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Development of Indian Sociology in Bombay (Mumbai): Issues and Concerns

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Abstract: *The department of sociology, University of Mumbai is one of the earliest centres of teaching and learning in India. The contribution of the eminent sociologists like Geddes, Ghurye, Desai and others is noteworthy. Indology, fieldwork and Marxist approaches remained dominant in teaching and research since its inception. Subsequently, sociologists engaged with classical texts - textual and field views, theoretical & philosophical anthropology and phenomenology. The historical context of social research remained significant for the study of Indian society. The founding fathers had a deep engagement with diverse issues and concerns. Caste, family, marriage, kinship, religion were dominant issues and concerns of the sociologists (known as Bombay School). It is argued that the department had two separate legacies - Ghurye and Desai. Later Ghurye's students and followers practiced and popularized diverse sociological orientations. Subsequent research interest was sustained in the areas of caste, tribe, and village by using ethnography and field work traditions. However, this department remained silent on the contributions of Dr Ambedkar, Dalit movements and similar issues. A bottom-up perspective has now emerged and widely debated and discussed all over India.*

Keywords: Bombay School of Sociology, Diverse Issues; Two Legacies; Main Concerns

As it is well known that the Department of Sociology in the University of Bombay (Mumbai) is the oldest centre of teaching and research in India, and the second oldest in Asia, the first set up in Tokyo University in 1898. The Department of Sociology in the University of Mumbai was established in the year 1919 with Sir Patrick Geddes as the first Professor of Civics and Sociology, who served as its Head from 1919 to 1924. He had a multidimensional personality - a botanist, an economist, a sociologist, a civic reformer, a town planner, and a teacher. He practiced synthesis (drawing from sociology, biology, botany, geography, town planning) to develop his approach to Study the interaction between human beings and their natural environment.

In 1919 Geddes was offered the post of Professor of Sociology in the University which he accepted and established the department of Sociology and Civics. His methodology of teaching was unique - which included discussions, public conversations, seminars, and fieldwork with students in neighbouring villages of Mumbai and to the parts of the city. When he taught his first course in sociology in 1919, he used to deliver his lectures in the form of conversations and seminars. A course on the 'Elements of Sociology' was offered to the public on three afternoons a week, the lectures being invariably followed by discussions. The emphasis of the course was on practical work, for undertaking such fieldwork Geddes sent his students to different parts of India- Lucknow, Kanpur and Indore. (Ferreira & Jha 1976: xi)

Geddes had a different vision for the university in India. He believed India was an agricultural country, poor and backward, and therefore, what, in his view, it needed most was agricultural education. As Munshi I. mentioned, Geddes's contribution to Sociology has been largely ignored and underrated by Indian Sociologists. Even in the department of Sociology in Mumbai, which he founded, he received little recognition. Geddes did not feature in teaching courses. His emphasis on interdisciplinary, his critique of the existing system of

educational universities, his ideas about the responsibility of sociology and sociologists in shaping social processes in order to create an environment and people friendly society may have seemed difficult to accept and adopt. (Munshi, I.: 2013:236)

G. S. Ghurye, who had studied under Geddes, succeeded him as Head of the Department of Sociology in 1924 and remained in that position until he retired in 1959. He trained and guided a large number of students in the department (fifty-five for Ph.D. thesis and twenty-five for M. A. dissertation) in a variety of subthemes of Sociology. Ghurye and the students trained under him constituted a dominant lineage in sociology in post- independence India. Ghurye was undoubtedly a towering figure of the Department of Sociology at Mumbai. Ghurye's Sociology carried the imprint of his training in Sanskrit and Indology, on the one hand, and a pronounced anti-colonial and pro-India nationalist ideology, on the other. (See Upadhyaya, C. 2002, 2007: 243-47). For better or worse, the department came to be exclusively identified with his views and works. The department includes Sir Patrick Geddes (as we have seen earlier), the visionary sociologist, environmentalist, and town planner; Ghurye, who was basically trained as a Sanskritist and whose writings reflect an abiding engagement with classical texts; K. M. Kapadia, who combined the textual and field views of Indian society; N. A. Toothi who was influenced by Geddes; A. R. Desai, who was Ghurye's student but share none of his mentor's academic concerns, and who stoutly espoused the Marxist ideology; J.V. Ferreira, who had a lifelong interest in theoretical and philosophical anthropology and in Phenomenology; Dharendra Narain, who had a deep interest in the theoretical foundations of sociology, and he was wedded to vision of an internationalist sociology; and Manorama Savur, who addressed and critiqued environmental issues from a Marxist perspective.

From the days of Ghurye, the department began to acquire a reputation for its promotion of field work and the credit goes to him. Though he personally preferred to engage in descriptive and analytical research based on textual sources he encouraged his students to do field research for their master's and doctoral dissertations. Though Ghurye

and Kapadia believed that it is profitable to supplement the field view of Indian society with the textual view, they took care to point out that one could not entirely and exclusively rely on the classical texts for a historical reconstruction of Indian society or for an interpretation of contemporary Indian society.

The founding fathers of the department had a deep engagement with social issues and concerns. This reflected in Geddes's work on urban ecology and town planning, in Ghurye's writings on the tribal question and on the interface between caste and politics, and in Desai's work on human rights, labour movement, peasant struggles, and communalism. Geddes, Ghurye and Desai were the key figures of the department.

Ghurye's most important and influential book is 'Caste and Race in India' which was originally published in 1932 and has been reprinted several times. Though some of Ghurye's ideas on caste have been questioned, an important feature of the book is Ghurye's critique of colonial ethnography. He refuted Herbert Risley's conflation of caste with race in the early census reports. Ghurye was the first sociologist to write about the nexus between caste and politics which, in his view was embedded in colonial machinations.

Sociologists and anthropologists are well aware of the controversy and sharp exchanges between Ghurye and Verrier Elwin relating to the status and integration of tribal communities. Elwin argued that the tribal people needed to be kept in a state of isolation from mainstream society in order to protect them from the influences of outsiders and exploiters. Ghurye on the other hand vehemently opposed this view, arguing that tribal people were essentially backward Hindus and, as such, they should be assimilated into mainstream Hindu society. Ghurye's commitment to facts has both a positive and negative side. Positively, it has given him and his students a firm empirical base. M. N. Srinivas rightly compliments Ghurye for conducting a one-man ethnographic survey of India from his chair in Mumbai. Negatively, Ghurye's prolonged neglect of all theoretical

positions has deprived his writings of a powerful thrust (Narain 1979: 13-33).

He emphasized on 'sub-caste' and maintained that sub-caste is the real. Looking at the divisions and sub-divisions, it was Senart who first suggested that the sub-caste be considered the 'real' group. Senart's concern was to start with a precise idea of the modern state of affairs and he realized that it was sub-caste the endogamous unit and instrument of internal justice, which was the fundamental institution and should be called the true caste. Ghurye follows Senart when he points out that sub castes should be recognized as real castes (Bose, P.K 1996: 70-1).

“To sum up, Ghurye's account of caste is based on four different perspectives : (1) Indological views of Hindu society on the basis of which he characterizes the main features of Hindu Society; (2) racial theory and physical anthropology, on which his account of origin of Castes and the relationship between caste and racial distinctions are based; (3) empirical sociology and anthropology which marks his distinction between caste and sub caste and (4) finally his account of elements of caste outside India based on orientalist history. It is interesting to know that the principal sources on which Ghurye depends for his description are the volumes on castes and tribes by Crooke, Risley, Kitts, Nesfield, O'Malley, Senart, Sherring and the Census Reports. Ghurye's approach has been a synthetic one and he adopts the discursive of the west to describe the institution” (Bose 1996: 65).

Ghurye believes in Brahminism which played a decisive role in fashioning Indian social institutions, and the Indian cultural unity. For him religion is the basis of social unity in India and caste becomes essential signifier of Indian civilization.

Ghurye has been criticized for his uncritical acceptance of the textual view of Indian society, which led him to gloss over regional diversities, the disjunction between normative prescriptions and ground realities and processes involving conflict and contestation.

A far more serious limitation of Ghurye's work is the implicit Sanskrit or Brahminic conceptual framework, which is essentialist, unitary and exclusionary. His model of Indian society, which privileges homogenization and glosses over diversities takes little or no cognizance of the essentially heterogeneous, composite, character of Indian society and of the contributions of the Buddhist, Jain and Islamic traditions to the making of Indian civilization. In one of his major works, *Family and Kin in Indo-European culture*, Ghurye suggested an Indo-European origin for the Indian joint family. Unfortunately, he disregarded the conspicuous diversity in Kinship organization in India as reflected, for example, in the structurally different Dravidian kinship system and the kinship systems of many non-Brahminic, non-Hindu, and tribal communities (Momin, A. R. 2013: 2013).

Besides caste and race Ghurye worked on diverse themes such as *The Aborigines So-called and Their Future* (1943), *Mahadev Kolis* (1956) *Culture and Society* (1946), *Occidental Civilization* (1947), *Indian Sadhus* (1956), *Gods and Men* (1962), *Indian Acculturation, Religious Consciousness* (1965). *The Legacy of Ramayana, Cities and Civilization* (1962), *Social Tensions, wither India, Scheduled Tribes* (later version).

The legacy of the department (Bombay school) was disseminated and carried forward by many of its distinguished alumni, such as M.N. Srinivas, Irawati Karve, I. P. Desai, Y. B. Damle, M. S. A. Rao, C. Rajagopalan, M. S. Gore, and G. S. Nepali, among others.

When Ghurye retired at 65 the late Professor K. M. Kapadia succeeded him in 1960. Kapadia's first major publication, *Hindu Kinship* (1947), based on his Ph.D., draws entirely on Indological sources. It is a detailed analysis of Brahminical texts and their commentaries for their assumptions and pronouncements on ancestor worship, the Hindu house- hold, organization of kin, marriage regulations, marriageable partners, polygamy, polyandry, adoption, inheritance, succession, and birth and death impurities (Kamala Ganesh 2013: 293). Kapadia's another work on *'Marriage and Family in India'* (1955) which was

widely prescribed in college and university syllabi. This book deals with kinship as well as family and became a template for students in the field. Though Kapadia's work was well known in his time, it has been under-recognized (Ibid: 294).

Professor A. R. Desai became head of the department in 1967. Classic work *'Social Background of Indian Nationalism'* was based on his. Doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Bombay. He was committed to the Marxian framework. His deep concern for social intervention was reflected in his writings as well as in his close association with human rights groups and grassroots organizations. Desai used historical materialism as a tool to locate, assess, and give specific weightage to various social forces which evolved to form a base for the rise and development of nationalism in India (Savur, M. 2011:20). In the 1970s Rural Sociology as a discipline was first introduced by Desai in Bombay. Desai was a scholar - activist who trained his students to integrate theory and practices - Go beyond the classroom teaching and beyond the library was his message. He encouraged his students to join the processions – morchha, talk to participants, and get to know the problems of the people - masses.

Desai reformulated the course on the *'Sociology of Indian Society'*, and a critical course on the *'Sociology of Development'* was introduced. Further, for the first time in the history of Sociology, the *'Sociology of Marx'* was introduced as an elective by Desai. Subsequently, the other universities too found a place in their curriculum. Desai's main 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 (Savur & Munshi:1995). He assumed the Marxian method was not only significant, but also necessary for an understanding of an Indian Society. In addition, he maintained that the Marxist method and viewpoint were an integral part of the discipline of sociology and social anthropology.

It is through his writings, Desai constantly tried to analyse the changing situation in Indian society. In his anthology *'Agrarian*

Struggles in India after Independence (1986)', he attempted to take stock of the upsurge of the agrarian struggles. In his article in this volume 'Changing Profile of Rural Society in India', he analysed the dynamics of the class - caste issue. His principal argument is that there has been a great 'transformation' in the structure, function and the very system of the Indian caste systems. He refers to the changing caste configuration in rural India and weakening of some castes and the strengthening of some intermediate castes linked to agriculture and who have been beneficiaries from the land reforms process. The process of polarization among the castes is highlighted. He emphasizes the dovetailing of castes with the emerging class configuration, a direct consequence of the process of economic and political development (Ramon, V. 2013:264).

J. V. Ferreira (1922-2010) succeeded A. R. Desai as Professor and Head of the department in 1976. For Ferreira Anthropology, is the most comprehensive discipline to understand man. He obtained Ph.D. at the University of Vienna in early 1960s. He was very much involved in discussing and clarifying the boundaries and opportunities of his discipline-integral anthropology, by which he meant first the study of man in the entire span of his existence on earth, and second the philosophical examination of the findings of this scientific endeavour. The first notion he calls 'applied anthropology' and the second 'philosophical anthropology' (Bernd Pflug & Michael, S. M. 2013: 271).

At many places in his writings Ferreira recommends a replacement of the term 'social sciences'. These studies would include physical anthropology, cultural anthropology, social anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics. In a wider sense, to which Ferreira was favourably inclined, they would also include psychology, sociology, economics, political science, and other disciplines usually subsumed under 'social sciences'. (Ibid: 271).

Ferreira's major achievement was to understand and define anthropology as philosophical anthropology. His philosophical anthropology did not emerge by simply adding some philosophical

thoughts to some anthropological findings; rather it was formed in discourses with Ideas from outside the purview of British social anthropology and American cultural anthropology. He called his philosophical anthropology 'integral anthropology' because it was dealing with the becoming of man in culture. He was of the opinion than those who addressed only the being of man in culture would try to be 'scientific' 'static', and 'general'. Integral anthropology could not be like that but had to be fluid and particular (Ibid: 273).

Ferreira's concept of man can be summarized as one in which man's existence in its wholeness is central to the anthropological understanding of man not separated in castes and classes, ethnicities and races. As a matter of fact, Ferreira could be placed next to Verrier Elwin. Ferreira linked Elwin's tenets of anthropology, his style of writing and his 'uncertain location between literature and science' (Guha 2007: 346).

Admittedly, Ferreira deserves to be better known in the history of anthropology in India and especially in the history of the department of sociology, University of Mumbai. His huge contribution has gone unnoticed and unrecognized, and present-day students hardly know his name, leave alone for what he stood for in anthropology. Ferreira's urge to philosophize anthropology deserves to be more widely known and studied first as a contribution to the 'history of ideas' in India and second as a unique contribution to Philosophical Anthropology in general. His work is rich in ideas, but also full of questions for the present-day reader.

The Department of Sociology (Bombay School) University of Mumbai completed its century in 2019. On this occasion quite a few researchers started taking stock of the discipline. The apt questions were raised such as whether the Bombay school has a legacy of its own? Or whether there are many legacies? Whether Bombay School is the 'School' like Chicago School or Frankfurt School? in the true sense of the term. As it is well accepted that Professor Ghurye is the founding father of the Indian Sociology. Therefore, it is considered a

legacy (Ghurye's legacy) undermining the contribution of other colleagues in the department.

It is from the available literature one can say that the Bombay School had two separate legacies, and not a single legacy (Dhanagare D N 2011: 135). As stated earlier, the first is the one that has been associated with Ghurye's style of research and his method of understanding Indian society and social change; and the other legacy is what had been developed by A.R. Desai as a distinct stream of theoretical and methodological line of thinking.

Ghurye's legacy is summed up in three tendencies by Dhanagare

1. Academic freedom to the students to pursue their research.
2. Though Ghurye had a strong empirical database he was disinclined to engage himself in theoretical discourse.
3. Complete absence of 'rigour' (i) neither systematic use of any theory theoretical and conceptual framework (ii) no formulation of hypotheses (iii) lack of empirical generalizations In establishing sociological laws.

A. R. Desai developed his own legacy and insisted on application and use of a theoretical framework as well as on a reasonable degree of scientific rigour. Desai's insistence on rigorous application of theoretical and analytical framework is something about which he departed from Ghurye legacy (Ibid: 136).

The 50th anniversary of the department was organized with a few publications: *Modernization of Underdeveloped Societies* (Desai - 2 vols. 1969), where he critiqued western sociological models of development. Then the volume on *Family* was edited by D. Narain in honour of K.M. Kapadia and the *Outlook Tower* (ed.) by J. V. Ferreira was in honour of Patrick Geddes (Savur M. 2011:24).

'In State and Society in India: Essays in Dissent' (1975) Desai authored a book wherein he refutes the notion of India as a welfare state. On the contrary, he clearly identified the fascist nature of Indian state in his 'Violation of Democratic Rights' (1986), and in

'Repression and Resistance in India' (1990). Desai urged the students of Indian society to recognize the authoritarian nature of the Indian Constitution and the undemocratic elements in it in his 'Expanding Government Lawlessness and Organized Struggles' (1991) (Ibid: 25).

To commemorate the diamond jubilee of the Indian Sociological Society (I.S.S.) the department of sociology, University of Mumbai had organized a two-day seminar on 'Sociology in India and the Bombay School: Retrospect and Prospects' on 23-24 September 2011. The ISS published a special issue of its Journal 'Sociological Bulletin' on 'The Bombay School of Sociology: The Stalwarts and Their Legacies' edited by N. Jayaram. This issue contained the papers presented in the seminar, barring a few (Jayaram N. 2013). In 2004 the department received a grant from the University Grants Commission under 'Special Assistance Programme' (SAP) for two phases -2004-09 and 2009-14. P.G Jogdand was nominated by the UGC as the coordinator for two terms. After reviewing the progress of the department, the UGC extended the SAP for another five years 2014-19. However, due to non-receipt of the grants the activities could not start. As a result, the programme remained standstill.

Needless to mention that the first generation of sociologists right from G.S. Ghurye led its teaching and research from the 1920s to the middle of the 1950s, laid very solid foundation of the Profession in India. In their own writings this generation was more encyclopaedic and macro analytic in approach. These early sociologists pioneered the vision of sociology as having a historical-civilizational anchorage. They consistently introduced the perspectives of historicity, culture and values in their formulation (Singh, Y.2017: 145).

There is no detailed critical account either of his work or of the contribution of the Department University of Mumbai.

As an initial step towards a critical evaluation of the contribution of the department, let us briefly review the issues and concerns expressed in the works of Ghurye and others. A basic feature of Ghurye's sociology was its emphasis on what he identified as the fundamental institutions – family, Kinship, and religion, which he researched as

central to social and cultural integration. Research interest was sustained by Ghurye's students in the areas of caste, tribe and village by using ethnography and field work tradition. Ghurye's method was textual, but he was also an empiricist who thought that the 'facts' would speak for themselves (Upadhyaya 2007 217). This approach was Indological, and he used texts extensively in his writings.

Along with Ghurye, the arrival of A. R. Desai and the Marxist approach to understand Indian society can be said to be a marker of the department. With Desai, it is observed, and there was a major shift in the practice of sociology in Mumbai. Hence as Dhanagare has observed that the department has two separate legacies. Desai developed his own legacy using a new theoretical framework; Desai developed a new stream of theoretical and methodological perspective to analyse Indian society that attempted to combine academics and activism. However, with the emergence of M. N. Srinivas, a student of Ghurye, as a proponent and advocate of field research and functionalist perspective, became dominant in sociological knowledge production and knowledge transmission.

The marginalization of Desai and the approach he followed is also reflected in other realms: the marginalization of Dalits as a source of sociological knowledge, silence about Dalits struggle, as well as, more importantly, systematic and institutional neglect of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's contribution to theorization of caste and the nature of Hindu (Brahminical) social order (Jogdand & Kamble 2013: 325). It is not to say that issues such as caste, social stratification and tribe did not form the concerns of sociology. Both the Ghurye's functionalist sociology and Desai's Marxist sociology, however, failed to develop a serious engagement with the issues of casteism, untouchability, social exclusion and exploitation that confronted the Dalits and oppressed sections of Indian society. More specifically, the department remained indifferent to the glaring injustice and oppression the Dalits suffered, and to the struggles led by Dr. Ambedkar as well as his critical contributions to sociology and social anthropology (Ibid: 325).

Studies on Dalits in the early phase of the department under discussion categorized them in terms of occupations they performed (Ghurye 1969: 306-36; Pradhan 1938). Thus, the sociological literature is silent

on the movements launched by Dalits for liberation from the Hindu social order; when it made this category visible in sociology, it was in terms of stigmatized identities as mentioned by Kumar (Kumar V. 2005: 521). The department of Sociology thus exhibited cognitive blackout and practices of silencing, omission, distortion, and epistemic violence as regards to life world and critical knowledge engagement of Dalits struggle. The indifference towards the Dalits issues, and thereby marginalizing and ousting Dalits social world from sociological knowledge as well as constructing it as irrelevant in building sociology for India mark as a context of epistemic closure and violence against Dalits as social actors and knowledge producers. Furthermore, it also ignored the vibrant Dalit culture - folk songs, dance forms, art and literature - not only sources for understanding Dalit social reality, but also as reflective of the diverse nature of Indian society (Jogdand & Kamble 2013: 326).

Thus, Dalit-Bahujan researchers have been questioning the upper caste (dominant) perspectives and the process of knowledge production over a century. Therefore, a perspective from below (read Dalit Studies or Dalit-Bahujan approach) has emerged and widely debated and discussed in academics all over India.

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