

Subject: Anthropology

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Paper No. : 10 Theories and methods in social and cultural Anthropology

Module : 33 D.N. Majumder, V. Elwin, G.S. Ghurye, Irawati Karve



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Description of Module	
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 **Pathshala**
पाठशाला
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Learning Objective:

1. To study the contribution of eminent anthropologists:
 - Dhirendra Nath Majumdar
 - Iravati Karve
 - Verrier Elwin
 - Govind Sadashiv Ghurye
2. To study the life history of these anthropologists
3. To know about the theories and concepts emphasized/propounded by them

1. DHIRENDRA NATH MAJUMDAR (1903-1960)

D. N. Majumdar holds a unique place in Indian anthropology. He was born on 3 June 1903 in Patna. He was educated at Dacca Government College (now in Dhaka), University College Calcutta (now in Kolkata), Cambridge University and Dalton Laboratory in London.

In 1924, he became a Masters in Anthropology from Calcutta University. He was awarded the Premchand Roychand Scholarship by Calcutta University in 1926 for his original work during this period. In 1929 the University of Calcutta awarded him the Mout Gold Medal.

In 1928 he became a lecturer in 'Primitive Economics' at the Department of Economics and Sociology, Lucknow University. In the mid-twenties, he rejected his nomination as a sub-Collector and was ready to conduct fieldwork in the Chotanagpur region. In this he had been encouraged by S. C. Roy. He received his Ph.D. degree from Cambridge University in 1935 and was elected as a fellow of Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland (in 1936). He conducted his fieldwork among a tribe called the Ho in the Kolhan region of Chotanagpur.

Though he specialized in Social Anthropology, he had keen interest in Physical Anthropology and Prehistory. He received training through his teachers Professor G. M. Morant and Gates, who taught him, advanced techniques in the field. In 1939, he became the President of the section of Anthropology and Archaeology of the 26th Indian Science Congress held at Lahore. He was also elected a fellow of the American Association of Physical Anthropology. In 1950, he was awarded the Research Medal by the Gujarat Research Society, Bombay. In 1958, he received the Annandale Gold Medal by the Asiatic Society of Bengal for his contributions to Asian Anthropology. He was involved in the decennial census operations of 1941 and in collaboration with P. C. Mahalonobis; he conducted anthropological and serological surveys in the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh). Along with Verrier Elwin, he started 'problem oriented ethnography'. By 1945-47, he founded 'Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society' (EFCS) in Lucknow. Under this society, the *Eastern Anthropologist* started out as a premier journal in anthropology. He delivered lectures at numerous renowned national and international institutions.

He may be regarded as a pioneer in 'village studies'. In 1953 he collaborated with M. E. Opler of Cornell University in a research project on village studies. He died on 31 May 1960 after a cerebral haemorrhage.

His important works include *A Tribe in Transition* (1937), *Fortunes of Primitive Tribes* (1944 a) *Race and Cultures of India* (1944 b), and *Himalayan Polyandry* (1962). He also wrote a popular textbook the book *An Introduction to Social Anthropology* that he wrote with T. N. Madan.

1.1 Study of Tribal culture

Being strongly influenced by Bronislaw Malinowski, Majumdar followed the Functionalist approach to study culture. In his fieldwork research, Majumdar claimed that the Hos were being affected due to external pressures. His work was on culture contact and acculturation among the Ho. He saw that primitive tribes were declining and an advanced culture imposed on a simple society caused such a decline. He did not support that the idea of 'Tribal Reserve Area', instead he believed that the tribe should be integrated into Indian society, a process that he called "creative or generative adaptation." He believed that dominant groups should give respect to backward communities. A social change, in his opinion, should not be disruptive but should be in continuity with existing

cultural traditions. His book titled 'A Tribe in Transition: A study in Culture Pattern' (1937) is regarded as first scientific study of impact of modern civilization upon Indian tribal people.

He was the first Indian anthropologist to study and write about the impact of non-tribal culture on various institutions of tribal life. His book, *The Fortunes of Primitive Tribes* (1944) provides an account of social and cultural life of various tribes of Uttar Pradesh. He produced ethnographic accounts of the Ho (Bihar), the Khasa, the Korwa, the Tharu, the Gonds of Bastar (M.P.), the Bhil of Gujarat and the so called criminal tribes of U.P. He conducted fieldwork through local dialects and covered the major aspects of culture – economics, Kinship, marriage, religion etc.

1.2 Rural Studies

He played important role in encouraging village studies in India. He presented a model of anthropological village study in book titled *Caste and Communications in an Indian Village* (1958). He stated that the anthropologist and even sociologists can play a decisive role in studying and exploring problems of backward classes and assessing the impact of Community development programs on the life of people at village level. Thus anthropologist can help government and administration to develop suitable strategies for the tribal and backward classes and assess their implementation. His work, *Himalayan*

2. IRAVATI KARVE (1905 – 1970)

Irawati Karve was India's first woman anthropologist at a time when the discipline was developing. She was the founder of sociology in the Poona University, an indologist and an eminent writer.

She was born on December 15, 1905 in Burma and educated in Pune. She obtained B.A. degree in Philosophy (1926) from Fergusson College and M.A. degree in Sociology (1928) from Bombay University. She did doctoral work in anthropology from the University Of Berlin, Germany in 1928-30 under the guidance of Eugene Fischer on the Normal Asymmetry of the Human Skull and Bones. Berlin University honoured her with D. Phil, degree in 1930. She was well versed in both social as well as in physical anthropology. In 1939, Karve became the head of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune (University of Pune). In 1947, she presided over the Anthropology section of the Indian Science Congress. Later, she remained the Vice Chancellor of SNDT College for some time. She was invited by the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London in England in 1951-52 where she prepared her first draft of the book on Kinship Organization in India.

Her famous work includes - *Kinship Organisation in India* (1953), *Hindu Society: An Interpretation* (1961) *Group Relations in Village Community* (1963), *The Social Dynamics of a Growing Town and Its Surrounding Area* (1965) and *Yuganta* (1967 in Marathi). She wrote many research papers in several renowned journals in both English as well as in Marathi. Her work *Yuganta* (1967) won the Sahitya Academy Award for that year. *Yuganta* studies the principal, mythical heroic figures of the Mahabharata from historical, anthropological and secular perspectives. She died in 1970 while she was still in service.

She gave much importance to the racial composition of the Indian population, the kinship organization in India, the origins of caste and sociological studies of rural and urban communities. She has immensely contributed to social- cultural anthropology. Her contribution can be categorised as:

- **Study of Kinship system in India**
- **Dynamics of Group relations in village**
- **Social Dynamics of a Growing Town**

2.1 Study of Kinship system in India

Her book *Kinship Organisation in India*, first published in 1953 is considered a renowned work depicting several facets of family structure in India. She basically categorised the country into four different cultural zones in accordance with the marriage practices as: the northern, the central, the southern, and the eastern.

Three concepts namely, linguistic regions, institution of caste and family organization are necessary to understand any cultural phenomenon in India. The kinship organization exhibits the linguistic pattern, but in some aspects, deviations are observed. As , though the Maharashtra region belongs to the area of Sanskritic languages but its kinship organization is related to Dravidian or south Indian kinship system. According to Irawati Karve caste is hereditary endogamous group which is restricted to linguistic region. It is an extended kin group. Caste members share a particular occupation and castes are also ranked in a certain order in social stratification.

Joint family is another important institution to understand cultural phenomenon in India. This family system has been compatible with agrarian background of Indian economy. Joint family is a group of kins of several generations, ruled by a head, in which there is joint residence, hearth and property and whose members are bound with each other by mutual obligations. As stated by Irawati Karve, joint family is a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked in one kitchen, who hold property in common, participate in common family worship and are related to one another as some particular type of kindred. A joint family has vertical as well as horizontal extensions. Its main characteristic feature is the indivisibility and common sharing of property. The eldest male member has the right to manage property and he sees that no member is deprived of its benefits. Karve has followed the classical three or four generation formula but she does not include the generation of the common ancestor, the great grandfather, in the number of generations and does not mention unmarried males at all. This means that formula of the genealogical depth of the joint family is deeper than the classical formula. She stated that every joint family has an ancestral seat or locus which some members may leave for an indefinite period. Thus, the linguistic region, the caste and the family are the three most important aspects of the culture of any group in India. This is applicable to the primitive tribes of India.

Certain anthropological problems have been addressed by Karve. The family in the majority of regions in India is an autonomous unit with, its own economic organization while caste is a closed autonomous unit which has certain limited contacts with other similar units. The joint family provided economic and social security The rise of industrial cities and the new opportunities of employment have resulted in disintegration of the bonds of the joint family and of the village community.

The kinship organization described in this book presents different cultural zones with different modes of marriages. Karve saw that in the north, the rules of marriage lay down that brides should be brought from families which are not related to blood. Her analysis of southern marriage pattern, based on the chronological division of the kin into older and younger kin, rather than on the principle of generations, is an important contribution to Indian anthropology.

Karve devotes an entire chapter to the comprehensive survey of property, succession and inheritance in the new edition (1965). She explains the differences between the Dayabbaga system of Bihar and Bengal and the Mitakshara system followed by the rest of Hindu India. She also deals with the system in matrilineal Kerala.

2.2 Dynamics of Group relations in village

Her book *Group Relations in Village Community* (1963), describes a study conducted by Karve and Damle (1963) in three villages in Maharashtra to examine group relations in village community. They collected both quantitative and qualitative data to test the hypothesis of the structuring of interpersonal and inter-group relations with reference to kinship, caste and locality.

The authors viewed the boundaries of kin and caste that existed in various types of inter-dependence governed by economic relationships. Economic independence did not seem to imply social intercourse. But, the system of social stratification defines and delimits personal and social intercourse.

The study reveals that the traditional values about the caste system basically continued to define the status system. Formal education seems to have some impact on behaviour, attitudes and opinions. Help as regards agricultural operations was generally received from people of one's own caste. There were few occasions of help outside the caste. Also, help during sickness and involving personal attendance was confined mostly to kin and sometimes to caste but medicines were given freely by other than the caste members. Help was given and received at the time of funeral in the traditional pattern.

Scheduled Castes (SCs) did not have a place in the rural economy; and it was very difficult to uplift them. Thus, the authors find that most of the intercourse of an individual was confined to kin groups. And, the inter-group intercourse was governed by the social rank. The attitudes and opinions provide ample evidence that behavioural pattern in terms of social distance were governed by the caste system.

2.3 Social Dynamics of a Growing Town

Karve and Ranadive (1965) conducted a study on the social dynamics of a growing town and its surrounding area in the town of Phaltan of Satara district and 23 villages around the town in Maharashtra.

According to one of the authors, the small town in India seemed to play a role between the crowded and sophisticated city and the extremely isolated society of the village. The town with its weekly market was the bridge between the city and the village. To the city inhabitants, a small town is a backward place without economic, social or cultural opportunities. To the village people, it offers excellent economic and social opportunities. Also, the city with its congestion and distances offers less and less amenities to a certain class, who may be attracted to a small town which might become the future city. The authors tried to examine this small town keeping in light of the above points. The authors attempted to understand the thought and behavioural pattern of the small town and the villages with reference to education, religion and economic

activities. The difference in the behavioural pattern of the town and village sometimes seems to be due to education.

The town had not attracted people from places more than a hundred miles away but it was definitely a centre of attraction for the surrounding areas. The town had both the rural and urban character. The difference between town and village was due to accepting new lifestyle that transformed the earlier socio-cultural institutions. This was revealed by the list of goods possessed by the sample families, by modes of dress, by modes using certain things and spending leisure hours.

In the second part of the work, the authors, on the basis of their observation in Phaltan and the surrounding villages, suggested a model for building up of communities to which maximum cultural amenities can be provided by the government.

3. VERRIER ELWIN (1902-1964)

Verrier Holman Elwin was born on 29 August 1902 in Dover. He received education at Dean Close School and Merton College, Oxford, where he received his degrees of B.A. in English Language and Literature, M.A., and D.Sc. degrees. In 1925, he became the President of Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union.

He went to India in 1927 as a missionary. He first joined Christian Service Society in Pune. The first time he visited the central India, current states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and parts of eastern Maharashtra was with Shamrao Hivale. He took up anthropology as a primary interest. He participated in the Indian independence movement.

Elwin conducted several ethnographic studies on India's tribal people, the major being those on the Muria and the Baigas. In 1932, he began to conduct field study among the Baiga tribe of Madhya Pradesh. This was later published as *The Baiga* in 1939. His next work was *The Agarias*, which dealt with his studies on blacksmiths and iron-studied the Orissa tribes, particularly of the Bastar state, and conducted several other anthropological studies in the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) (*A Philosophy for NEFA*, 1957) and other areas. His work *The Muria and Their Ghotul* (1947) and *The Religion of an Indian Tribe* (1955) are considered as classics in anthropological literature. After India attained independence in 1947 he was asked by Jawaharlal Nehru to find solutions to the problems that emerged among the tribal peoples living in the far northeastern corner of India, the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). He also remained a Fellow of the Indian National Science Academy. He later served as Deputy Director of the Anthropological Survey of India, Kolkata; Adviser, Tribal Affairs, North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) Administration. Elwin took Indian Citizenship in 1954. He edited *Man in India* along with WG Archer from 1943-48. He was significantly affected by the ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore.

Verrier Elwin was honored with the SC Roy Gold Medal (1945), the Annandale Medal of the Royal Society of Bengal (1951), the Revers Medal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, the Campbell Gold Medal of the Asiatic Society, Mumbai and both the Dadabhai Naoroji Prize and the Padma Bhushan in 1961. He was a Fellow of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata; Royal Anthropological Institute; Asiatic Society (Mumbai) and a Member d'Honneur of the l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient.

Ramachandra Guha's biography *Savaging the Civilized: Verrier Elwin, His Tribals, and India* (1999) threw light upon Elwin's life, career and his research work in India.

3.1 Tribal Study

While conducting fieldwork among the Baigas, he found that the Baigas were being destroyed by the landlords and the missionaries. Thus, he suggested that the State should prevent or control their interaction with outsiders. He proposed that tribals should be left alone instead of being acculturated. This gave him the reputation of being a person who advocated separate 'reserved national parks' for tribals. Such national parks he also called 'Tribal Reserve Area.'

After this, Elwin went on to study the Murias of the Bastar region. He devoted one book to the study of the youth dormitories among the Murias there. A *ghotul* or youth dormitory is a spacious tribal hut surrounded by earthen or wooden walls. It is an integral part of Gond tribal life in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh. The *ghotul* is central to social and religious life in Gond society. According to Elwin, it is a place for youths, an independent and autonomous "children's republic". Lingo, the supreme deity and the heroic ancestor of the tribe, was the founder of the first *ghotul*, and is at the centre of the *ghotul's* culture. It has an elder facilitator with young, unmarried boys and girls as its members. Girl members of the *ghotul* are called *motiaris*, while boy members are called *cheliks*; their leaders are called the *belosa* and *siredar* respectively. The members are taught lessons of cleanliness, discipline, and hard work. They are also taught the idea of public service.

No major social activity could happen without anticipation of *ghotul* members. The boys act as acolytes at festivals, the girls as bridesmaids at weddings. This participation continues until death ceremonies in the society. The *ghotul* is a place embedded in and nurtured by the larger socio-religious landscape of the Gond society—a sacred place where no wrongs can be committed. The Madia Gond *ghotuls* are different from the Bastar *ghotuls* in that boys and girls return to their homes to sleep. It was responsible for training the youth in various social activities and for initiating them into sexual activities. Elwin went on to publish many more works on tribal life and their cultures. He published one on the religion of the tribes and their folklore.

In a study of the Borneo highlanders he again supported isolationism. He was criticized by several nationalist leaders and anthropologists. Elwin wrote *A Philosophy for NEFA* in collaboration with the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. In this book, he supported an assimilationistic perspective and developed the idea that the tribes should be allowed to develop according to their own rules, customs and beliefs.

4. GOVIND SADASHIV GHURYE (1893 – 1984)

Govind Sadashiv Ghurye was born on 12 December 1893 in a Brahmin Malavan family. He went to Cambridge to study anthropology and sociology. He had keen interest in study of Indian society and he used indological texts to work on caste and race in India, an interest that continued throughout his life. After his return from Cambridge, he became the first Reader of the Department of Sociology in Bombay (1924). After a decade, he became its professor. After retirement he continued to conduct extensive researches for a very long period. He worked on classical texts, the study of comparative religion, survey methods, and problems of urban women, bureaucracy, political processes and elites. His work has led to development of both anthropology and sociology.

His own study of caste and race in India provides significant information of caste system, along with its origin, features, function and development with reference to political, economic and social change in India. His work *Caste and Race in India* (1932) became a basic text in this respect. By 1939, Verrier Elwin suggested that the tribes should be left alone and they should be allowed to develop in isolation, away from the mainstream. On the other hand, G. S. Ghurye had not even wished to enumerate the tribals separately in the census operations, thus enforcing his contrary idea that the tribals should be completely assimilated by the Hindus as a part of the mainstream. His work *The Aborigines – 'so called' and Their Future* (1943) explained problems of the aboriginal tribes of India in a truly anthropological perspective.

Ghurye helped in the emergence of Sociology as a separate discipline in India. His sociological work emphasized about the existence of overall cultural unity in the Indian population as a result of acculturation with the advent of *Vedic Aryans*. He established the Indian Sociological Society in 1952 and started its journal *Sociological Bulletin*.

He died at age of 90, on 28 December 1984.

His work was multi-disciplinary in nature and he has made significant contribution to both anthropology and sociology. His contribution to field of Social anthropology could be categorized as:

4.1 Views about Indian society and culture

Ghurye attempted a synthesis of *Indological and sociological perspectives*. He believed that culture was central and main element of society and its evolution. He suggested five 'foundations of culture'. These are religious consciousness, conscience, justice, tolerance and free pursuit of knowledge. He believed in the existence of an overall cultural unity of the Indian population, mainly Hindu population. He believed that this cultural unity was result of acculturation introduced with the arrival of *Vedic Aryans*.

4.2 Views about Caste and kinship system in India

His work, *Caste and Race in India* (1932), depicted a comprehensive picture of castes, along with its origin, function and development and so on. He believed caste in India is a Brahmanic child of Indo-Aryan culture, cradled in land of Ganges valley. He never supported caste system and thought that it would weaken in urban environment through the impact of formal education.

He emphasized that, in past, kinship and caste in India played an integrative role. The integration of different racial and ethnic groups through kin and caste networks helped the Indian society to evolve.

4.3 Views about Tribal population

Ghurye observed that certain anthropologists and British officials supported the isolation policy for the tribal people. He was an assimilationist and wanted to include the tribals of India into the 'mainstream' of Indian culture. Ghurye contested the ideas of these anthropologist, who thought that tribals, unlike Hindus, were animists and their contact with the Hindus had been dangerous for the culture and economy of the tribals. He viewed that British Administration had created problems in the administration of the tribes. He even emphasized that the British policy of revenue and Justice and even forest policy created hardship for the tribal people.

His work *The Aborigines – ‘so called’ and Their Future (1943)* explained the problems of the aboriginal tribes of India in a truly anthropological manner.

He was of the opinion that these tribes should neither be called ‘adivasis’ nor ‘aborigines’. They should not be a separate category but should be merged with castes and should be treated as backward classes. He believed that tribes followed Hindu social order for economic motivation and catholicity of caste system to the tribal beliefs and rituals.

