

Indian Society: Sociological Perspectives
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G. S. Ghurye: Introduction

Welcome back to the class. We are continuing our discussion about Indological Approaches or Indological Approach. And this class onwards we are going to look at a couple of very important or prominent figures who represented Indological Approach in Indian Sociology. And there is no doubt that one has to start with G.S. Ghurye who was born in 1893 and who passed away in 1983, you know, who is considered by many as one of the founding figures for as many times, you know, even called as the father of Indian Sociology, a person of very, very extremely high significance in the history of Indian Sociology. So, I am just introducing you important, you know, sources, resources or articles written by important scholars on G.S. Ghurye and there is an essay written by Sujatha Patel titled Orientalist Eurocentric Framing of Sociology in India, a discussion on three 20th century sociologists in Political Power and Social Theory, Emerald Group Publishing Limited. Then there is another essay by Carol Upadhyay published in 2002 in Sociological Bulletin, The Hindu National Sociology of G.S. Ghurye. Then Carol Upadhyay has another more lengthier essay appeared in this Anthropology in the East, Founders of Indian Sociology and Anthropology, a very useful book.

We have referred to this book many times, edited by Patricia Uberoi, Nandini Sundar and Satish Deshpande published in 2007. And there is also a book by SK Pramanik published, this is the second edition I believe, 2020. The first edition must be before this and its title Sociology of G.S. Ghurye and this is a book on G.S. Ghurye. So, for this class I am using this essay, Carol Upadhyay's 2007 essay that appeared in this Anthropology in the East, Founders of Indian Sociology and Anthropology. So, let us look at that essay. So, this is the essay, The Idea of Indian Society, G.S. Ghurye and the Making of Indian Sociology, written by Carol Upadhyay. So, it is a lengthy essay, around 60 page long essay which looks into his life, his formative period and then also looks at his contribution in terms of his research interests, the kind of his involvement in the framing of syllabus and then it has also section on how the kind of university politics influence the trajectory of sociology in India and then of course it has a kind of a critical take on that. So, we are not going, we are going into specific important sections of this particular essay. So, this is the picture given in this book, not a very clear picture but I am sure there are clearer picture of, pictures of G.S. Ghurye available. Govind Sadashiv

Ghurye, that is a full name, was born on 12th December 1893 in India, Malvan, a town in Konkan coastal region of western India, into a Saraswat Brahmin family. Ghurye's family owned a trading business. So, he was born into a Brahmin family from Konkan region, Saraswat Brahmin family and then he studied in this Elphinstone College in Mumbai, considered to be the oldest and most reputed college in the city founded in 1835. And then Carol elaborates the kind of an imprint that this particular college has had on Ghurye's outlook because this college provided a kind of very cosmopolitan atmosphere. It exposed Ghurye and lot of other people into the kind of a, kind of political ideologies and value system from the west and that in turn kind of, you know, ignited a kind of a nationalist fervor in Ghurye's mind, a kind of an unintended consequence of western education. So, the students learnt not only of the literature and history of Europe but also the principles of English liberalism and they were encouraged to apply western rational criticism to the social reforms of the society, a process that ended in a critic of colonial rule itself. And this is a familiar story that we know that the intention to create, you know, the college educational reform or his idea of creating, you know, Indians who are exposed to British education but will not think beyond a point, proven to be completely futile.

So, Indians who got exposed to western education were the first to race against the British colonialism in Indian society. So, he studied in Mumbai in Elphinstone College and then he goes to the UK on a fellowship. He joined for a sociology program in Bombay University which had already established by then and he, Ghurye turned from Sanskrit to sociology. He studied, he was a student of Sanskrit and he turned to sociology when in 1919 in University of Bombay, he advertised scholarship for training in sociology and economics abroad.

So, he along with another person, C.N. Vakil goes to the UK and that time it was, you know, yeah, so he goes to the UK and he for a brief period he works with a professor in the Cambridge University. So, before that there is a mention about Patrick Geddes as a very well-known, you know, town planner and urban sociologist who was appointed as first director of, you know, Bombay Department of Sociology there. And yeah, so there is explanation.

Yeah, so he goes in 1920, he goes to the England as a research scholar in sociology and he joins this London School of Economics and where he approaches L.T. Hobhouse, a professor of sociology at the London School of Economics, a prominent sociologist of the Evolution School and New Liberal. And it seems that Ghurye did not like that particular place and then he comes across this very important scholar, W.H.R. Rivers from Cambridge University who was already a very important leading figure in anthropology and then he felt, maybe he felt so attracted to Rivers and then decides to do his PhD in

University of Cambridge and decided to leave London School of Economics and then join Cambridge University. So, it says that he writes note, anthropology approach was the most appropriate one and that he was convinced that he could not get anything worthwhile. Yeah. So, Rivers was by then very famous, he had written this very well-known book, the Todas of Nilgiri Hills. It is considered to be one of the earliest works on Todas, one of the most authoritative accounts on Todas.

And again you might know that Todas are world renowned for their, or they were kind of very popular in the anthropological circles for their practice of fraternal polyandry. That is the practice where a single woman gets married to multiple brothers of a family. So Todas are the ones who follow that. And so, Rivers is remembered in anthropology primarily for his contribution to methodology. He was a pioneer of field research during the Taurus Strait expeditions organized by Haddons and invented the genealogical method for studying kinship systems.

He was largely responsible for major shift that took place in the early 20th century anthropology from the armchair to the field. So, this again, those who are familiar with the transition of anthropology knows that the earlier theorizations were mostly a kind of a theoretical endeavor without really going into the field. So, a transition happens from a kind of anthropology seen as an armchair practice into the field work oriented, ethnographic kind of work happens and then Rivers is one of the most important people. And Rivers, but by the time Ghurye met him, Rivers had been converted to extreme version of diffusionism advocated by G. Eliot Smith and others. So diffusionism, it was a kind of a competing theoretical argument with that of evolutionism. If evolutionism believed that every society has this innate tendency to evolve and they all lead to a kind of a particular kind of progress, diffusionism really looked at how different groups of people move across the space, move across the place and then how that movement diffuses cultural ideas and cultural traits and how societies develop in a very different and predictable manner. And this is a very interesting framework which actually talks about the actual migrations of people, migrations of population and then transfer of ideas, transfer of cultural traits, transfer of material culture and how that influences the growth and trajectory of different society. So, Rivers had become a very important champion of diffusionism during this particular time.

He finished the papers required for, so he completes, Ghurye completes his PhD after Rivers then had an untimely, unexpected death thereby Ghurye was there in Cambridge University. But he completed his PhD under the supervision of another professor and then comes back to India. And yeah, so he was the first Indian in Bombay province to obtain a Cambridge doctorate and the third in India, very important achievement. So, Ghurye also left England with a contract from the publishers Kegan Paul for his first

book *Caste and Race in India* which turned out to be one of his most popular works of Ghurye. Then he joins in the department of sociology in 1924.

After some debates in university senate, Ghurye was appointed as a reader and the head of the department of sociology in June 24 and then he continues therefore several decades until he got retired. So, now looking into what is the formation of Indian sociology and what is the role played by Ghurye. There is a section on prehistory of Indian sociology. You can read that why, what were the kind of intellectual context that provided some kind of a background for the emergence of sociology in India. Ghurye's sociology due heavily on the traditions of British and German Orientalism that had emerged out of 18th century European debates on the nature and origin of civilizations and the West's fascination with what were thought to be the earliest civilization, Greece and Egypt.

The Orientalist's discourse which was dialogically produced by European scholars through interaction with the Brahmin pundits identified ancient Indian civilization with Brahminical Hinduism as embodied in Sanskrit text and placed Brahmins at the center of the social order. And I do not think we need to repeat this point because this is something that we have been discussing all through. So, Ghurye is kind of exposed into these arguments and then he also becomes very fascinated by that argument. And also, there is elaboration about this invention of Sanskrit and its connection with European language family so there are, Carol elaborates that. So, this theory also underwent Ghurye's main thesis that the Indian civilization was formed through the slow assimilation of non-Aryan groups into Aryan or Vedic culture.

So, this was one of the fundamental argument of Ghurye as well that Indian society is a product of the meeting of Non Aryans, those who are the native population of India with that of the Aryan population. So, these are all about the kind of a larger intellectual context. Now coming to Ghurye's cultural, historical, sociology what exactly were his arguments and how he puts forward his theories in a very specific manner. So, Ghurye developed a cultural historical approach to sociology that in many ways reflects how English educated high caste intellectuals in the late 19th and early 20th century conceptualized their society through the social reform debates and emerging ideology of nationalism. And as I mentioned, Carol Upadhyaya has another essay which specifically looks at the nationalist sociology of Ghurye.

So this was quite a reflective of, representative of the trend that could be seen among a lot of other people, especially scholars coming from upper caste background. They were heavily influenced by the European argument and also were influenced by the kind of nationalist ideologies. His sociological perspective drew heavily on the converging intellectual streams of diffusionism acquired from rivers and the orientalist rendering of

Indian history that he must have absorbed earlier. So, this intellectual orientation was reinforced and structured by his Cambridge experience where he found in diffusionism a complete theoretical framework. While his sociology contains elements of Orientalism as well as diffusionism, its basic orientation can be characterized as a cultural nationalism.

Ghurye pursued the comparative study and history of all major civilizations, but his primary interest was the reconstruction of Indian society and history through which he attempted to locate the source of contemporary social institutions in the distant past. So that is what makes Ghurye the most preeminent Indological scholar who wants to look at the ancient scriptures and who believed that these ancient scriptures really contain the kind of insights into understanding the social institutions in contemporary India. So Ghurye's sociology of Indian civilization is clearly outlined in his first book, *Caste, and Race in India* in which he attempts to explain the origin and spread of caste through examination of extensive historical, archaeological, and anthropometric evidence. The book essentially represents a refinement of Aryan invasion theory. In brief he argues that the Indo-Aryans were a branch of the Indo-European stock who entered India around 2500 BC bringing with them the Vedic religion and the Brahminic variety of the Indo-Aryan civilization.

The caste system he suggests originated in the attempt by the Indo-Aryan Brahmin to maintain their purity by keeping themselves apart from the local population through endogamy and ritual restrictions. This is the, you know, this is the very familiar Aryan invasion theory which talks about the Aryas and Dasas, the Dasas being the native population or the local population who were kind of displaced by the Aryans who came from the European geography. So, then there are other works other than this *Caste and Race*, Ghurye identifies Brahminism and the caste system as essential features of Indian civilization and traces their origin to the Indo-Aryan civilization in the Gangetic plane. The subsequent works such as *Family and Kin in Indo-European culture*, two Brahminical institutions *Gotra and Charana* and *Vedic India*, he extended his thesis by tracing the origins of several institutions and cultural practices to the Vedic age. Ghurye's usual strategy in this book is to examine the traditional knowledge systems, religious practices, social organizations and law as represented in Sanskrit's sources in tandem with the discussion on the contemporary practices suggesting continuities between the present and the distant past.

So, this is a very useful strategy or tactic adopted by Ghurye. On the one hand you will have the text, Sanskrit text or scriptures that talk about these institutions. On the other hand, he has ethnographic material about the rituals and practices of these institutions and then he says that he was able to establish a kind of a continuity. A central concern of

Ghurye's sociology was to demonstrate the unity and antiquity of Indian civilization. He believed that Hinduism is at the center of India's civilizational unity and that at the core of Hinduism are Brahminical ideas and values that are essential for the integration of society.

A very powerful idea and a very powerful set of imagination which has kind of become very influential in the contemporary India. For Ghurye, as for the Orientalist writers, it was through religion that Indian civilizations are formed as diverse groups are assimilated into Brahminical Hinduism and incorporated into caste system. He represented Indian culture as the product of acculturation between Vedic Aryan and pre-Aryan cultural elements and Indian social history as the history of the absorption of non-Hindu groups into Hindu society. Ghurye's historical sociology echoes not only the Orientalist view but also the late 19th century intellectuals such as Ranade who believed that the Aryans were the chosen race and the Brahminism was the Aryan faith that had united India in ancient time. So this is a very interesting, very powerful yet very problematic idea which kind of conflates India with that of the Brahmins which argues that Brahminism is a central pillar of Hinduism and it is a Brahminism through its ritualistic, theological complex that unites India together and that is the argument which is very very powerful.

In short, following the Orientalist view and some streams of nationalist discourse, Ghurye defined Indian society as essentially Hindu society and its cultural and religious unity as the base of the nation. A sociological view that underwrote his later political writings. The influence of nationalism on Ghurye decided to locate the unity of the national nation, of the nation. Sociological became more evident in his well-known book *The Aborigines, so called and their future*, republished in the *Scheduled Tribes* in which he attacks the colonial tribal policy of protectionism. For example, he was somebody who, I think he disagreed with Verrier Elwin who was another very important anthropologist, a British person who came and then studied in a society extensively and then stayed back in India, almost lived like a tribal.

So, in *Aborigines* he criticized the view of anthropologist Verrier Elwin and several British administrators that the Indian tribes are culturally distinct from caste Hindus and their ways of life should be preserved through state enforced isolation from Hindu society. So that was the time when you know you have this huge debate between protectionism, isolationism and integration was kind of raging. So, there was one argument that these tribals are of a unique culture and they must be protected, they must be isolated. The other argument was that they are the people who are you know, who are part of Hindu society but are outside and they must be assimilated into Hindu society. And the third argument was a kind of in between position that you integrate them but selectively, provide them with infrastructure and education and other thing but allow

them to continue with their cultural and religious practices and other things.

So this was a major debate during 1960s and 1970s and Verrier Elwin was one of the very important parties to that and Ghurye was extremely critical of Verrier Elwin in that. Because of the nature of most of his subject matter, Ghurye's method was primarily textual, but he was also an empiricist who thought that the facts could speak for themselves. His books are loaded with information, often poorly organized and short on analysis and interpretation making it difficult for the reader to discern his argument. Ghurye advocated the collection of primary data through field research but did not carry out much field work himself, mainly due to ill health. In the later part of the essay, Carol Upadhyay says that he used to send his PhD students to collect data from different parts of the country.

Even though the PhD students, their work may not be related with this particular assignment, they were kind of used or they were kind of asked to collect data and he did not get a co-author articles with them and this data were used for his own writing, maybe could be considered as not a very ethical practice. However, he encouraged his students to do field work and direct significant field-based studies of the social change in rural India and impact urbanization. Ghurye like Rivers never adopted wholesale the naturalism and empiricism that became established in British anthropology after Arthur Brown and Malinowski which rejected historical and broad comparative theorizing in favor of small scale, intensive and synchronic studies. We will come back to this point later, what is social anthropological tradition of British lineage that we will discuss later when we talk about Srinivas and others. So, he was not somebody who was enthused by that turn of anthropology.

It is difficult to gauge the direct impact of Ghurye's thought on sociological theory and practice in India. Despite publishing 31 books and 47 papers and other writings over a span of 50 years, only his caste and race in India and the scheduled tribes have been extensively read and taught. So that is a kind of an assessment that a person has written 37 books and almost 40 papers, is not that remembered or discussed or debated now. As I argue below, it was primarily through the research guidance and teaching that Ghurye was able to institutionalize his brand of sociology in India. But through his own writing as well as that of his students, sociology was expanded to encompass a wide variety of subjects and approaches.

So more than his own individual intellectual contribution, the way he built the Bombay department, Bombay University department and the way he trained a new generation of sociologists and anthropologists and the way they conducted sociology in the early formative years of the discipline is something very important. So, this list actually talks

about the diverse topics that he looked at, almost very very long list. He was not oblivious to new theories, but he did not appreciate the functionalist revolution ushered into British sociological anthropology by Radcliffe Brown and Malinowski because of its neglect of history. He argued that reverse approach was superior to new theories because it combined both historical and functional explanations.

So yeah. Now this particular section, the institutionalization and professionalization of sociology, I do not think that we need to go into that because it looks at the kind of syllabus that was offered in Bombay University framed by Ghurye and his colleague. So, we can skip that and then come to maybe some of the other important sections. So, it is a very interesting take but do read this essay. It gives you how an idea about maybe how one of the oldest sociology syllabus in India looked like and what were the important. And Ghurye's research program talks about how he nurtured PhD students and others.

So again not something which we need to discuss because it elaborates his role as a teacher, as a research guide. And there is a section on Ghurye's student. Of course, M.S. Srinivas, his assistant from 1940 to 1944 in which capacity he toured Tamil Nadu and Andhra to collect data on folklore. And there are quite a lot of other students as well. So yeah. So, there are also students, Ghurye students who became prominent sociologists of the next generation include M.N. Srinivas considered to be a very very important pioneer.

Then I.P. Desai, K.M. Padia, Irawati Karve, A.R. Desai, M.S.A. Rao and Y.B. Damle as well as several others who are less well known but who made important contributions to the field. And at least these names are very very important and Srinivas we will discuss elaborately, Irawati Karve we will discuss, A.R. Desai we will discuss, A.R. Desai we will discuss, A.R. Desai really represents a very interesting position. He did not follow the Ghurye's footpath or Ghurye's theoretical orientation and he became a very important Marxist sociologist in India. So, then there is a section on academic politics and institution building. It talks about how you know Ghurye typical of any university how Ghurye was entangled in power politics and then how that affected him or how that affected the growth of university or the department and how sociology department has to be separated from the economics and how economics was given more prominence by the colonial as well as the post-colonial governments and other things.

Very interesting insights about the trajectory of a sociologist. Then another important contribution of Ghurye was he is the prime motive or you know force behind the establishment of Indian sociological society, the professional body of Indian sociologist and also the person who founded its journal the sociological bulletin which was registered in December 1951 in Bombay with 107 founder members. Now let us come to the concluding and critical sections. Legacy of Ghurye's Nationalist Sociology. So now

almost after a century how do we evaluate Ghurye and Carol has very interesting arguments to say. So, under his guidance sociology came to be defined as a study of India, that is Hindu civilization and the history and structure of its basic social institutions, family and kinship, caste and religion through textual and empirical fieldwork methods.

In Ghurye's view, India's society was produced by the spread of Brahminical Hinduism and it has been held together by its unique cultural traditions and social institutions. His sociology reproduced Indological nationalist notions of what constitutes a traditional Indian society. The patriarchal joint family caste system and Indian culture or civilization, Brahminical Hinduism with its roots in the Vedic past but invokes the tools of anthropological field research and scientific methodology in order to substantiate these images. So, this in a sense kind of captures the essence of Ghurye's take on sociology. How some of the fundamental ideas are shaped but on the basis of reading the scriptures but it was supplemented by using scientific methods of data collection to support his argument.

The tendency to avoid subject matter of other social sciences such as economics has stifled the development of alternative theoretical frameworks and discouraged interdisciplinary work both of which might enable sociology to tackle new. So, the argument is that this particular emphasis on Indian social institutions kind of limited the scope of sociology. For example, there is hardly any analysis of the economic activities from a sociological point of view that is hardly analyzed. So, second, as has been often pointed out, sociology's obsession with institutions, cultural traditions and social norms has served to privilege unity, continuity and harmony over change and conflict. For instance, traditional sociological analysis of caste have highlighted the stability of the caste system and its roots in the religious values and richer practices while glossing over relations of oppression and conflict.

It is a very, very powerful argument that a host of scholars who studied caste system in the beginning, they tend to look only at its positive aspects, how it is able to bring in some kind of harmony and then unity across society. And they did not really pay sufficient attention to its negative consequences, its discriminatory and exploitative parts, exploitative dimensions. And only with scholars from other backgrounds and especially from lower caste positions or caste who are considered to be lower, that this particular angle began to be highlighted. Very, very important and very telling insight about how your own positionality influences the kind of work that you do or how an institution like caste can permeate into your ideological thinking and then shape its outcome in a very specific manner.

So that is a, you know, she concludes this essay. As I told you, it is a lengthy essay around 62 pages but very, very readable essay which gives you a very broad idea about the man, the context and his contributions. So, I hope you have got a broad idea about GS Ghurye, one of the most important founding fathers of Indian sociology. So let us stop the class here and we will come back to the next class. Thank you.