoint was an integral part of the discipline of sociology and social anthropology.

His Presidential address to the Indian Sociological Conference in Meerut in 1980 was on the Relevance of the Marxist Approach to the Study of Indian Society (Desai, 1984:1-19). There are many points that are being made here. Desai highlights the major developments since the 1950s which need to be taken note of, one of which being the massive expansion of higher education. He refers to the phenomenal growth of institutions of higher learning like universities and colleges with social sciences acquiring an increased importance: "Knowledge generators and knowledge transmitters in the social sciences are operating on a big scale on the national scene". In the field of sociology and social anthropology, there is quite a sizeable number of trained persons. He describes the institutional framework for training and research in sociology as a gigantic knowledge factory engaged in large scale manufacture of knowledge products comprising of micro surveys and micro field reports (Desai 1984:3).

The whole address is to his professional colleagues partly voicing the serious misgivings of social scientists but also in a sense engaging the profession in a dialogue about the social significance of the research that is being generated. Some of the important issues raised can be summed up as follows:

- (i) The colonial mould within which sociological research is trapped, constricting its vision and sapping creativity, and overall operating within a dependency framework, with borrowed concepts and methods from the 'high prestige centres of learning' in the US and the UK. This uncritical acceptance of exogenous models without gauging its relevance to Indian conditions and society has distorted perspective and stunted the growth of Indian sociology.
- (ii) The hardening of disciplinary boundaries leading to a segmented perspective and related to this is the reluctance to draw from both indology and history.
- (iii) The important question of the value-free stance and a supposed neutrality while simultaneously accepting uncritically the values adopted by the policy makers; related to this is the wider question of ethical dimension of sociology, it has become 'a discipline without human meaning purpose'.

- (iv) Despite the fact that Indian society is undergoing major social transformation, social scientific analyses are essentially ahistoric, static and synchronic in their approach, pursuing a structural-functional, equilibrium model.
- (v) Sociology is not engaging itself with the critical questions facing Indian society and thereby is unable to contribute meaningfully towards the dilemmas of development. What is significant is that most of the issues were articulated by the leading practitioners of the discipline of sociology and social anthropology.

9.4 IMPORTANT WORKS

Some of A R Desai's important works are:

- (i) *Recent Trends in Indian Nationalism* (1960)
- (ii) *Rural Sociology in India* (1969)
- (iii) *State and Society in India: Essays in Dissent* (1975)
- (iv) *India's Path of Development: A Marxist Approach* (1984)

9.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we learnt about the biographical details of A R Desai. We found that his central ideas revolved around issues of nationalism, development, peasantry and social and political transformation. We could see the influence of both Gandhi and Marx on his ideas and approach to understand society in India. Finally, we may conclude that in addition to being a sociologist, A R Desai was an activist involved in labor union activities.

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9.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Desai views nationalism as a historical category, a modern phenomenon which comes into existence at a certain point in history. In India, it evolved as result of a combination of objective factors and subjective factors when the Indian people were political subjects of the British Empire.
- 2) In the pre-Independence period, colonialism and nationalism as concepts and fields of action were central to Desai's intellectual and political engagement, while in the post-independence years it was the character of the State and the path of the development.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Desai left the Communist Party after a brief period of five years since he found the bureaucratic structure of the party suffocating. Also, he opposed the change in the Party's stand regarding support to British war efforts in India when the Soviet Union was attacked by Nazi Germany in 1939.
- 2) Factors that facilitate capitalist development in India are: relationship between the capitalist class and the State, and the moulding of different institutions (i.e., legal framework and administrative apparatus for facilitating capitalist development, along with the major policy initiatives, the public sector, planning as a major instrument, the mixed economy and the welfare state).

UNIT 10 M N SRINIVAS*

Structure

10.0 Objectives

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Biographical Sketch

10.3 Central Ideas

10.3.1 Structural-Functionalism

10.3.2 The 'Other' in Sociological Studies

10.3.3 Book-View vs. Field-View

10.3.4 Villages in India

10.3.5 Caste

10.3.6 Social Mobility

10.3.7 Community Development and Nation-Building

10.4 Important Works

10.5 Let Us Sum Up

10.6 References

10.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

10.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to

- outline the biographical details of M N Srinivas;
- discuss his central ideas; and
- list some of his important works.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Srinivas's lectures and writings have influenced multiple generations of sociologists and social anthropologists. His observations and forecasts about the trajectory of Indian society appear to have gained new relevance several years after they were delivered in letter and word. Srinivas's in-depth and precise study of material has resulted in generalisations that apply in many facets of life even in this age of uncertainty and change.

We begin this Unit with an understanding of the socio-cultural background which influenced the ideas of M N Srinivas and then examine some of his important ideas. Thereafter, we will list some of his important works.

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10.2 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mysore Narasimhachar Srinivas was born in Mysore on November 16, 1916 in the traditional Brahmin family of Narasimhachar. His father belonged to a village named Arakere (which is about 20 miles from the city of Mysore). He was a government servant. Narasimhachar had to leave the village in order to provide education to his children. As you would have concluded by now, Srinivas's family valued education greatly. His eldest brother taught English first as a teacher in a school and later joined the University of Mysore as Assistant Professor in English. Srinivas's brother urged him to improve his writing skills. One of the ways in which Srinivas tried to improve his writing skills was to get his manuscripts edited by R.K. Narayan – the well-known novelist.

Srinivas's intellectual ideas were shaped in the three universities in which he studied. First was Mysore University where he studied social philosophy under the tutelage of A R Wadia and M H Krishna. Second was Bombay university where he was nurtured by G S Ghurye. Third was Oxford University where he was trained by A R Radcliffe Brown and E E Evans- Pritchard. At the post-graduation level, Srinivas worked closely under the guidance of G S Ghurye. Encouraged by Ghurye, Srinivas conducted a short field-based study on marriage and family in the Kannada caste in Mysore state. The study was submitted as a dissertation which was later published as a book titled, *Marriage and Family in Mysore* (1942). Srinivas went to Oxford to undertake D. Phil. Programme. His research began under the supervision of Radcliffe – Brown. It was on the suggestion of Radcliffe-Brown that he re-studied the Coorg material using the structural-functional approach.

In an interview with Fuller (1999:5) Srinivas reveals 'Anyway, between October '45 and October '46, I had worked out the structure of the thesis and I discussed in particular the concept of ritual idiom with Radcliffe-Brown. That is when I discussed purity and pollution as providing the framework, and for analysis of the Coorg wedding ritual I went to the *Andaman Islanders* which was very helpful to me. I discussed with him the linkage of Coorg ritual with the groups, the *okka* (joint family) and the village and so on... the whole idea of 'spread' also I owe to R-B [Radcliffe-Brown] – the ideas of Sanskritization and Westernization came up from the material, they were not imposed on it.' Later, he worked with E. E. Evans – Pritchard when Radcliffe – Brown left Oxford in 1946. This study was published as a book titled, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*.

In 1951 Srinivas returned to India. He founded the Department of Sociology in Baroda University. In 1959, he was offered the newly established Chair of sociology in the Delhi School of Economics at the Delhi University. Between 1966 and 1969, as he remained President of the Indian Sociological Society (ISS). He reorganized of the society's journal, the *Sociological Bulletin*. In the year 1972, Srinivas returned to his home state of Karnataka. He joined the newly set up Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC) as Joint Director. His

chief objective was to enhance the standard of sociology in south India (Shah 1996). Seven years later he retired from the ISEC and joined the National Institute for Advanced Studies at Bangalore. He passed away on November 30, 1999.

M N Srinivas

Box 10.1 Comparison between Oxford and Baroda

In the course of an interview with A.M. Shah (2000: 629) Srinivas says, 'First of all, I had no idea of the kind of situation that I would be facing when I moved from one of the oldest universities in Western Europe to the university in Baroda, which had been started only two years earlier. The contrast between Oxford and Baroda could not have been greater. During the first year of my stay in Baroda I went around in a kind of daze, wondering what I had let myself in for. Sometimes I got the impression that the people around me were playing at setting up a university. I felt nostalgic for Oxford, where academic conventions were several centuries old. But deep down in me I knew that I had to make a go of my job, as I wanted to stay in India'

10.3 CENTRAL IDEAS

Srinivas is known for his writings on methods and prospects of sociological research, villages in India, caste, nation-building and many more themes. Let us learn about some of his main ideas.

10.3.1 Structural-Functionalism

Srinivas learnt the concept of social structure from Radcliffe-Brown. Later, he became convinced of its significance in the study of social life. Srinivas's work was supervised by E. E. Evans-Pritchard, in addition to A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. This occurred when Radcliffe-Brown retired and Evans-Pritchard took over. Despite the fact that Evans-Pritchard considered Srinivas's basic approach had an undue reliance on Durkheim, which appeared undesirable to him, he did not want to interfere in his work. While Radcliffe-Brown shaped his approach, Evans-Pritchard inspired his vision.

Srinivas's engagement with Radcliffe-Brown and Evans Pritchard sharpened his intellectual ideas. Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functionalism and his treating social anthropology as natural science were challenged by Evans-Pritchard (1951). Evans-Pritchard critiqued Radcliffe-Brown's idea that societies are like natural systems that are governed by laws. Instead, he proposed that interpretations were more important in understanding social reality. Also, Evans-Pritchard suggested that historical perspective was essential for holistic understanding of social life. Following Evans-Pritchard, Srinivas adhered to the functionalist idea of studying social institutions in relation to the whole system.

Srinivas agreed with Radcliffe-structural-functionalism Brown's approach. He concedes, though, that his perspective had shifted by the time he graduated from Oxford in 1951. He realised the significance of historical evidence in the functioning of civilization. He also concluded that comparing social laws to scientific laws was pointless. Srinivas began to recognize the need of historical

data in societal functioning and the futility of the underlying principles of structural-functionalism. Srinivas did not limit himself to the structural-functional method. He sought to explore meanings within and beyond contexts. He tried to incorporate meanings in the course of analysing major social conditions and processes such as dominant caste, sanskritization, and westernization (Khare 1996).

Srinivas maintained that problems in Indian society e.g., agrarian conflicts, inequalities, ethnicity, communalism, and regionalism should be understood in the context of interrelationships that connect them with other aspects of life. This approach would enable politicians and administrators to see many options to resolve the problems. Srinivas emphasized the importance of systematic comparisons of a society's problems, processes, and institutions with those of neighbouring countries in the first phase and developing countries in the second.

10.3.2 The 'Other' in Sociological Studies

Anthropologists and sociologists commonly feel that they should study 'other' cultures rather than their own. Two of the main reasons are: first, the familiarity with one's own culture could result in overlooking certain important aspects of the culture; second, one's own bias could influence the study. Srinivas was aware of the diversity of lifestyles and their coexistence throughout the country. For this reason, he set studied cultures in his own country. He re-interpreted the notion of 'other' in anthropological and sociological studies. Srinivas maintains, 'Differences of language, dialect, religion, sect, caste, class and ethnicity confront Indian anthropologists at every pint, so they can find "the other" in adjacent village, tribe, or backward slum' (see Shah 2000:634).

Srinivas believes that the anthropological technique should be extended to the study of one's own family and existence. Srinivas had been sensitive to changes in people's lifestyles since early years of his life in the course of which he wandered both on College road and Bandikeri areas. College Road was dominated by Brahmins from various parts of South India, whereas the Bandikerineighborhood was dominated by Kunubas, who were shepherds/wearers by caste (Shah 1996). The diversity of College Road and Bandikeri's inhabitants provided Srinivas with his first exposure to cultural difference. Srinivas spent a lot of time researching the Rampura hamlet and the Coorg region in south India. The study of one's own society demands the use of all moral and intellectual resources available to the sociologist. Ethnic, regional, linguistic, and religious diversity, as also migration from one region of the country to another have enriched Indian culture.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Outline Srinivas's critique of Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functional approach.

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- 2) Explain Srinivas's justification of studying one's own society by Indian anthropologists and sociologists.

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10.3.3 Book-View vs. Field-View

Srinivas was keen to differentiate between a book-view of society (based on religious literature and an Indological perspective) and a field-view of society in the Indian context (derived from in-depth fieldwork and sociological approach). Books have remained an indispensable part of people's lives in India. They provided norms and laid out the normative code of behaviour. In urban areas, norms and normative code of behaviour were imposed by rulers. In rural areas, however, dominant castes or councils of individual castes enforced norms and normative code of behaviour. Noticeable cultural diversity exists not only between regions, but also across castes and ethnic groups. He noticed a significant gap between the book-view of society and the field-view of society. In reality, the disjunction between the two provided a unique viewpoint on understanding how caste regulates social relations across time. While Srinivas was attempting to establish the significance of field-view for the study of Indian society and culture, Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (1970) introduced the book-view in academic circles. The impact was so much that for many sociologists, book-view gained more importance than field-view.

10.3.4 Villages in India

Srinivas believed that village studies were the best way to learn about Indian society, culture, and civilization. They signified a transition in social anthropology's emphasis from tribal studies to studies of peasants' lifestyles, social movements, and societal change. Srinivas made a significant contribution to the realistic understanding of villages. At the outset, he busted the myths that surrounding villages in India. The Select Committee on the Affairs of the East Indian Company's Fifth Report treated the village regarded as a little republic, a stagnant, passive, and unchanging entity. Srinivas countered this overly simplistic view by bringing out the reality of Indian villages. He shed light on inequality, disease and illiteracy as also village resources. Srinivas brought out the point that rather than being egalitarian, villages were driven by hierarchy and influence of politics. He drew attention to the gap between lived reality in villages and perceived or imagined reality in the minds of policy makers.

While describing the routine or continuing ties between the village and the state, as well as individual occasions of contact, Srinivas (1975) emphasized the role of self-defense, collective fight, and local governance in the matrix of village life. In pre-British period, both political and economic factors combined to hinder formation of horizontal ties beyond political boundaries. Coming together of people beyond political lines was difficult for everybody, but notably for lower

caste people. Furthermore, politically ambitious patrons had to acquire and retain local supporters. For this, they had the politically ambitious patrons had to give out food and drink, especially at weddings and funerals. They had to provide loans and other assistance as needed. The leader who donated or loaned foodgrains to his tenants and labourers acquired their goodwill and ensured their support later. Again, the fundamental dynamics of village life are defined by meanderings through formalised arrangements in landowner-labourer and patron-client relationships. When labour was scarce, society was split into a series of 'production pyramids,' with the landowner at the top, artisans and service castes below, and landless labourers at the bottom. on top. Disputes and rivalry amongst patrons were governed by institutionalised connections and threats to the village society. In such a context, political power could only be obtained through negotiating institutional arrangements.

10.3.5 Caste

Srinivas discussed the importance of caste in managing social ties. This was illustrated in the specific setting of Rampura hamlet, and then in the larger context of the subcontinent. In his critique of Dumont's thoughts on caste, Srinivas aimed to subvert western socio-centrism onto an Indian social institution,' projecting caste as indigenes do. The fundamental perspective flip has far-reaching consequences. Srinivas (1957, 1984) established that caste hierarchy was one of several forms of rigorous social stratification that were antithetical to individuality. Historically, there was a great deal of connection among the various castes. Members of one caste were always reliant on commodities and services provided by members of other castes. People from one caste competed for the commodities and services given by other castes, which occasionally resulted in conflict.

In Rampura village, the population of peasants was the largest. The headman of the village was a peasant. All this made their social, economic and political position in the village strongest. Brahmins and Lingayats also respected them in spite of the fact that peasants belong to the shudra varna. Brahmins and Lingayats remained dominant in the ritual domain only. For support in all other aspects of life, they depended on peasants. Interestingly, peasants resolved disputes between high caste people and untouchables. You might be aware of the fact that arbitration is sought from most influential people in the village.

The Rampura study inspired Srinivas (1976, cited from 2002:75) to develop the concept of dominant caste. In his own words, 'A caste may be said to be "dominant" when it preponderates numerically over the other castes, and when it also wields preponderant economic and political power. A large and powerful caste group can be more easily dominant if its position in the local caste hierarchy is not too low' (1976, cited from 2002:75). Another factor which has been crucial in deciding dominance is the amount of educated males and their vocation. Often, western and traditional education determines dominance. Hence, Srinivas refers to this aspect of western. The common aspiration of the people is

to get younger members of their caste group educated and thereafter get employment on government offices.

When the position of a caste changes in different villages, the people in the village with the low position strive to identify with those with better positions and therefore move up in the local hierarchy. People of the ruling caste revel in social security because they know they will not be humiliated or insulted by those who are ritually or otherwise superior to them. The presence of able-bodied males who are willing to battle strengthens their position and security. A study of the locally dominant caste and the kind of dominance it enjoys is critical to understanding rural society in India. According to Srinivas, most essential characteristics of domination are numerical strength, economic and political power, ritual status, and western education and occupations. In a community, the various elements of power are usually distributed among distinct castes. a caste is said to be dominant when it possesses all or most of the elements of dominance.

10.3.6 Social Mobility

Srinivas (1968) emphasises mobility within the caste framework. He cites two sources of mobility in the pre-British era: flexibility in the political system , particularly at lower levels, and the availability of marginal land that might be cultivated. Prior to the British government, political power was typically taken by leaders of powerful castes who could fight battles and shift loyalties often. . The sheer size of their numbers, as well as the status and power that comes with owning land, put them in a strong position to seize political power. because The Kshatriya varna was made up of several castes. Each of the castes constituting the Kshatriya varna held political power. It was for this reason that when a leader of a dominant caste rose to the position of ruler, he claimed the status of a Kshatriya. He inspired others and emerged as a source of mobility for others. According to Baines (1912), it was mandatory for the king to be served by a specific number of Brahmins. A king who did not have the required number of Brahmins to serve him would elevate people of a lower caste to the status of Brahmins.

As a result of British rule, new sources of mobility emerged. According to Srinivas (1968), the British pushed the following as key sources of mobility in contemporary India:

- (i) the Concept of land ownership and economic opportunities in port cities and capitals. This encouraged individuals of all castes to purchase land. In times of economic distress, persons of high castes residing in cities sold their land to peasants and other castes in villages. Ownership of land offered them prestige and status.
- (ii) New values with it, with a focus on equality, assertion of one's rights, and freedom to practice one's faith which came with modern knowledge. The newly westernized Indians geared up to reform the society. Missionary propaganda criticized untouchability, animal sacrifice, idolatry, elaborate rituals, polytheism, polygyny, child

marriage and other such practices. In addition to hospitals, orphanages, and schools, the missionaries established a printing press, which aided in the dissemination of regional literature. They created dictionaries and translated regional literature into English.

- (iii) A new economic system, and an expansion of the communication network that connected the country internally and with the rest of the globe. The upper castes sucked up the majority of educational and economic chances. This widened the rift between the upper and lower classes. Eventually, the Backward Class Movement was formed in order to capture chances and resources for the upper castes. Those who did succeed motivated others who were impoverished or oppressed. In Srinivas's words, the 'demonstration effect' broadened social horizons and provided vigour and strength to the Backward Class Movement,
- (iv) new trading and employment opportunities such as road, railway, and canal construction work that benefited Noniyas of eastern Uttar Pradesh, Kolis of Surat Coast in Gujarat, and several other castes,
- (v) liberty to acquire symbols and rituals of higher castes that inspired lower castes to wear the sacred thread. The regionally dominant castes resisted, often resorting to violence and economic boycott. Such movements, however, are not always successful since victims file complaints with the police and file lawsuits in court, and
- (vi) conversion to Islam, Christianity, and sects such as Sikhism and the Arya Samaj. Many converts found they took the stigma with them into the new fold as well (see, Mathur 2020).

Adult franchise and prospects for attaining power have opened up new avenues of movement in Independent India. Leaders of the dominant and the non-dominant (but numerically larger) castes wield enormous influence. As the gap between the leaders and the rest of the population becomes wider, the leaders struggle to retain ties with the grassroots (without which they would not be able to retain the coveted position). Srinivas (1968) presents a typical type of mobility in which caste is contrasted with class among rich educated people in big cities. They take up activities that have little to do with their conventional caste employment back in the village. Such people can conveniently flout pollution norms, mingle with, and even marry persons who do not adhere to casteist standards. In such instances, rather than caste, class emerges as the organizing element in lifestyle and interpersonal relationships.

The economic aspect offsets the impact of the ruling caste on the social life of the. Joshi (1996:138) critiques Srinivas's interpretation of the Rampura situation, in following words, 'However, with the pace of change accelerating, the village and the town getting reintegrated, new opportunities, apart from broadening the scope of upward mobility, also enlarged the scope of economic disparity between members of the dominant caste. The new rich in this context, belonging, both to

the rural and the urban worlds, emerged as the new class, thus losing the attributes of a dominant caste. Even as a mode of their self-identification or of identification by other members of the village, the dominant caste could no longer serve as a meaningful concept.' According to Joshi, *The Remembered Village* suffers from a failure to provide appropriate place to people's economic organization.

Lower castes are inspired by upper castes to strive for upward social mobility. One of the chief means by which lower castes move up the ladder of social stratification is the process of sanskritization. Srinivas explains the process of Sanskritization in following words, 'A low caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism and by sanskritizing its ritual and pantheon. In short it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites and beliefs of the Brahmins and the adoption of the Brahminic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though, theoretically forbidden. This process has been called 'Sanskritization' in preference to "Brahminization" as certain Vedic rites one confined to the Brahmins and the two other twice-born castes' (1952:32). They followed the Brahminical way of life, mainly in observing, among others, stringent marriage code, adherence to purity – pollution restrictions, taking religious vows, and reading of Sanskrit tales and stories.

According to Srinivas (1967), in the traditional setup, a jati adopted the name and characteristics of a dominant caste which could be was respected in a region but was not highly sanskritized. A jaticould simply adopt changes in its diet, way of life, and rituals and start to assert itself as Brahmin, Kshatriya, or Vaishya. Often, this could be carried out over a span of one or two generations. This implies that after a span of one or two generations, people of the jati could be identified as those belonging to the Brahmin, Kshatriya or Vaishya varna. You will be surprised to learn that many Lingayats who claim equality with Brahmins refuse to eat food cooked by Brahmins., give an interesting case in point. Another example cited by Srinivas that stands out in stark contrast to the Lingayats is that of the Smiths of south India. They identify themselves Vishwakarma Brahmins. They wear the sacred thread, and practise sanskritized. Some of them, however, still enjoy meat and liquor. They were forced to perform weddings in villages that had a temple of their caste deity. The wedding procession would not pass through streets in which the Right Hand castes lived. The case of Smiths differed from that of Lingayats. Smiths's case was unique in the sense that the castes tried to avoid the hierarchy offered by structural neighbours by asserting equality with Brahmins.

Srinivas (1956) indicates that, whereas lower caste individuals try to raise their social standing by imitating the upper castes, the upper caste people are influenced by the western ways of life, ideas, and the prospects for economic advancement the western ideas provide. During the pre-independence period, Brahmins controlled the literacy tradition and held the highest position in the rural economic hierarchy. They took advantage of the majority of the chances

available in the Western way of life following the foundation of British authority. The westernized Brahmins acted as go-betweens for the British and the rest of the populace. As a result, a new and secular caste structure was superimposed on the previous system. Surprisingly, in the new and secular caste structure, the British and the new Kshatriya were at the top, the Brahmin was second, and Sudra was at the bottom of the pyramid. Brahmin looked up to the British; the rest of the people looked up to Brahmins and the British. The complexity in this system consisted in some British beliefs and customs that were diametrically opposed to those of Brahmins and their ethos. Sanskritization and westernization are two, often competing influences in contemporary social life. As Brahmins become more westernized and abandon some habits, the people of the lower castes adopt them as if to embellish their own way of life and advance in the regard of their relevant others.

10.3.7 Community Development and Nation-Building

The westernized elite in India upholds western concepts and values. These are used to understand the state of affairs in our own country. Focusing on nation-building in Independent India Srinivas held social scientists in the country for ignoring the complexity of political and social stability consistency in drawing conclusions about the country as a whole. He maintained that social scientists' conclusions were drawn on the basis of on the basis of inadequate ambiguous data. They did not celebrate the success in nation-building given the facts of the country's vastness and diversity. He suggests the importance of westernized elite for their commitment towards reforming society. They also strive towards parliamentary democracy as the form of government for the country. In this way, they contribute towards nation-building.

Srinivas outlines fundamental elements in the process of nation-building in India, including:

- (i) protective discrimination for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other Backward Classes, which aims to ensure that opportunities for growth and development reach the socially and ritually underprivileged;
- (ii) democracy as an information system in which the needs and necessities of people living in different regions, the effects of administrative action in the implementation of policies are brought to the notice of those in power. A free but responsible press is essential to the effective functioning of democracy;
- (iii) (iii) political education and decentralization not only in the political realm but also in the fields of administration and industry;
- (iv) a policy of pluralism in matters of religion, language, and culture;
- (v) sub-nationalism in the form of ethnicity communalism, linguistic consciousness, and regionalism that brings together people of hereditary groups, many of which operate as pressure groups at

regional and state levels because of which their leaders are able to secure political power and economic benefits. The threat of sub-nationalism and overwhelming nationalism is perpetual; and

- (vi) secularism ensuring that members of each religion are allowed to profess, practice and propagate their faith on the one hand and that no individual will be discriminated against on the basis of religion (Mathur, 2020).

Srinivas (1977) describes multiple cultures centred on the urban middle class and the rural poor in the larger framework of Indian society. The emphasis is on the relationship between them. This relationship influences India's economy, politics, society, and world-view of the people. The urban middle class consists of high and medium castes as well as the upper layer of minority groups. A large number of upper middle class people are employed as government officials, professionals in many fields, and other professions. , they are powerful but are submissive to the political elite. The political elite make an effort to keep members of the urban middle class pleased. This ensures smooth functioning of the administrative machinery. The rural poor, on the other hand, are largely peasants. Most of them communicate in regional language. They remain in awe of urban middle class people who are able to speak in English. Despite being impoverished and lacking the power that the urban middle class possesses, politicians target rural people because they constitute a larger vote bank. Landowning families of dominant and high castes occupy a strategic position between the two classes. They are politically and economically influential, with fair representation in bureaucracy and other professions. They are the oppress people of the lower castes, landless people, and the under-privileged. They main seek to join the upper middle-class and at the same time control the village activities.

Politicians approach rural patrons for votes particularly when elections are close. At this time, rural patrons demand licenses for buses, rice mills, and other businesses, as well as seats in medical and technological colleges for their relatives. Shah (2000: 631) maintains, 'Once middle-class status is gained, those who have arrived try hard to maintain it and also move up. This involves coping with new concerns and anxieties by visiting temples, going on pilgrimages, seeking out miracle-performing holy men and consulting astrologers. Life-cycle rituals become more elaborate, and vegetarianism, yoga and meditation become part of the Sanskritized lifestyle. At the same time, birthdays and wedding anniversaries are celebrated in Western style, with parties, alcohol, cake cutting etc. On the secular front, getting children admitted to good schools, seeking admission to professional courses of study, and conspicuous consumerism become important goals'.

Srinivas could foresee an increase in tension and conflict between dominant castes and the dalits (formerly referred to as 'untouchables'). Governments' preferential policies have enabled dalits to challenge the dominance of upper castes. Politicians seek to impress both the dalits and the upper castes in order to build vote banks. Even decades after its origin, Srinivas's concept of a vote bank is

relevant in contemporary times. The dominant rural elite take away the gains from community development projects while the powerless remain waiting. This deepens the split between the two groups. According to Srinivas (1962), conflict would escalate as more rural poor people realize they are not benefiting from development programmes supposed to ameliorate their lot. He goes on to say that tensions between higher castes and harijans are likely to worsen in the future. The position of dominant castes has been strengthened in the Panchayati Raj. This has been used by dominant castes to further subjugate people who have long obeyed them but are now seeking independence. Srinivas also believes that the urban elite may not notice these changes until they reach a tipping point. Rise in level of education could be linked with change in values and attitudes of people. Education promotes economic progress by facilitating the transition from an agrarian to an industrial culture with a higher emphasis on logic, punctuality, and discipline.

He believed that social anthropologists and sociologists couldn't overlook India and China, not just because of their size, population, and cultural richness, but also because they are emerging as world powers. In India, the twin phenomena of decentralization of authority and reservation of women and underprivileged sections of the population in local self-government have attracted the interest of social scientists all over the world (see, Srinivas 1966, 1997, 2000).

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Explain Joshi's critique of The Remembered Village study.

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- 2) List the fundamental elements of nation-building outlined by Srinivas.

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10.4 IMPORTANT WORKS

Some of M N Srinivas's important works are:

Marriage and Family in Mysore (1942)

Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India (1952)

Caste in Modern India and Other Essays (1962)

Social Change in Modern India (1966)

The Remembered Village (1976)

10.5 LET US SUM UP

M N Srinivas

In this unit we learnt about the life and work of M N Srinivas. We began with developing an understanding of the social and academic environment in which his ideas developed. The influence of his training under G S Ghurye, Radcliffe-Brown and Evans Pritchard is evident in his ideas concerning individual, society and culture. He emphasised the need to develop indigenous concepts to understand Indian social reality. We discussed his central ideas relating mainly with structural-functionalism, villages in India, caste system and social mobility. His work presents holistic and profound understanding of society of that time.

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10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Srinivas's critiqued Radcliffe-structural-functionalism Brown's approach mainly on following points: ignoring historical evidence in the functioning of civilization; (ii) comparing social laws to scientific laws. was pointless. Srinivas began to recognize the need of historical data in societal functioning and the futility of the underlying principles of structural-functionalism.
- 2) According to Srinivas, an Indian anthropologist who studies the 'self-in-the-other' is studying someone who is the other as well as someone with whom s(he) has cultural forms, beliefs, and values on one level. The nature and extent social and cultural variation in India. Differences in language, dialect, religion, sect, caste, class, and ethnicity challenge Indian anthropologists at every turn, so they can locate "the other" in an adjacent hamlet, tribe, or backward slum

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) According to Joshi, *The Remembered Village* suffers from a failure to provide appropriate place to people's economic organization. The broader propensity to disregard economic activities covers up a comprehensive understanding of caste in India.
- 2) Srinivas lists the following elements of nation-building in India: (i) protective discrimination for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other Backward Classes, (ii) democracy; (iii) political education and decentralization in the political, administration and industry areas; (iv) policy of pluralism in matters of religion, language, and culture; (v) sub-nationalism, and (vi) secularism.

UNIT 11 RAMKRISHNA MUKHERJEE *

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Biographical Sketch
- 11.3 Central Ideas
 - 11.3.1 Social Forces behind Rise and Fall of the East India Company
 - 11.3.2 Rural Economy and Society
 - 11.3.3 Sociology of Indian Society
 - 11.3.4 Sociology and Society
 - 11.3.5 Scientific Method
- 11.4 Important Works
- 11.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.6 References
- 11.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to

- outline the biographical details of Ramkrishna Mukherjee;
- explain the socio-historical environment which influenced his work;
- explain his central ideas; and
- discuss the impact of his work on sociology in contemporary times.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Mukherjee was one of the few social scientists in India who consistently and fruitfully applied the Marxist concepts and method in appraising the social reality. He laid bare the stark reality of exploitation of the subjugated people of Africa and India by the colonial powers of the west. He threw light on the development of classes and class-contradiction in the societies of India and other places. He strongly advocated the adoption of conflict approach in place of the consensual approach in studying social structure and process. A keen sense of history is manifest in all the works by Mukherjee. We begin this unit with a

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glimpse into his life. Thereafter we will learn about the main ideas that characterize his work. In subsequent section, we will identify some of his important writings.

11.2 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ramkrishna Mukherjee was born in Jessore in erstwhile Bangladesh on November 7 in 1917. His father was Satindranath Mukherjee and mother, Sati Rani Devi. Satindranath was a self-made man who worked as an engineer in the Indian Railways. Ramkrishna Mukherjee inherited from his father the conviction of independent and hard labour. He believed that man should not only depend on lineage but should learn to stand on one's own feet. Mukherjee's mother was Sati Rani Devi who also came from a reputed landed aristocratic family of Bengal. Sati Rani Devi was, it is said, of a haughty temperament. Mukherjee's daughter writes: "The young Ramkrishna was brought up in a strange atmosphere of a decaying feudal culture intermixed with the heady ideas of rationalism and positivism of nineteenth century Bengal." (Banerjee; p. vi, 1995)

Mukherjee obtained school education from Ripon Collegiate School and Mitra Institution. He did his M.Sc. in Anthropology from the University of Calcutta with Human Genetics as a special paper. He did his Ph.D. on the Physical Characteristics of the Ancient Inhabitants of Jebel Moya, Sudan, under the supervision of Professor J.C. Trevor in 1955. This work was on Biometry and not on Anthropology.

Mukherjee was, in the main, influenced by the dialectics of Marx and Engels, on the one hand, and by the statistical figures of Professor Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis (particularly his D2 statistics). The impact of the Marxian dialectics had always been prominent on Mukherjee, particularly in his early writings on village and famine. Though Mukherjee had, for a brief spell of his life, an association with the Ramkrishna Mission, he joined the Bangiya Provincial Kishan Sabha (BPKS) of the Communist Party. He was inducted into the Krishak Andolan by the CPI and from 1941 to 1946, he actively participated in the peasant movement in Bagura, now in Bangladesh. In CPI Mukherjee came in contact with many people among whom P.C. Joshi was important. P. C Joshi introduced Mukherjee to P.C. Mahalanobis in 1944. Professor Mahalanobis was then searching for dedicated young men and women for building up a team for the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI). Mukherjee joined the ISI in 1944 and remained there till his retirement in 1979.

At ISI under the guidance of Mukherjee had the training of applying statistical techniques and large scale sample survey methods. In the study of society and social problems. The culmination of this training resulted in the study of the aftereffects of the Bengal Famine of 1943. There were two papers "An Assessment of the after-effects of a Famine in Bengal" (Mahalanobis, Ghosh and Mukherjee) and "A Plan for the Rehabilitation of Bengal" (Chattopadhyay and Mukherjee). Both the papers were published in 1946. These two papers formed the basis of the book *Famine and Rehabilitation of Bengal* in 1946. Mukherjee

also applied large-scale sample survey method to the study of rural indebtedness and rural stratification.

Mukherjee's fame went beyond the confines of Bengal when he came in contact with Henry Wellcome of the Burroughs Wellcome Foundation. Henry Wellcome had excavated a number of skulls and skeletons from Jebel Moya in Sudan. The Burroughs Foundation gave a research grant to Cambridge University to study and catalogue the skulls and skeletons. The Cambridge University contacted Professor Mahalanobis to send scholars who would apply Mahalanobis' D2 statistics on the remains from Egypt and Sudan and determine the racial characteristics of the skeletons found at Jebel Moya. Professor Mahalanobis sent C.R.Rao and Ramkrishna Mukherjee to Cambridge. The results of this study formed the nucleus of Mukherjee's Ph.D. thesis published in 1955 as *The Physical Characteristics of the Ancient Inhabitants of Jebel Moya, Sudan*.

During 1948-49, Ramkrishna Mukherjee came in close contact with members of the French Communist Party. At Cambridge, Mukherjee attended classes on economic history by Maurice Dobb. At Cambridge again Mukherjee came in contact with Rajni Palme Dutt of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Both Dobb and Dutt had moulded Mukherjee into the Marxist frame of thought. So whatever he wrote, whether on peasantry, village stratification or family of India or of any other part of the globe, particularly of the Communist countries, was touched with leftist leaning. He was also engaged with works on the colonized countries like Uganda. Three books *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company*, *Dynamics of Rural Society* and *The Problem of Uganda* were published during his stay in Humboldt University of East Berlin from 1953 to 1957 as the Professor of Indian Studies.

Mukherjee returned to India in 1957 as the Professor of Sociology at the Indian Statistical Institute (Calcutta). He was trying to form the Sociological Research Unit at ISI. He was a prolific writer. And, we find him publishing *The Sociologist and Social Change in India Today*, *West Bengal Family Structure* and *Social Indicators* from 1960 to 1975. Between 1977 and 1980 he published *Sociology of Indian Sociology* and *What Will It Be?* From the 1980s certain changes took place in his academic endeavours. First, he wanted to prove that there were no social sciences but a social science. Second, instead of applying his quantification to study the objective variables, he included the study of subjective variables along with those of the objective ones. In the book, *Why Unitary Social Science?* Mukherjee suggests that compartmentalization of the social sciences should be replaced by the establishment of a uniform or unitary social science.

11.3 CENTRAL IDEAS

Ramkrishna Mukherjee is known for his extensive writings on research method, Indian sociology, and society. Let us learn about his ideas.

11.3.1 Social Forces behind Rise and fall of the East India Company

In *the East India Company* (1955) Mukherjee used the Marxist concept of primitive accumulation in analyzing the historical data about changes in the society and economy of India, which were wrought by the regime of the East India Company. The rise of the Company was the result of the growth of mercantile capitalism and its decline was caused by the decay of mercantile capitalism and the rise of industrial capitalism in Britain. The whole process was linked with economic and political denudation of India. Mukherjee shows how the British colonized India through the East India Company with the ulterior motive of exploiting India in order to enrich themselves. And then, the British Government took over the Government of India and fleeced the Indians. Their claim to bear the “white man’s burden” to civilize India which was portrayed by them as a culturally and economically backward and stagnant society was a reprehensible lie. The entire process was connected with the primitive accumulation of capital by the British during the phase of Company’s rule.

What is meant by primitive accumulation of capital was not explained by Mukherjee. Marx defines and analyses it in *Capital* I, pt. VII. Primitive accumulation is related to abstinence and abstinence can lead to accumulation of capital if capitalist relations of production are already in existence. Prior to that, operation of two processes paves the way for creation of surplus leading to primitive accumulation of capital. First, the transformation of relations of production centering on the land through dispossessing the peasantry of the land. The fleeing of the peasantry from the land is the source of wage labourers both for agricultural capital and for industry. The other and concomitant process consisted in merchants’ making gains not merely by exploration of products of home industries but by the promotion of exchange of products of commercially and otherwise economically undeveloped societies, and by the exploitation of both spheres of production.

Mukherjee analysed the working of the second process through the activities of different merchants’ companies of Europe. The chief moments of primitive accumulation were also followed by the East India Company. The Company gained monopoly over trade with India through a) the grant of Royal Charter at home, b) victory in wars with other European merchants having connections with India, c) gain of favour of the disunited Indian rulers by means of flattery, bribery, chicanery and finally, d) military victory over them and their subjects. Mukherjee shows with a mass of historical data the nature of loot and plunder of India the Company and its officials began and perpetrated.

Contrary to the propaganda of promotion of freedom and justice and good governance in India by the English, the British Parliament and government and the British people in general acquiesced in the Company’s game of guile and bribes, of coercion and treachery – exposing the worst side of human character. The Company ruthlessly followed the rule of buying cheap and selling dear. To realize this desire, the Company took away the rights of the Indian merchants, destroyed the flourishing textile and other industries of the Indians and

devastated the life of the artisans and the peasants. The mercantile bourgeoisie could not thrive because it did not secure any protection from the decadent feudal system. The mercantile bourgeoisie remained decisively subservient to the feudal power of Indian society.

The absence of a strong navy in possession of the supreme political power weakened its agency in trade with foreign countries. The class of merchants had to depend on foreign merchants for overseas trade. The European merchants, particularly, the English manipulated this weakness of the Indians to obtain control over the Indians.

The way to complete political subjugation of Indians by the British became very well secured after the Company's military victory over Siraj-ud-daula, the Nawab of Bengal, through devious means. Not only did the Company secure thenceforth its territorial expansion in other parts of the Indian sub-continent, it also created a "colonial merchant bourgeois" class in the form of banyas and gomastas. It also engaged in rack-renting. The regime of the Company made the peasants including different categories of landlords bleed white. The countryside experienced droughts and floods, famines and epidemics. The towns decayed because of deliberate destruction of the indigenous industries and artisans in order to facilitate the demands for the goods manufactured by the upcoming industries of eighteenth century Britain. Lives and property of the colonized masses were destroyed to secure the end. They had no means to secure justice from anywhere.

The "Raj" imposed by the foreign power proved callous in its complete neglect of "public works" such as constructing and maintaining irrigation systems.

The same policy continued even after the British Government directly took the reins of power from the hands of the Company and put an end to its monopoly of trading in India. The reason lay in the consolidation of the rising industrial bourgeoisie in England that benefited from the primitive accumulation of capital by the mercantile bourgeoisie of which the East India Company was a notable representative. The rising industrial bourgeoisie benefited from the policy whereby the British manufacturers were forced into India through the agency of the Governor-General and Commercial Residents, while Indian manufacturers were shut from England by prohibitive tariffs.

It is true that England witnessed quite a few innovations in industry. But in them innovations are passive, many of the most important having lain dormant for centuries, waiting for a sufficient store of force to have accumulated to set them working. That store must always take the shape of money, and money not hoarded, but in motion. The influx of Indian treasure through exploitation of India by the Company created the situation where Indians would continue to "supply the British industrialists with raw materials and to consume the British goods dumped in India."

The mercantile bourgeoisie cleared the path for the successful penetration of industrial capital in the colony. The industrial bourgeoisie were no longer

prepared to brook the monopoly of the East India Company to trade with India. They became vociferous in their criticism of the 'excesses' by the Company to which they hitherto connived in silence and brought the monopoly of the Company down.

11.3.2 Rural Economy and Society

Mukherjee's *Six Villages of Bengal* is a study on the relationship existing between the village on the one hand and the wider economic structure, on the other. The book is divided into four chapters. All the six villages are from the erstwhile East Pakistan. Of the six villages chosen, five were in the interior part while the sixth one was near the town. The villages had similar kinds of physical characteristics – arable land, huts, tanks, etc. and the population consisted of people from Hindu and Muslim communities. Mukherjee discusses the religious groups of the villages and also their administrative organizations. He gives an account of the different caste groups in the villages and shows the interrelationships of the groups, intermarriage between two caste groups, if any, the nature of family, the relationship existing between the village and the local union boards, policed station and the district board. He also gives a detailed account of the kind of food of the villagers, the dress they wear, the types of diseases they suffer from, the festivals in and around the village. He discusses the source of water supply in the villages and notes that intoxication is almost absent in these villages.

Mukherjee provides a detailed description of the types of occupations of the villagers. Though agriculture happens to be the principal occupation, other professions like weaving, oil-pressing, tinkering, tailoring, shop-keeping, peddling, money-lending, fishing, begging, etc are also found in the villages. Service is found pursued by villagers of Silimpur because of the proximity of this village to the town. Mukherjee then gives a detailed account of the nature of soil, climate and irrigation facilities available in the villages. With the help of tables he shows the types of cultivation done by the villagers throughout the year in the six villages. Then with the extent of land-holding and cultivation Mukherjee finds out that cultivable holdings (1 to 5 acres of land) in the interior villages is 50 per cent while the same is 76 per cent in Silimpur. He also gives an estimate of the services received from the bullocks and other implements utilized in agriculture. All this information is given month-wise and in tables.

The first argument that Mukherjee gives with respect to economic differentiation is that the distribution of the households under their per capita income is considerably asymmetrical in 1941-42. The data of Mukherjee reveal that though the range of per capita income spreads from Rs. 11 to above Rs. 500, the per capita income of the overwhelming majority of the people is restricted between Rs. 11 and Rs. 150 or more specifically between Rs. 11 and Rs. 50. Mukherjee now makes an intensive study of household budgets. And, on the basis of hierarchical distribution of households under different types of household budgets and under the mean living indices, Mukherjee talks of three classes in the economic structure – Class I, Class II and Class III. Class I is made up of

professional groups and service-holders, jotdars, zamindars and rich farmers. Class II ryot, artisan, small trader and non-cultivating owners and Class III ryot-bargadar, agricultural labourer, beggar and others. He mentions that people in Class I enjoy a prosperous and smooth life, people in Class III maintain a bare living and Class II lies somewhere in between.

Box 11.1 Economic Structure and Social Life

Mukherjee... shows...that even though the average income of villages in Bengal was low due to primitive techniques of agricultural production, there is a well-defined income hierarchy to be found among villagers. He sees clearly three ranks of family occupations. The upper rank consists of subinfeudatory landlords and the relatively prosperous peasantry, as well as those persons who are in well-paid positions or engage in large-scale trade with interest in land. The middle rank consists mainly of the self-sufficient peasantry and others, such as artisans and small traders, who maintain a somewhat self-sufficient existence partly based on land. The lower rank consists of the remaining occupational groups who depend on working for others or even begging....

The upper rank own land, the principal means of production in an agrarian economy, and employ the labor power of others. The persons in the middle principally produce for themselves and employ their own labor, and the persons of the lower rank posses no or little land, living mainly by selling their about power.(Munshi 2016:36)

The economic structure is mainly responsible for the poor condition of the rural economy, for the upper rank have no incentive to develop production techniques. With the pressure on land being considerable in view of the poor development of industry, the upper rank benefit from cheap labour. Further, they can compel the impoverished peasantry to work as sharecroppers on their land, which according to Mukherjee, gives them a better margin of profit than what they would get by hiring daily wage labour.

A study of the economic structure over time, from 1922 to 1942, shows the extent of the disintegration of the old system in a subsistence economy. There was slight movement form the middle ranl to the upper rank, but considerably so from the middle rank to the lower rank, accentuating inequality .'''

He finds that caste hierarchy does reflect to a certain extent the division of people into separate economic units. Thus, he finds that all the upper-caste Hindu families (Brahmin, Kayasthas, and their half-castes) are found in the upper rank of the economic structure, and 83% of the Scheduled Caste families are found in the lower rank, and the rest in the middle rank. The "joint family" is found more among the upper rank, the "simple family" (parents and dependent children) more among the lower rank, with the middle rank behaving as a group between the two. Literacy is of a poor standard, and whatever little education there is it is confined mainly to the upper rank.... (Munshi 2016)

With the passage of time, these three classes experienced changes and deterioration occurred from 1921-1941 because of war and famine. Through statistical application and with the help of tables Mukherjee shows that the rural economy is marked by concentration of income in the hands of a few at the top and impoverishment of the vast mass of people at the bottom. The people at the bottom are linked with those at the top by an intermediate layer of about one-third of the population. The intermediate layer is also more closely allied to the bottom than those at the top. With changing conditions, the hierarchical structure is further worsened with Class I slightly inflating, Class II suffering depression and Class III largely inflating and deteriorating. The reason behind this deterioration lay primarily in usufructuary mortgage of land by the people of Classes II and III. This gradual impoverishment has, according to Mukherjee, led to the alignment of the society into two opposite camps of haves and have-nots.

Finally, Mukherjee shows the effect of these economic changes in the life of the two communities (Hindus and Muslims), their kinship patterns, caste groupings and marriage and family structure.

Certain basic points made in his work are:

- (i) Village community in India, particularly in Bengal, was not an unchanging social entity. It kept on changing though the tempo might have been slow. It had its own dynamics which becomes evident through a perusal of history.
- (ii) Village community in Bengal was not an “undifferentiated” or “egalitarian” social system. Differentiation and inequality were found in both a) the hierarchical caste system and b) the in egalitarian system of production and distribution of resources especially related to land-holding and other means of livelihood in village economy of Bengal.
- (iii) Indeed, the social aspect of caste division and economic aspect of production relations revealed in unequal access of different groups to land and other economic resources are intertwined. The social system was embedded in the in egalitarian economic system. And, inequality was supported and sustained by the ideology of the caste system which made invidious distinction between persons and groups.
- (iv) On the basis of a sample survey of the rural populace, Mukherjee found the existence of three classes which have already been discussed above in *Six Villages*.
- (v) Analysis of the data gathered through sample survey showed that there is an association between the social hierarchy of caste and the economic structure. Brahmins are represented in Class I than the Muslims, Muslims make a larger representation in Class II and the “others” (lowly caste groups and the tribal groups) are concentrated in Class III. Mukherjee further showed how the caste-hierarchy has dovetailed itself into the economic structure which emerged in Bengal during the British Rule.

- (vi) Finally, the colonial regime of the British did not interfere with the traditional socio-cultural system. For they found an ally in the higher castes in their exploitation of the masses. The introduction of the railways and allied innovations of the British led to transformation of the agrarian economy from subsistence to commodity production. But it paved the way for further exploitation of the masses of the people through the upper-caste land-holder-cum-sharecropper relationship. The traditional economic system suffered disintegration because of the policies followed by the colonial regime. People of the lower social strata represented a larger section of the disintegrated peasantry. The land-owning castes and classes continued to enjoy the social and economic benefits.

Further, the caste system mesmerized the lower social strata who continued to strive to climb up the caste ladder. The caste system affected the Muslims as well. It aggravated the social distance between the Hindus and Muslims. The suffering masses could never get united against the dominating and exploiting segments. The segregating ideology fanned and manipulated by the British had a “peculiarly retrogressive character which dissipated the energy of the people.” And the legacy continues even through present time in Bengal rather Indian countryside.

Box 11.2 Dynamics of Rural Society

For Bengal, Mukherjee finds that under the British rule a new relationship grew between the propertied and property less classes at the expense of the self-sufficient peasantry of the pre-British time.

This new relationship had a particularly “retrogressive” character, for the growth of the landholder (*jotdar*) – sharecropper (*bargadar*) relationship just maintained the form of peasant cultivation, when, in effect, the relation of production was made suitable for the new function of commodity production. The landholders functioned as rent-receivers by taking a share of the produce from the cultivators””.

[T] he landowning class continued to thrive on the rent received from the land without any investment in it. This arrangement was strengthened over time. Thus, in 1943, during the famine, a large section of the peasantry not only lost land and other means of production like draught cattle, but was also forced to borrow grains year after year for survival, not to speak of borrowing grains as seeds for production””.

The landlords dominated the society in ideological terms as well. Thus, instead of a progressive change in their outlook, people in the lower social strata remained steeped in the notion of caste and communal segregation. This made it difficult to organize them on progressive lines. (Munshi 2016:37)

In the book, *The Sociologist and Social Change in India Today* Mukherjee shows the relationship between planning and development. He addresses the problem of

development and social change which should be people-centric i.e., the people would themselves take up the matter of development. He shows here that development that is generally induced from “above” does not necessarily bring about social change. He points out that material development induced by high order of material culture may not result in any significant shift in the social organization and the ideological orientation of the people from what is traditionally ordained for India at large. Mukherjee cites the example of Jamshedpur, the then half a century old steel town of India. He points out that the surrounding territory of the materially developed Jamshedpur does not reveal any significant shift in the social organization and the ideological orientation of the people. Mukherjee suggests a method for studying social change: (i) knowledge of facts and fallacies (i.e., what is it?); (ii) an appreciation of the relevant focus of attention (i.e., how is it?); and (iii) orientation to further research (i.e., why is it?). Mukherjee unfolds in this book the integration of socio-cultural aspect of social change and development with the economic aspect. His methodology is humanistic in the sense that he believes in the full-fledged development of Indian society.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What is the distinguishing feature of Mukherjee’s book, *The Rise and fall of east India Company*?

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- 2) In what way is economic structure responsible for poor condition of rural economy in the six villages studied by Mukherjee?

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11.3.3 Sociology of Indian Sociology

Sociology of Indian Sociology (1978) is, in Mukherjee’s words, a preliminary but necessary attempt to understand the development of Indian Sociology. This work also endeavours to study the development of sociology in India from a methodological standpoint. The book starts like this: “People of every society, as well as those concerned with it but not belonging to it, feel the need from time to time to learn about the previous, present and future operations of that society.....Indian society is no exception in this respect.” Learning about Indian society started from the Vedic period and the book tries to give an account of the entire history of Indian sociology. It divides the history of this development into two phases: (i) pre-sociological period and (ii) sociological period.

These two periods are represented by certain reference groups: a) pre-sociological and b) sociological reference groups. i) Social Philosophers, ii) Policy Makers, iii) Policy Promoters and iv) Proto-Sociologists constitute the pre-sociological reference group. Sociological reference groups are represented by i) Pioneers (1920s – 40s), ii) Modernizers (1950s), iii) Insiders (1960s), iv) Pace-makers (1970s), and v) Non-Conformists (1970s). The social philosophers were perennially present in Indian society. The policy-makers include the social reformers and are exclusively concerned with the society in question. Like the social philosophers, their focus on the social questions is limited by the place-time-people dimensions of variation represented by the society. The policy-promoters include the administrators and the information-gatherers. Their focus on the social questions limited to the society but not in the same way as that of the social philosophers or policy-makers. Proto-sociologists emerging from the already established disciplines of social science look at the social questions from a perspective which is different from the other three groups.

Modernizers emerged in the Republic of India. They denounced the historical approach as pseudo-scientific and adopted the structural-functional approach. The Insiders were interested in the spread of behavioral sciences prevalent in the United States in those days. They were also trying to consolidate the cognitive-historical and Marxist trend that were already there in the time of the pioneers and the modernizers. The non-conformists and the pace-makers had their differences from the Modernizers and the Insiders in ideology, conceptualization of social research and research methodology. Mukherjee seeks to analyse this development from the perspective of five questions – i) What is it?, ii) How is it?, iii) Why is it?, iv) What will it be? and v) What should it be?. He states that any phenomenon of society are to be studied from the perspective of these five questions both from their positive and negative standpoints. He further points out that these five questions have to be asked in their chronological sequence for an objective comprehension of any variable phenomenon. The reference groups differ from one another because of their preferential emphasis on the five above-stated questions.

11.3.4 Sociology and Society

Sociology denotes the science of society. Society could be conceived of as a complex whole of individuals and groups who are systematically integrated in terms of their i) actions and interactions, ii) social behavior and iii) social relationships. This whole is organized and sustained purposes lead to the emergence of iv) motivating agencies of social institutions. Social institutions consolidate the individuals within a system of material and immaterial things. They also impart to them a character beyond individuality. The institutions operate through collectivities of individuals who are consolidated into v) social groups. The groups are formed in many ways in accordance with the institutions which produce one or the other kind of grouping. For example, the institution of family is linked with kin-groups such as nuclear family, matrilineal-matrilocal families, etc.

Society is an entity which conditions the lives of people and also allows for undersigned individual variations within the limits of casualness. If, however, the individual variations become designed, these are institutionalized by means of the existing institutions or by evolving new ones.

Society remains in a state of dynamic equilibrium. That is, various configurations or forms of society a) maintain their identities at a point in time, and b) change within and between themselves over a period of time. Society involves both complementary and contradictory group interactions within and between each and every configuration of world society. Configurations of society are identified by the place, time and object dimensions of variation.

Mukherjee illustrates the above features of society and its working with the examples of Indian joint family over time, and the rise of the Bangladesh society and nation-state from Pakistan which emerged from India (colonized by the British). The origin of Bangladesh may be explained by, first, political factor (the two-nation theory), and then psychology and culture (separation), economic factor (unequal exchange between eastern and western wings of Pakistan). Explanation by means of any one factor will lead to one-sided and misleading understanding of the process and phenomenon of emergence and working of the nation-state of Bangladesh. Its correction lies in apposite epistemology of sociology which requires integration of all social science specializations at the top of the social frame. All social science specializations will be geared to unity in order to gain comprehensive knowledge of working of society. Sociology as a specialization forms a mutually exclusive part of a complex whole, namely, social sciences as a system. Thus, Mukherjee like two pioneers in Indian sociology, namely Radhakamal Mukerjee (1957) and D.P. Mukerji (1958) emphasized the need to integrate all social science subjects on a common base. Sociology realizes this need. The contexts for all science subjects of specialization are finally integrated by the specialization of sociology assuming a generic character.

For understanding the social reality Mukherjee calls for “sciencing” society. “Sciencing” means a systematic understanding and appraisal of a phenomenon. Sciencing of the phenomenon of society requires the conjoint pursuit of answers of five questions. These five questions refer to the appraisal of any system of variation. The first question (what is it?) refers to the description of any system. The second question (how is it?) relates to its classification (i.e., an analysis of its internal articulations and variations as well as interrelationships with other systems). The third question (why is it?) refers to an explanation or its causality, i.e., causality of the working and change in and of the system. It is especially urgent in cases of supra-systemic changes, e.g., explanation of substitution of feudalism by capitalism. The fourth question (what will it be?) leads to the predictability of the structure, function and process of the system of variation in the future. The fifth question (what should it be?) is concerned with desirability of the changes suggested or proposed.

- i) appraisal of the elite- experts' valuations of what the people need in their quest of realizing the cardinal values
- ii) appraisal of the individually formed groups' valuation of what the people themselves want and
- iii) conclusions to be drawn from the interactions of these two sets of appraisal of social reality in a space- , time- , and people-specific situation.

Systemic sociology depends on diagnostic research. It will be effective only when quantitative information is available for evolving indicators, testing hypotheses, and so on.

11.3.5 Scientific Method

Mukherjee's life-long engagements with epistemological issues came to produce *Why Unitary Social Science?* and *The Measure of Time in the Appraisal of Social Reality*. The main arguments of these two works may be stated as follows:

First, Mukherjee deplores fragmentation of knowledge of the reality through the academic division between social and natural sciences and increasing divisions of social sciences in the name of specialization. He insists on the effort to develop a 'unitary social science'. Sociology has the potentiality to develop as this unitary social science. Its appropriate methodology would define rationality, in terms of shedding the 'deterministic stance' of positivism and moving over to "indeterminacy"-based systematic exploration of manifestations of reality as a 'probability' science. The "natural biological and earth sciences" all explore into the nature of probability. The pursuit of this appropriate methodology will help the promotion of unity of all knowledge. It will remove a 'seemingly inevitable barrier in the quest for knowledge to appraise reality....planted under labels Science and Arts (Humanities).'

Box 11.3 The Issue of Method

Central to RM's [Ramkrishna Mukherjee's] work was the issue of scientific method. Observation, measurement, classification, comparison and inductive inference stand out in his conception of it. Besides, there was a commitment to the historical and value dimensions of social reality. He remained rooted in the Marxian approach but not uncritically; he questioned various dichotomies associated with it, such as material base—ideological superstructure and objectivity-subjectivity (1979, cited here from Madan 2016:27).

Application of statistics in gathering and analyzing data regarding social phenomena is strongly recommended by Mukherjee. The task of science, social in particular, is to make valuation of the nature of phenomena. But the scientist would remain committed to transcend subjectivity to ensure that "objectivity rules the world of knowledge". He will examine 'what', 'how' and 'why' of the

phenomenal world and will not desist from exploring ‘what will it be’ and ‘what should it be’.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Outline the method proposed by Ramkrishna Mukherjee for studying social change.

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- 2) What is the purpose of ‘sciencing society’?

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11.4 IMPORTANT WORKS

Some of the important works of Ramkrishna Mukherjee are:

The Dynamics of a Rural Society (1957).

The Sociologist and Social Change in India (1965).

Six Villages of Bengal (1971).

The Rise and Fall of the East India Company (1974)

11.5 LET US SUM UP

Ramkrishna Mukherjee has kept him restricted in the domain of research. He has not taught in colleges or universities on a regular basis. He has had many admirers in India and abroad. But he has not developed a band of followers in the academic circle in India. May be, this is the reason why Mukherjee is not cited in text books and class-rooms in sociology. It can hardly be denied that he made significant contributions to sociology in India and abroad. In this unit we learnt about the social and academic environment which influenced his works. We discussed his central ideas and identified some of his important writings.

11.6 REFERENCES

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11.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The distinguishing feature of Mukherjee's book, *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company* (1955) is the use of the Marxist concept of primitive accumulation in analyzing the historical data about changes in the society and economy of India.
- 2) The economic structure in six villages studied by Mukherjee is mainly responsible for the poor condition of the rural economy, for two reasons. First, the upper rank have no incentive to develop production techniques. With the pressure on land being considerable in view of the poor development of industry, the upper rank benefit from cheap labour. Second, they can compel the impoverished peasantry to work as sharecroppers on their land, which according to Mukherjee, gives them a better margin of profit than what they would get by hiring daily wage labour.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Mukherjee suggests a method for studying social change: (i) knowledge of facts and fallacies (i.e., what is it?); (ii) an appreciation of the relevant focus of attention (i.e., how is it?); and (iii) orientation to further research (i.e., why is it?).
- 2) "Sciencing" means a systematic understanding and appraisal of a phenomenon. According to Mukherjee, 'sciencing society' is required for understanding social reality.

UNIT 12 LEELA DUBE*

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Biographical Sketch
- 12.3 Central Ideas
 - 12.3.1 Towards Equality
 - 12.3.2 Women and Kinship
 - 12.3.3 Construction of Gender
- 12.4 Important Works
- 12.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.6 References
- 12.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

12.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to

- outline the biographical details of Leela Dube;
- explain the socio-historical environment which influenced her work;
- explain her central ideas; and
- discuss the impact of her work on anthropology, sociology and women's studies.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Leela Dube was born in pre-independence India. Her socialization was impacted both by the home and nationalist atmosphere of that time. Her work was pioneering as she combined the insights of anthropology with women's studies. She used the 'comparative method' of anthropology to bring in insights of different cultures to explain the position of women. She wrote several books including *Sociology of Kinship* (1974) and *Matriliny and Islam: Religion and Society in the Laccadives* (1969)(with A.R Kutty). One of the books that brought together many of her insights from her academic and field experiences was *Anthropological Explorations in Gender: Intersecting Fields* (Dube, 2001). Apart from exploring caste and gender relations, this book analyses the various ways in

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which existing social mores in the form of poems, common sayings, and stereotypes have a deep and lasting impact on creating and maintaining female inferiority in the social system.

Let us first look at the socio-historical context which influenced her work.

12.2 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Leela Dube was born on 27 March, 1923 in a traditional Brahmin family in Maharashtra. Her father worked in the state judiciary of the Central Provinces and his work took the family to different places. She had three sisters and a brother. It is important to understand her life as the different life stages of family life had a great impact on her work as she herself has narrated in various places. In her family set up girls were brought up affectionately and school education for girls was taken for granted; and, depending upon individual interests and inclinations, entering college and university too were live possibilities (Dube, 2000). An independent career was not considered important – education was important for a certain class status and in case of any contingency. Marriage was considered extremely important for women. Most of the women got married by the age of 20. The women who remained unmarried were either responsible for taking care of their family or were involved in the nationalist movement. Leela Dube grew up at a time when the nationalist movement was at its peak. Many of her family members including her father were in the British services which embarrassed her as she felt drawn to the movement. She did not actively participate in the movement but followed some of the tenets such as ‘India made’ and attended some of the meetings of the Quit India movement.

Within her home Leela Dube was exposed to the regular reading of the Hindu texts such as Ramacharitmanas as well as the Marathi and Bengali literature in the form of novels and stories along with its translations of world classics related to Marxism. Availability of different literature at home and reading extensively developed her analytical and critical skills which were to help her later in her work. The literature that she read and heard about talked about women in different ways – the ways in which they faced difficulties, status within marital relationships, tasks they should follow and so on. At a young age she questioned some of the depictions of women in these stories and also developed an admiration for the strength that women showed in some of these stories. Reading also developed an understanding of ‘*women’s vulnerability, deprivation and oppression*’. Marathi magazines of the day carried articles related to denial of inheritance, dowry, child marriage, condition of widows, lack of education of women, tyranny of caste, economic disparities.

In the background that she grew up she was not sure about her own goals and looked as marriage with a ‘superior’ (intellectually not economically) man as her salvation as this would help her in clarifying her goals. The manner in which she achieved that also shows her single mindedness about gaining independence and retaining her ability to make decisions about her life. While pursuing her M.A in Political Science in Nagpur University she heard about a distinguished young

man Shyama Charan Dube. He seemed to fulfil the ideas she had about a possible husband and belonged to the same caste. Through her family members she extended a proposal which was accepted by both the families and they were married in a simple civil ceremony.

In present times it hardly seems an achievement but in 1945 it displayed her ability to maintain her autonomy. The choice of similar caste was important as she herself states that growing up in a loving family she was not inclined not to rebel. Instead she chose to balance her aspirations with the needs of the family. This continued in her marital life as well and was also the reason for her interest in the area of gender, kinship and the position of women within the household.

Through her marriage she was introduced to anthropology as a subject. She collected data for her husband S.C. Dube's work and worked as an assistant researcher before branching out on her own. Her professional life coincided with the Indian independence and the subsequent growth of the nation. Growing up in an era where the anti-colonial environment dominated, it is not surprising that ultimately the anthropology that she practised and wrote about was anti-imperial and focused on groups which had previously been silenced.

Her first journey in anthropology was through engagement with her husband's work with the Kamar's where she worked on to obtain from Kamar woman some information on essentially 'feminine matters'. Subsequently, she started work on her dissertation related to women amongst the Gonds of South Chattisgarh. Her work is discussed more in detail in the later sections.

She worked in Sagar University from 1957 to 1975 in Sagar University. Formally, she started teaching at the university from 1960 onwards. Her research, writing and academic outreach activities were voluminous, through her many stints as research fellow and visiting professor at Universities and Institutes all over India. She was associated with ICSSR in different capacities: as Senior Fellow, Director (Sociology) and National Fellow. In women's studies, her journey started with her nomination as a member of the National Committee on the Status of Women, Government of India which produced the landmark report *Towards Equality*. She was also chair of the Tenth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences. As an important office-bearer, she organised a symposium along with others which was published later as a book *Visibility and Power: Essays on Women in Society and Development* in 1986. Subsequently, she continued in the field with her involvement with the Indian Association of Women's Studies and her stewardship of a major IAWS conference *Women and the Household in Asia* which resulted in five edited volumes that were early milestones in the field. She was part of the global women's studies community, as Vice President of the International Women's Anthropology Conference, Chairperson of the Commission on Women of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences and other honorary positions.

According to Madan (2017), Leela Dube began as a woman anthropologist studying women and from that perspective culture and society, and remained so until the very end (ibid: 382). She remained wedded to the qualitative approach, combining careful attention to ethnographic details with insightful interpretations of the same to bring to life, as it were, the nuanced richness of interpersonal relations in the setting of the household, the family, and the larger kinship and descent groups (ibid: 390). She considered gender studies as her major field in the last two decades of her life.

She was influenced by the work of Irawati Karve in the area of family, kinship and gender. Malinkowski and Katherine Gough's work on kinship systems also inspired her. In the course of her career she won several awards, in 2007 she was given the UGC's Swami Pranavananda Saraswati Award for 2005 and the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Indian Sociological Society.

Box 12.1 Beginnings of Academic Work of Leela Dube

In her PhD dissertation Dube explored the lives of Gond women from Chattisgarh. It was during this period that her understanding of gender disparities increased and she saw the differences in the lives of Gond women as compared to the upper caste women, subtleties of their dependence and the nuances of their disabilities, and these women's strategies and manoeuvres for creating a living space for themselves (Dube, 2000: 4040). Through her research she talked about not just gender relations but also about relationships amongst family members and aspects of aging. For example, she outlined how most people in the Gond society were defined through their 'usefulness' or 'labour'. She quotes in her paper a Gond woman- 'I earn my rice (*bhat*) by looking after this grandchild.' Through these examples she emphasized how throughout their life trajectory women have to justify their existence.

After working in the area of women for her dissertation, Dube focussed more on caste, family and kinship. In her work on *Sociology of Kinship: An Analytical Survey of Literature* she covered a vast area of work including marriage, kinship and families, literature on tribal societies, caste and communities inheritance patterns, mother right, exchange theories, alliance theories and so on. It provides an important and extensive source of information. In writing this she was able to transcend the received disciplinary distinction between anthropology and sociology as she chose to link kinship studies, traditional playground of anthropologists with the sociology of the family—a sub-field of sociological research, developed within the so-called 'modernisation' paradigm (Uberoi, 2017:404). This extensive survey of literature covered women only peripherally (Sharma, 2005:31). Even though her PhD work had covered Gond women, Dube moved away from focussing on issues of women to the traditional anthropological topic of kinship studies. The next section deals with the reasons for transforming Dube's work.

12.3 CENTRAL IDEAS

Leela Dube's work presented the interface between gender and kinship. During the 1960's and 1970's women studies scholars did not take into account anthropological or ethnographic materials and anthropology described family and roles of women without questioning them. It was Leela Dube who bridged these fields, catalyzing the development of gender and kinship studies in India. She sensitised women's studies scholarship to the methods and theoretical insights of anthropology, not to mention the reverse, alerting anthropology to the possibilities of women's studies scholarship. In the early debate about multi-disciplinarity and inter-disciplinarity in women's studies, she held that feminists must also engage with the fundamental debates of their own primary disciplines to avoid being ghettoized and marginalized.

Dube's research and fieldwork experiences among shifting cultivators (Kamars in Andhra Pradesh), settled agriculturists (Gonds in Chhattisgarh) and in a multi-caste village with Rajputs as the dominant caste (western UP), gave her a sense of the sweep of patrilineal kinship, despite variations across caste, class, tribe and region. Her work on matriliney and Islam (Lakshadweep Islands) not only provided a glimpse of a different set of life trajectories for women under a different kinship system but drove her to take on traditional anthropological expositions on the 'matrilineal puzzle'. Her comparative survey of kinship across various countries of South and South-East Asia strengthened her conviction that kinship systems are not just symbolic and esoteric but have material consequences for the well-being of its members (Ganesh, 2012: 402).

She brought out issues of power and hierarchy through vignettes of everyday life in a non-judgemental manner.

In this unit, Leela Dube's work is presented in historical framework. We explore her initial forays into anthropology and studies of kinship, her increasing focus on gender in her work and then ensuring the 'feminisation of anthropology' structurally by introducing the subject of gender in different national and international platforms.

12.3.1 Towards Equality

The invitation to be a part of the Committee on the Status of Women which was involved in writing the 'Towards Equality' report was an important catalyst in the life and works of Leela Dube. This report was submitted to the government of India in 1974. At the time she was invited to work on the report there was a rising consciousness about women's oppression and cultural organization of gender and the need to work on these issues within social sciences (Dube, 2000: 4044). Important publications in the field of 'anthropology of women' had begun to make an appearance. These writings advocated an urgent need to recognise women's lives and situations as a legitimate area of ethnographic enquiry, questioning too, the misconceptions and misrepresentations of women in the discipline and beyond (ibid: 4044).

Towards equality became a reference point for substantial research across disciplines as it brought out the vulnerable position of girls within the household especially the natal household which discriminates against the girl child in terms of nutrition and health needs, marriage - facts that Dube had brought out in another book on Women and Kinship as well. A large number of studies were commissioned focusing on women in relation to religion, kinship, marriage and marriage payments, work, "prostitution", tribes, caste and purdah among other themes leading to expansion of her interest areas (Palriwala, 2012:33).

At the same time, the CSWI exercise brought Indian women activists and academics into productive dialogue with a global community of 'second-wave' feminists, whose shared agenda took shape during the 1975 U.N. International Year of Women. The Tenth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, held in Delhi in 1978, provided the occasion for Leela Dube (chairperson of the Commission on Women of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences [IUAES], 1976–1993) to frontally address the issue of the neglect of women in mainstream anthropology (Dube, 1986).

Another important transformation in her work came with the supervision of A.R. Kutty's work on matriliney in Lakshadweep. She was fascinated by the combination of Islam (considered to be essentially a patriarchal religion) with the matrilineal descent system. She herself visited Lakshadweep and undertook research in that area. This work brought explored a society that accepted two sets of rules simultaneously (Dube, 1994). Her work in Kalpeni brought interesting insights about a rare culture through in-depth analysis of property and its devolution. This research gave insights about how women gained more power in the matrilineal system even situated within a patriarchal religion. It also gives an example of the flexibility of Islam and that it depends on practice. The information about the region and their practice was based on ethnographic research and interviews and in her article on *Conflict and Compromise: Devolution and Disposal of Property in a Matrilineal Muslim Society* published in 1994 there is a detailed and intricate picture created of a Matrilineal system under the rubric of Islam and how both systems co-exist. This work becomes important in today's context as it clearly shows the manner in which the local contexts can redefine an existing institution.

These influences in combination increased her interest in the area of studying gender and understanding it in relation to kinship relations. In a sense this change gave her a created a uniqueness her work which was now began to represent insights from anthropology and women's studies.

12.3.2 Women and Kinship

Leela Dube considered the study of kinship important in studying gender as it provided an appropriate context for understanding gender in society "(Dube, 1997:151). According to Dube, women had always been relatively more 'visible' in anthropology than in other social sciences in consequence of the importance of

sex as ‘one of the important organising principles of society’, and anthropology’s ‘special emphases on the study of kinship, family and marriage in “other cultures”’ (Dube, 1986: xii). In this sense, the alliance of gender and kinship, which she believed lay at the core of the project of feminist anthropology, was virtually pre-ordained.

Dube favoured the comparative method used in anthropology and its use was evident in the UNESCO-sponsored survey report, *Studies of Women in Southeast Asia* (1980). This report was explicitly undertaken with the dual purposes of critically assessing the existing body of knowledge on the status of women in Southeast Asia and simultaneously preparing the ground for the promotion of women’s studies as an academic discipline, both in the region and globally. From her own disciplinary standpoint as an anthropologist, it could be said that this study was also a part of her long term objective to correct the ‘invisibility’ of women in anthropological discourse (Dube, 1986).

Her interest in using the comparative method to study women in South Asia was further consolidated in her book on *Women and Kinship: Perspectives on gender in South and South-East Asia*. Here, she explores kinship systems in South and South East Asia and their impact on the position and rights of women. She argues that the study of kinship is actually the study of gender. Through exploring kinship systems and family organizations and their impact on inheritance and resource distribution, female sexuality, seclusion of women, bodily processes, living spaces, marriage, nutrition and education she brings out in detail the differences and similarities amongst the everyday lives of women living in these regions. Towards the end she concludes that it is the concept of bilaterality in South-East Asia that enshrines the principle of flexibility and it accepts hierarchies of age, seniority and class rather than of gender (Dube, 1997: 157). This makes the position of women in South-East Asia stronger.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What were the factors that led to increased focus on women in Leela Dube’s work? Explain briefly.

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- 2) Outline the chief argument in Leela Dube’s book, *Women and Kinship: Perspectives on Gender in South and South-East Asia*.

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In an important article 'On the Construction of Gender: Hindu girls in Patrilineal India' Dube (1988) traces the mechanisms through which girls develop a gendered identity by examining the rituals and ceremonies, language and practice of families. Her focus was on Hindu girls as she examined her own socialization as well.

She begins with emphasizing that gender differences that are culturally produced are always interpreted as being rooted in biology (Dube, 1988:WS11). She explains this by using the 'Seed and Earth' analogy. This analogy has been examined by her in several other papers and is very important in understanding gender relations. This concept is extremely powerful and has been extensively discussed in Women's Studies in various places.

The reason for the secondary status given to women comes from the understanding of women as passive receptacles. "Man provides the seed the essence-while the woman provides the field which receives the seed and nourishes it. A child shares the father's blood" (Dube, 1988: WS11). Within the natal group a woman transferability and non-functional nature is empathized while within the marital family her *instrumentality* is emphasized. This unequal social arrangement is perceived as the arrangement of nature which gives different roles to men and women in procreation. She further explains how gender roles are lived out in terms of family structures and kinship which makes rules about recruitment, marital residence and rearrangement of the family. These in turn are impacted by the institution of caste.

Through different expressions and idioms used in different languages she brings out the manner in which girls are made aware of their secondary status. For example, a Telugu expression states "Bringing up a daughter is like watering a plant in another's courtyard" (Dube, 1988: WS12). In her paper she does not offer a simplistic picture- she gives several examples of how girls are valued as they become 'objects' of worship before menarche. She explains how the temporary status of girls in their natal household and short visits there after marriage are emphasized by various Puja across the country e.g. Durga Puja in Bengal and Gauri Puja in Karnataka. Again the custom of worshipping and feeding virgin girls (pre-menarche) that is prevalent in large parts of the country help in emphasizing the feminine role for women and contrasts with the post menarche more 'dangerous' stage. She explains that one of the reasons constraints are placed on female sexuality is because their future is tied to being a wife and mother. Motherhood is the highest achievement in a woman's life. Marriage is the gateway to motherhood. Everything else is secondary to these two goals (Dube, 1988: WS 14).

Socialization of girls was also impacted by the idea of women as gatekeepers of caste, as boundary marker. She was one of the first scholars to introduce this idea and used this to explain violence against women as well. According to her, women as boundary markers became 'repositories of honour', such that violence

against women was an outcome when social hierarchies were threatened. The other aspect of violence against women that Leela Dube engaged with vigorously was the debate about sex-selective abortions. Her writings in this area merged as a response to Dharma Kumar's article in Economic and Political weekly about the moral and policy implications of amniocentesis. In her responses, interesting insights about preference of a particular child emerged with examples from different countries of South Asia. She explained the practice of female infanticide in different societies and its implications such as practice of polyandry (because of less number of women), abduction of women and so on. This debate also strengthened her previous arguments of how women were accorded different status in different parts of South Asia.

Box 12.2: Leela Dube's Contribution to Anthropology, Sociology and Women's Studies

Leela Dube was responsible for introducing women's concerns in mainstream sociology and anthropology. She simplified concepts of anthropology in a manner which allowed other disciplines such as women's studies to use them to analyse gender relations. Discussions of power and hierarchy which were missing from the domestic domain in the studies of kinship were introduced by her work. Through her work in the area of gender and kinship the relationship of aspects like nutrition, inheritance, education, living spaces, marriage with the kinship organization have also been explained.

Her comparative work in South and South- East Asia helped us to see what can exist and what does exist in bilateral societies. Her insights were rooted in the different kinds of field work that she had done- Kamar tribe of shifting cultivators, Gond women who were settled agriculturalists living in close interaction with the Hindu castes. She conducted field work in a large multi-caste village in western UP and also studied that matrilineal Muslims of Lakshadweep island. She also visited South and South Asian countries for comparative work (Ganesh, 2001:16).

Leela Dube was very sensitive to the diversities that existed in different systems and brought out the manner in which these impacted women in different social systems. For example, she highlighted how food and rituals surrounding it have been used to control women's thoughts and movements. Her anthropological insights have been very influential in understanding the status of women across societies. In addition to that her insights about women have enriched anthropological and sociological understanding of kinship and family.

One of the main reasons for her wide ranging influence is also the engaging style in which she wrote which was accessible to everyone. Her writings often included reflections from her own life and it is this reflexivity that enriched her work.

Dube emphasized that in Southeast Asia women have a freedom of action and decision making which is not found in South or East Asia (Dube, 1983: 1633). Using studies of fertility, family planning and population control she argued that

it was the value given to women and not ‘demand-supply’ principle (as mentioned by Dharma Kumar) that ensures birth and survival of a female child. She questioned the idea of cash incentives for having children as she felt that such incentives will perpetuate the social–structural arrangements which need to be changed and reaffirm existing perceptions and values of people (Dube, 1983, 1634).

Check Your Progress 2

1) Fill in the blanks.

(i) Dube’s article ‘On the Construction of Gender’ is based on the socialization of _____ girls.

(ii) Leela Dube’s PhD work focused on _____ women.

2) Briefly examine the reasons that leela Dube gives for better status of women in Southeast Asia.

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12.4 IMPORTANT WORKS

Some of Dube’s important works are:

Visibility and Power: Essays on women in society and development (edited), 1986

Women and Kinship: Comparative essays on gender in South and South-East Asia, (1997)

Anthropological Explorations in Gender: Intersecting Fields (edited), 2001

12.5 LET US SUM UP

This unit began with the biographical sketch of Leela Dube and socio-historical background in which she grew up. The influence of her background is seen in her work as the central ideas of her work are presented. She worked on issues of women in her dissertation and moved on to kinship systems. In the initial years she was not really the questioning or analyzing the position of women. Gradually after being a part of the ‘Towards Equality’ report she discussed more about issues of power and hierarchy and that status accorded to women in different kinds of societies and kinship systems. Her work helped in gendering sociology and anthropology and brought anthropological insights to women’s studies.

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12.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Being a member of the committee to examine the status of women in writing the 'Towards Equality' Report led Dube to explore the vulnerable position of girls within the household especially the natal household which discriminates against the girl child in terms of nutrition and health needs, marriage. In the early 70's when she was invited to become a member of this committee a large number of important publications on 'anthropology of women' also came out. Further, her work on status of women in Matrilineal societies increased her interest in comparing social position of women in different descent systems.

2. In the book, *Women and Kinship: Perspectives on gender in South and South-East Asia* Leela Dube explores kinship systems in South and South East Asia and their impact on the position and rights of women. She argues that the study of kinship is actually the study of gender. Through exploring kinship systems and family organizations and their impact on inheritance and resource distribution, female sexuality, seclusion of women, bodily processes, living spaces, marriage, nutrition and education she brings out in detail the differences and similarities amongst the everyday lives of women living in these regions. Towards the end she concludes that it is the concept of bilaterality in South-East Asia that enshrines the principle of flexibility and it accepts hierarchies of age, seniority and class rather than of gender. This makes the position of women in South-East Asia stronger.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) (i) Hindu
(ii) Gond
- 2) In her book, *Women and Kinship* Dube argues that the principle of bilaterality in which descent can be traced through matrilineal or patrilineal line provides better status to women in South-East Asia. She states that it is a principle of flexibility and it accepts hierarchies of age, seniority and class rather than of gender. This makes the position of women in South-East Asia stronger.

GLOSSARY

Advaita	: The vedantic philosophy of Sankaracharya, which believes in the existence of one God.
Ameliorative	: A measure which leads to the welfare or betterment of a social group
Amniocentesis	: It is a pre-natal test in which a small amount of amniotic fluid is removed from the sac surrounding the fetus. It is usually done to detect certain kinds of birth defects and can also be used for the purpose of sex determination.
Bilaterality	: Descent which can be traced through either the matrilineal (through the mother) or the patrilineal (through the father) line.
Canonical	: The laws, rules or general principles of a religion
Comparative Method	: Involves the study of social processes across nation-states, or across different types of society
Compartmentalisation	: To divide anything into separate sections. In the unit, it refers to the limits put to the boundary of a social science like history, economics, political science or sociology.
Ecological	: The study of plants, animals people or institutions related with the environment
Ethical Relativism	: Variation of values from one culture to another is called ethical relativism.
Forum	: An assembly or programme for discussion of public matters related to either social-political or economic matters
Humanistic	: It is that system of thought or action which is based on the nature, dignity and ideals of human beings.
Idealist	: A person, whose behaviour or thought is based on ideals such as, those of a visionary or impractical dreamer, or those of an adherent or practitioner of idealism in art, philosophy or literature
Idolatrous	: Worship of a statue or image of God
Kinship	: One of the main organizing principles of human society. Kinship systems establish relationships between individuals and groups on the model of biological relationships between parents and children between siblings and between marital partners.

Missionaries	: Those concerned with religious missions, in the context of this unit, the term refers to persons sent by religious (Christian) community to convert heather (non-Christians).
Mono-cultivation	: The cultivation of one cash crop year after year which depletes the soil of its nutrients making it infertile
Multi-ethnic	: A society having many races and cultures, like India is a multi-ethnic society
Orientalists	: Those scholars who study the Eastern cultures like China, India, Pakistan etc.
Patronage	: The protection and encouragement given to certain arts, crafts and architecture by a ruler, landlord or a rich and powerful person.
Persecution	: To discriminate against some people or a social group on the basis of religion, caste or class, for example, the persecution of the Jews in Europe on religious grounds
Polyandry	: Term denoting the marriage of one woman to two or more men. Rarely encountered form of marriage and usually occurs when one women marries two or more brothers. This is usually some to maintain land and property within one family.
Rationalist	: A person who believes in accepting reason as the only source of knowledge and as the only basis for forming one's opinions, beliefs or course of action
Renaissance	: It means a rebirth or revival in a literal sense but it also refers to the great revival of art, literature and learning in Europe in the fourteenth, fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries.
Universalisation	: The process in which culture specific values become part of the value system of a larger society, such as a nation or the universe.
Vedanta	: A system of Hindu monistic (belief in one God) or pantheistic (belief in many Gods) philosophy based on the Vedas

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